



**LIBRARY  
Michigan State  
University**

This is to certify that the  
dissertation entitled

**LANGUAGE IN SEARCH OF PRACTICE: THE PROGRESS  
OF CURRICULUM REFORM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

presented by

**KAMILA ROSOLOVÁ**

has been accepted towards fulfillment  
of the requirements for the

Ph.D. degree in Educational Policy

*Barry Sykes*

Major Professor's Signature

12/2/08

Date

**PLACE IN RETURN BOX** to remove this checkout from your record.  
**TO AVOID FINES** return on or before date due.  
**MAY BE RECALLED** with earlier due date if requested.

DATE DUE	DATE DUE	DATE DUE

**LANGUAGE IN SEARCH OF PRACTICE: THE PROGRESS OF CURRICULUM  
REFORM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

**By**

**Kamila Rosolová**

**A DISSERTATION**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

**Educational Policy**

**2008**

## **ABSTRACT**

### **LANGUAGE IN SEARCH OF PRACTICE: THE PROGRESS OF CURRICULUM REFORM IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC**

By

Kamila Rosolová

In 2004, the Czech Republic passed a new Education Act and with it a curricular reform that is expected to fundamentally transform education in the Czech Republic. The reform replaces old highly prescriptive national curriculum with new national curricular frameworks and mandates that each school produce its local curriculum to fit the new frameworks. More importantly, through the frameworks, the reform brings into focus new educational goals --so called key competencies-- that are to help Czech schools and teachers embrace instructional approaches targeting students' skills rather than mastery of knowledge as the ultimate goal of education. In the context of Czech education, these ideas appear revolutionary. Previously, teachers were not involved in curriculum development and students were not expected to demonstrate that they are able to use and apply the knowledge they had acquired through schooling.

This dissertation examines the meaning of the reform in its existing context and its early implementation. As it captures the trajectory of the reform's evolution, it focuses on two objectives: 1) explaining the gestation of the new curricular policy and 2) understanding the nature of the policy implementation in its early stages. The study takes a broad view of policy analysis that spans the distance from global trends and their impact on the development in state policy to teachers in high school classrooms. The overtones of globalism colliding with historical traditions and institutions, combined with

policy perceptions and the reactions and responses of “street level bureaucrats,” produce a more complex narrative than a traditional implementation study.

The dissertation primarily draws on qualitative inquiry based on 51 semi-structured interviews with policy actors at various levels of the system, document reviews, and surveys collected from 89 high school teachers from schools that were piloting the reform. The organization follows Hodgson and Spours' conceptual framework for policy analysis that integrates macro- and micro-level perspectives of policy. The study first examines the international, political and historical contexts of Czech education and then zeroes in on the policy process, including the gestation of the policy, analysis of the policy text, and analysis of the early implementation in a small sample of high schools.

The reform has progressed abruptly and at times heedlessly. It has been severely underspecified and teachers did not tend to view it as a signal of a significant change that will prompt them to overhaul their existing practices. But rather than criticizing the new policy and its implementation, this study explains the peculiarities of the case, positioning it in its local meanings with regard to global and international influences. Overall, the narrative yields a story about difficulties faced by a nation that is re-creating its identity in the post-communist era of globalization, and shows that change is also culturally bound and shaped by idiosyncratic national histories and political circumstances. Propositions from policy research studies that originated primarily in the English speaking world added insights to the interpretation of the case and generated policy recommendations that close the study.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This dissertation would not have been possible without the cooperation of the study participants. I want to thank them all for giving me the time to discuss the reform and for sharing their views about it. I also want to thank all the school principals who gave me access to their schools and who helped to distribute and collect completed surveys from their teachers.

I am particularly thankful to my dissertation chair and advisor Gary Sykes for the countless hours that he spent discussing the dissertation with me, for his advice and wisdom, and for allowing me to see things that I would not have seen without him. I admire him as a great thinker and scholar, and I am grateful that he was willing to be my mentor.

I also want to extend special thank you to Michael Sedlak who has recruited me to Michigan State University and provided extraordinary guidance and support through all the years that I took to complete the program. He has been an attentive listener and pragmatic problem solver. I greatly appreciate his straightforwardness, kindness, and willingness to help any time. Hadn't it been for him, I would not have been where I am.

I am also indebted to Brian DeLany, Lynn Fendler, and Lynn Paine who served on my committee next to Gary Sykes and Michael Sedlak, and who were always willing to squeeze in some time for me in their busy schedules whenever I needed their feedback and advice. Each contributed to the dissertation through their expertise as well as personal support.

There are many other people and dear friends to thank and I cannot list them all but I owe a thank you to my husband Gaston who has patiently witnessed the many

emotional meltdowns that I experienced as part of the writing process and helped me get through.

Finally, I must thank the Fulbright Commission in Prague for making it possible for me to come to Michigan State University, and to Michigan State University and the College of Education for supporting my research with a pre-dissertation Summer Research Fellowship, College of Education Alumni Fellowship, and Dissertation Completion Fellowship.



## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>LIST OF TABLES</b> .....	ix
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b> .....	x
<b>CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION</b> .....	1
The Czech reforms in a nutshell .....	1
Conceptual framework .....	4
Data and analysis .....	11
Organization of the study .....	12
<b>CHAPTER 2: THE POLITICAL ERA AND EDUCATION STATE: HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND CURRENT SITUATION IN CZECH EDUCATION</b> .....	18
Czech education in history .....	19
Jan Amos Comenius, the teacher of nations .....	19
Maria Theresa's school reform .....	20
Education in independent Czechoslovakia .....	24
With the Soviet Union forever and never otherwise.....	26
Velvet Revolution of 1989.....	31
The new political era .....	33
The education state .....	36
Summary.....	45
<b>CHAPTER 3: EXISTING SCHOOL SYSTEM</b> .....	48
Pre-schools as sites of innovation.....	48
Primary school.....	49
Selectivity of the system.....	51
Academic high schools vs. other secondary schools .....	54
Teaching and learning in academic high schools.....	56
Organization of instructional time .....	56
Content of instruction .....	58
Instructional practices.....	59
High school exit examinations.....	62
Higher education and university entrance examinations .....	65
Summary.....	71
<b>CHAPTER 4: POLICY GESTATION</b> .....	74
Towards an overarching educational strategy .....	74
"Quality and Accountability" .....	76
New Educational Standards.....	78
Curricular reform in the shadow of high school exit examinations.....	79
How the idea of reforming curriculum resurfaced again .....	83
The 'White Paper' versus 'Quality and Accountability'.....	85
External political pressures and migration of discourses.....	87
Origins of the ideas.....	89
The curricular reform and new Education Act .....	92
Summary.....	95

<b>CHAPTER 5: THE POLICY AS TEXT</b> .....	100
The content of the new Frameworks .....	101
Key competencies, attainment standards and content.....	101
Subject integration, cross-curricular themes and instructional time allocations .....	103
The text as a discourse.....	106
Clash of ideologies .....	108
Implementation strategies and support mechanisms .....	112
The language of the Frameworks .....	114
Political significance of the language .....	117
Language in search of practice .....	119
Text distribution and consumption .....	121
Pilot projects.....	121
Interactive policymaking? .....	124
Newspapers on the curricular reform.....	126
The role of non-profit educational associations.....	130
Summary.....	131
<b>CHAPTER 6: THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN A SAMPLE OF ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOLS</b> .....	136
A note: How will school curricula be judged? .....	139
Teacher Autonomy and the National Curriculum.....	142
Ownership and empowerment: Is change likely to ensue?.....	148
Key competencies.....	153
Seeing the old in the new.....	157
The rules of the reform .....	162
Capacity and support .....	165
Professional development.....	168
Reflective feedback, learning the reform and learning from the reform .....	169
School curriculum writing – a whole school affair?.....	173
Summary.....	177
<b>CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETING THE REFORM</b> .....	183
Localized perspective of the reform .....	183
A word on globalization .....	189
The Czech reform interpreted in global terms .....	192
World culture theory view .....	192
Conflict theory view .....	193
Global forces, local meanings.....	196
Prospects for a large-scale change.....	200
<b>CHAPTER 8: RESEARCH-BASED INTERPRETATION OF THE REFORM</b> ..	202
Research perspectives on reform.....	202
Brief history of policy implementation research.....	202
Proposition one: Clarity, specificity, and policy language matter in implementation .....	205
Proposition two: Choice of policy instruments helps determine policy effects .....	210
Proposition three: Changes in governance may not be sufficient to spur changes in instructional practices.....	214
Proposition four: Reforms require attention to policy alignment and coherence.....	218
Proposition five: Reforms call for attention to teaching and learning up and down the system ...	222
Proposition six: Successful implementation utilizes the potential of social networks.....	228
Implementation and local wisdom.....	231

<b>CHAPTER 9: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS</b> .....	233
Combining the narrative and policy research perspectives .....	234
Concluding remarks.....	248
<b>APPENDICES</b> .....	252
Appendix A: Study approach.....	252
Interviews .....	253
The first round of interviews .....	254
Second round of interviews .....	254
Third round of interviews .....	257
Interview questions.....	257
Document review.....	261
Surveys .....	263
Data analysis.....	270
Appendix B: Examples of high school exit examination topics in history.....	272
Appendix C: Instructional time allocations for four-year academic high schools .....	275
<b>REFERENCES</b> .....	276

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1 – Teachers' perceptions of the status of their profession .....	44
Table 2 – Numbers of high school graduates according to school type .....	55
Table 3 – Numbers of university students between 1997 and 2006 .....	67
Table 4 – Teachers' perceptions of their work constraints .....	143
Table 5 – Teachers' perceptions of the new Frameworks and teaching .....	149
Table 6 – Teachers' perceptions of the new Frameworks and school decision-making ..	149
Table 7 – Teachers' perceptions of content's relevance .....	149
Table 8 – Teachers' perceptions of the amount of content .....	150
Table 9 – Teachers' perceptions of the novelty of the reform .....	160
Table 10 – Teachers' perceptions of the concept of the reform .....	160
Table A.1. – Interviews.....	253
Table A.2. – Key policy documents in chronological order .....	262
Table A.3. – Teacher surveys in pilot schools.....	264
Table A.4. – Teacher survey .....	265

## **LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1 – Conceptual framework (Hodgson & Spours, 2006).....	6
---	---

## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

This study has been motivated by the desire to capture and explain the gestation and implementation of a new curricular reform that has been introduced in Czech education. The case has been evolving in rather peculiar ways, particularly when viewed from the perspective of implementation theories that originated primarily in the English-speaking world. But I do not wish to suggest that policy research is universally applicable across the globe. Instead, I am going to show that while there may be some general approaches that increase the likelihood of reforms being implemented closer to policy intentions, policy change is also culturally bound and shaped by idiosyncratic national histories and political circumstances. In sum, this dissertation is set to do two things: 1) explicate the emergence of a new curricular policy and 2) understand the nature of its implementation in its early stages.

### The Czech reforms in a nutshell

The Czech reform that lies at the core of this study is a new curricular policy adopted with the passage of the Education Act of 2004. Although the Czech educational system produces relatively good results as evidenced in international comparative studies such as TIMSS or PISA, various national leaders and prominent educators now consider the system increasingly outdated and irrelevant. One complaint prevails – Czech students tend to be overloaded with large amounts of factual knowledge, which they master fairly well but then are at a loss when they need to apply their knowledge and exercise independent judgment. The curricular reform sets out to fix this problem, among other things. It introduces new national curricular frameworks with content outlined in more general terms than in the previous highly prescriptive national curriculum. More

importantly, the frameworks are oriented towards a new goal, the "key competencies", or students' skills to actively work with knowledge.

The backbone mechanism of the curricular reform is decentralization of decision-making authority to individual schools and teachers who are being asked to design their own school curricula in response to the new frameworks and the key competencies. This decentralization is another remarkable novelty introduced to a system that has been historically governed by the state. The underlying assumption is that curriculum developed at the school level to fit the new national frameworks will better respond to local conditions and the changing needs of the society. Since Czech schools do not employ curriculum specialists who could take on the task of curriculum design, the work will fall on teachers. The premise is that teachers' engagement in curriculum development will allow them to tailor the content to their students' needs, possibly reduce the large quantities of content, and thus free space to make use of other teaching practices besides the traditional recitation and lecturing. Consequently, Czech students will no longer cram to memorize large quantities of information but they will develop skills that will allow them to apply acquired knowledge.

For the Czech Republic, the new curricular policy signals a revolutionary departure from the past. In a society where education has been traditionally equated with content and mastery of factual knowledge, and where teachers have always been regarded as agents of the state, the reform indeed implies a radical shift and overhaul of the existing system. The Czech media announced a revolution and policy makers deploy the rhetoric of a fundamental, even revolutionary change. However, Czech educators and policy makers have had no prior experience of reforms on such scale, and the reform

presents numerous challenges and hurdles that need to be overcome. The reform departs from deeply embedded traditions and introduces novelties that few are prepared to absorb. There are no policy leaders experienced in curriculum change who could guide the envisioned transformation and policy makers appear to be handing down the reform implementation to teachers who nevertheless also lack experience and knowledge of the practices that the reform advocates. In addition, teachers have virtually no incentives to change. To an outsider, the expectations that the curricular reform might actually spur a large-scale change are perplexing because in the absence of experience, know-how, and incentives to change, successful implementation seems unlikely. But insiders seem to believe that the reform is much needed and will produce desirable effects.

To understand the particularities of the Czech case and how the reform unfolded in ways that may upon closer inspection appear puzzling, it is necessary to take a broad view and scrutinize different factors that influenced the conception and implementation of the reform. Czech history of education and tracing of the gestation of the reform will provide some clues and set the ground. At the same time, deep knowledge of the local circumstances and historical conditions that propelled the rise of the reform is not going to be sufficient to explain the trajectory of the reform's evolution and early implementation. In a world that is increasingly interconnected, exploring local contexts must be coupled with an examination of broader, global circumstances, which function as strong pressures for change in national policies. Positioning the case in its local meanings with regard to global and international influences yields an interesting story about difficulties faced by a nation that is re-creating its identity in the post-communist era of globalization. This story can be built by re-constructing events that span the distance



from broad developments in state policy to teachers in high school classrooms. Such spanning might be regarded as a standard policy implementation study, but the overtones of globalism colliding with historical traditions and institutions, combined with policy perceptions and the reactions and responses of “street level bureaucrats,” produce a more provocative mix than the standard implementation narrative.

Even so, the story may be incomplete. Given the wealth of policy research and scholarship on reforms, the complexity of the case may be explained more fully with the use of an additional perspective that draws on abstract generalities regarding implementation. This implementation perspective is grounded in research that evolved over the past decades primarily in the English-speaking world and that captures important factors that impact policy formulation and implementation. Some of the implementation theories originated in political science, some stem from sociology and psychology, others from history, and many are interdisciplinary. They do not coincide with any particular discipline but present views that are representative of the social sciences. With this added approach to the analysis, the case of the Czech reform expands from a journalistic account to a more nuanced study that explores the interplay of local, historically and politically contextualized factors of the reform, and broader generalities that have arisen in prior study of reform implementation.

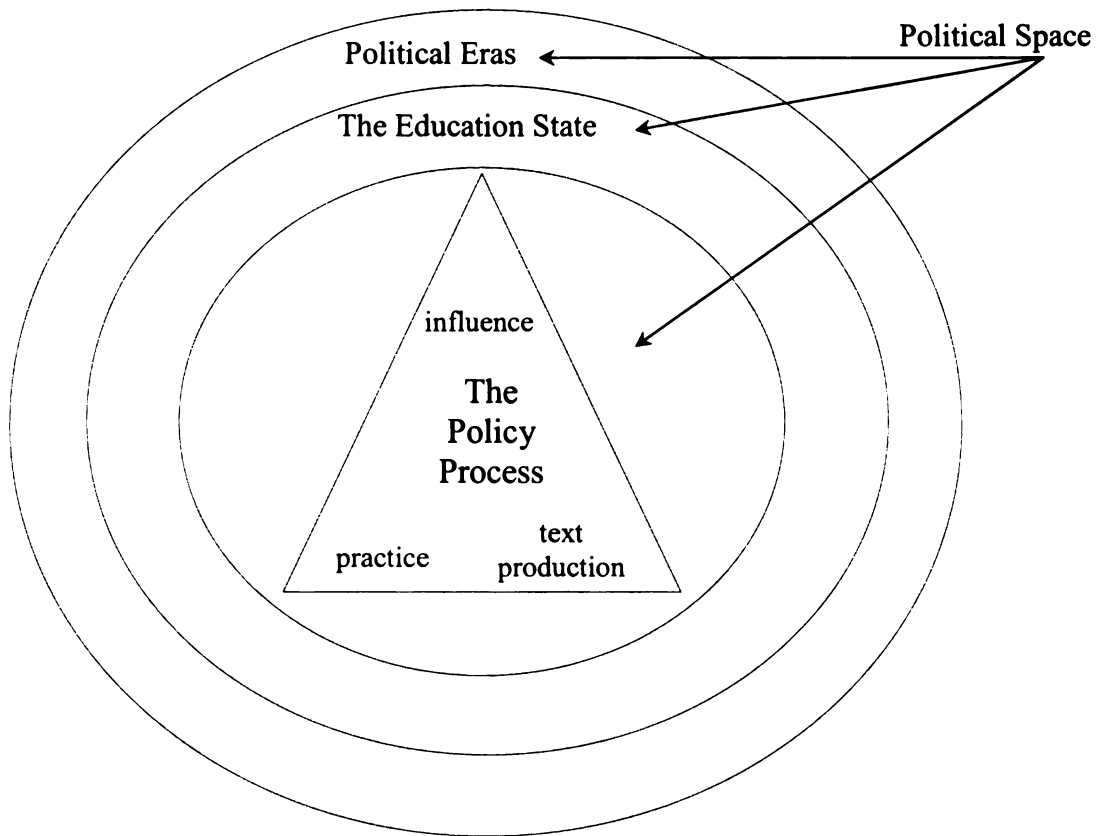
#### Conceptual framework

I adopt the view that policy is a process that involves policy gestation as well as policy implementation. This process unfolds on macro and micro levels (Olssen, Codd, & O'Neill, 2004; Taylor, Fazal, Lingard, & Henry, 1997), and it is dialectic and interactive in nature. By that I mean that policy responds to numerous interests, pressures, and

circumstances but it also affects them, reshapes them, and co-creates them. On the macro level, policy makers formulate policy goals and strategies, and articulate them in policy documents. Once policy ideas are established in texts, the evolution of policy continues when individuals (street-level bureaucrats) decipher the texts and translate policies into practice, adapting them to their work circumstances, re-interpreting them and reshaping them. Thus, policy continues to evolve and often results in producing unintended consequences that differ from the original policy goals (Majone & Wildavsky, 1984; McLaughlin, 1987). Ultimately, implementation changes policy. The change is linked to what individuals do with the policy but it goes even beyond that because individuals do not act in a vacuum and are affected by the institutional context in which they work as well as the conditions in the system as a whole.

Approaching policy analysis with such a complex view requires that attention be paid simultaneously to different layers of policy and this has proven to be a challenging task for policy analysts. While they have recognized the need to develop and utilize more holistic frameworks (McLaughlin, 1987 & 2006), they have struggled to integrate the different aspects of policy into single models. However, such models have been proposed and this study draws on one relatively recent attempt by Hodgson and Spours (2006) to draft an integrative model (Fig. 1) that brings different contexts and aspects of policymaking and policy implementation under one umbrella.

Figure 1. Conceptual framework (Hodgson & Spours, 2006)



Hodgson and Spours (2006), similarly to Taylor (1997) argued that policy analysis must be contextualized in broader historical and socio-political trends (2006, p.685). In their model, these trends receive attention in the outer dimension that they titled *political eras*. Contextualizing policy in history and political circumstances means acknowledging that societies undergo significant shifts and changes in political ideologies, and that such shifts matter to policy development. It also means accounting for transnational and international forces that increasingly contribute to the formation of national discourses and policy making. Anchoring policy developments in the broader socio-political and historical circumstances is important in any study but it becomes even

more pertinent in an international study like this one, where the primary audience is from the U.S. and the focus of the study is on a country that has distinctively different patterns of schooling and organization of education. The dimension of *political eras* provides a setting where these patterns can be described and explained. The socio-political and historical lens also aids analysts in selecting and presenting necessary background information, identifying the culturally unique patterns of schooling, and more effectively explaining to foreign audiences why certain developments occur and what they may mean in a given context. Generally speaking, the broader view of the *political eras* helps analysts to set the scene.

Once sufficient contextual information is outlined, analysts can move to other factors that play an important role in policymaking and policy implementation. Hodgson and Spours addressed these factors in their second dimension of the model, nested in the dimension of *political eras* and titled *education state*. Education state refers to various education stakeholders and policy actors who influence policymaking and who participate in policy implementation. These actors may include government institutions and various pressure groups, think tanks, associations, and individuals. Understanding who these players are and what influence they may have in the policy process helps to explain and interpret how policies emerge and what interests they may serve.

Hodgson and Spours started from a broader view but they did not lose sight of the micro-level aspects of policy and policy implementation. Their model progresses from the bigger picture of political eras and policy actors to the policy and its implementation. The part of the framework that is concerned with the policy and implementation draws on previous work of Bowe and Ball's (1992) and their conceptualization of the policy

process into a triangle model consisting of three contexts that together shape concrete policies: *influence*, *text production*, and *practice*. The context of influence represents the arena where policy ideas are initiated and developed. It takes into account the policy actors as well as the politics of the process and the timing of reforms. Different stakeholders compete to push forth their proposals on how education should be understood and how it should evolve. Governmental interests meet with interests of various associations, committees, and individuals and education discourses are formed. The conceptualization of the context of influence closely resonates with theories of policymaking and brings to mind Kingdon's classic "Agendas, alternatives, and public policies" (1995). In this book, Kingdon discussed windows of opportunities, pet proposals, problems and governmental agendas and showed how at least three policy streams (problems, policy streams and politics) must come together to result in policy proposals that appear on agendas. Kingdon's theory of the policy process fits into Bowe and Ball's context of influence and is utilized in this study to explain how the curricular reform in the Czech Republic emerged.

At the second tip of Bowe and Ball's policy triangle sits the context of *text production*. This refers to the phase in the policy process when winning ideas appear on policy agendas and are articulated in concrete policy texts. Policy texts represent policy in various forms including official and unofficial texts, legal acts, policy documents, commentaries, and media representations of policy. Because policy texts reflect a contested terrain of diverse and competing interests and values and because they are frequently a product of multiple authors, they tend to be ambiguous; key terms are used

inconsistently, and coherence and clarity are absent. But analysts should still scrutinize them for underlying discourses and assessment of the course that policy ideas are taking.

Policy texts serve as a steppingstone to policy implementation, which constitutes the third tip of Bowe and Ball's policy triangle although they do not call it implementation but a context of *practice*. Through implementation that has now moved among school practitioners, policy continues to evolve and reshape its form. The policy text often serves as a key clue for policy implementers to decipher the meaning of a new policy and act upon it. And because "for any text, a plurality of readers must necessarily produce a plurality of readings" (Olssen et al., 2004, p.62), it is understandable that new meanings are constructed and the policy may unfold differently than policy makers originally assumed. Practitioners read texts through the lenses of their prior experiences, knowledge and values but they are also constrained by the circumstances of their daily jobs. As they locally construct the meanings of policy, they determine what the policy becomes.

Bowe and Ball acknowledged that their triangle model offers a somewhat simplified view of the policy process, which is not as linear in nature as the model suggests but it serves as a helpful analytical tool that calls attention to different aspects of policy that matter. As for the conceptual framework that incorporates Bowe and Ball's model, Hodgson and Spours included one more dimensions to their model – *political space*. This dimension refers to tipping points and the timing of events and can be seen as weaving through all the other dimensions of the model (i.e. *political eras, education state, and the policy process*).

In respect to this study, the model was used primarily to identify the key arenas that needed to be examined and addressed, and to organize the study into meaningful components. As stated earlier, understanding how the reform arose and why it has unfolded in its particular ways requires a deep knowledge of the local socio-political context and its influence on the reform, and such understanding can be reached through examination of the dimension of *political eras*. This dimension facilitates scrutiny of the Czech policy memory, existing political ideology, and defining moments that contributed to the development of the reform. The reform is inextricably linked to the existing political climate in the Czech Republic, which is characterized by the nation's continuous efforts to break away from the communist past and become fully integrated in the European Union and the globalized world. Political pressures are negotiated through various agencies, interest groups, and individuals, and the model's second dimension -- *education state*-- helps to understand better who the policy actors on the Czech policy scene are and what interests and ideologies they represent.

Together, the *political era* and *education state* provide a descriptive background of the national context and its evolution. In respect to *political space* as it surrounds these two dimensions, this study pays attention to the larger context of the European Union, how the Czech Republic is situated within it and how important policy events were linked to the EU's policy proposals. The analysis of the curricular reform itself is modeled according to the inner part of the framework -- *the policy process* and its three contexts (context of influence, text production and practice).

The model does not have explanatory power; instead it breaks down the policy process and highlights areas that analysts should scrutinize when seeking an

understanding of policy driven change. While lacking the power to explicate what happens, the model and its individual components help analysts to capture the full complexity of examined phenomena and understand the different dimensions that determine policy effects. Furthermore, each dimension has the capacity to accommodate theories that emerged from policy research. These various theories weave through individual chapters and are explicitly brought together in the closing chapters in efforts to interpret the narrative and provide an alternative, theory-based view of the phenomena examined in this study. In other words, the conceptual frame serves to determine what needs to be examined; the research propositions then provide additional clues as to how the examined areas may be explained and understood. According to Hodgson and Spours, the conceptual model also helps researchers assess when and how to intervene in the policy process. The authors assume that a researcher's role goes beyond policy critique and extends from "analysis of policy" to "analysis for policy" (p.691).

#### Data and analysis

The aim of this study is to illuminate a process of reform gestation and evolution during its early implementation. Hence, the most fitting approach to investigation was a qualitative, naturalistic inquiry (L. Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000) drawing on grounded theory approach (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). This approach is inductive and interpretive in nature; it does not begin with a set theory but instead it is open for theory to emerge. It assumes thick descriptions and generation of hypotheses; it does not seek proofs and objective facts but meanings and understandings that are construed by individuals who vary in their perceptions of phenomena (L. Cohen et al., 2000).



To understand the process that led to the policy formulation and the meanings ascribed to the policy, I needed to obtain data that would capture how the policy evolved and that would show actors' perceptions and understandings of the process. Data were collected on different levels of the policy system and from different sources in three points in time (summer 2004, fall 2005, spring 2006). In sum, there are three kinds of data: interviews, surveys, and documents. The study draws on 51 semi-structured interviews with various policy actors, including governmental officials, researchers, university professors, school principals, and teachers. Schools included in the study were secondary high schools, and towards the end of the study, only pilot secondary high schools, which were the frontrunners of implementation of the reform that to this date has not yet fully unfolded. Surveys were used during the final phase of data collection only in pilot schools to gauge attitudes of their teachers towards the reform and to provide a richer description of the case. Altogether, 198 surveys were sent to five pilot schools with 89 surveys being returned (53% response rate). Document review included policy documents and reports as well as newspaper articles concerning the reform and published in three mainstream newspapers between fall 2003 and spring 2007. Details about methodological approaches, data sources and data analysis are included in Appendix A.

#### Organization of the study

The study takes into account that readers are unlikely to be familiar with education in the Czech Republic. For the readers to understand the reform, they must first gain some knowledge of the culture and traditions of Czech education as well as the current school system. In line with the conceptual framework, Chapter Two thus begins the exploration of the 'policy era' and the 'education state'. It maps the broader historical

and political context of Czech education and introduces the current policy scene and its players. The chapter begins with the description of historical roots and strong traditions in Czech education, which have evolved over centuries and to a degree still affect how the general public perceives education today. The education system was established and governed from the top down and Czechs learned to rely on the state as the primary education provider and care taker. With the shift from communism to market based democracy in 1989, the constellation of political powers changed, new actors emerged, and in part also due to the effects of globalism, traditional views about the purposes of education have been challenged.

The education system has been adjusting to the altered circumstances that followed the democratic movement after 1989 but at the same time, it holds on to its traditions and "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Chapter Three delves deeper into what the grammar of schooling is and what new trends it has encountered. In the perspective of the conceptual framework, Chapter Three functions as an extension of the examination of the *education state* context. It provides an overview of the existing school structure, the culture of Czech schooling, and challenges that it faces. The description of current state of affairs of Czech education is important also because the audience of this study is foreign and explanations are necessary so that readers understand the implications of the curricular reform. The chapter opens with an observation that a reform has reached pre-school education and early grades of primary schooling but from higher grades of primary school up the system, Czech schools continue to operate on the concept of what one influential Czech education professor called "erudition," focusing on transmitting large quantities of factual information and

knowledge with little attention to students' ability to apply their knowledge in practice. The curricular reform is based on the assumptions that part of the problem with Czech education lies in the national prescriptive curriculum that promotes a content-driven education model and teachers' limited autonomy to steer away from it. However, this chapter shows that there are also other mechanisms in the system that help to preserve existing status-quo, namely entrance examinations between school levels. Czech teachers tend to perceive university entrance examinations as a particularly strong mechanism of control that shapes school instruction even though the entrance examinations are developed locally and are highly variable and unpredictable.

Chapter Four shifts gears from the contextual factors that affected the emergence of the curricular reform to the reform itself. More specifically, Chapter Four looks at the first tip of the policy process triangle model that lies in the center of the conceptual framework and examines the context of influence. In concrete terms, this means that attention is paid to how the policy formulation was influenced by workings of various change forces, and shaped by opening and closing of 'policy streams' (Kingdon, 1995). Drawing on document review and interviews with policy makers and practitioners, the chapter reconstructs circumstances that led to the formulation of an overarching strategy for the development of Czech education and consequently to the Education Act of 2004, which instituted the curricular reform, among other things. In exploring the interplay of politics, policy actors, and ideas, the chapter discusses a concurrent reform of high school exit examinations and EU policy trends that arguably also affected the gestation of the curricular reform. The high school exit examination reform preceded the curricular reform and captured the policy scene for a number of years. Even though to this date the

reform of high school exit examinations has not been launched, it has played an important role in the debates of educational transformation in the Czech Republic and it continues to hold strong implications for the curricular reform.

Chapter Five zeros in on the curricular reform as it was articulated in the text of the new national frameworks (Frameworks from here on). From the point of view of the conceptual framework, this chapter connects to the second tip of the policy process triangle, the policy text. It analyzes the text of the Frameworks and other related documents; it describes the reform in greater depth, and identifies its underlying assumptions. It is the text of the Frameworks that schools receive and teachers decipher for clues about the implementation of the reform. As such, the text plays a vital role in the implementation so this chapter scrutinizes it not only for what it says but also for how ideas are formulated, interpreted through the media, and re-interpreted by school practitioners. The chapter thus spans the distance from the text, to information channels that carry the text, namely newspaper articles, to school principals and teachers in high school classrooms and their reading of the text.

Chapter Six moves to the level of practice and examines how principals and teachers in non-pilot and pilot high schools negotiate the meanings of the reform as they are beginning to implement it. At this early stage, implementation meant that a small number of teachers in each pilot school were writing the school curriculum for their subjects in response to the requirements of the new Frameworks. This chapter links the assumptions embedded in the Frameworks with the realities of teachers' jobs and then looks at other ways how, from the perspective of the teachers, the reform played out in the schools where it was piloted. As a whole, the chapter illustrates the difficulty of

change implied by the reform when teachers have virtually no access to alternative models of practice, few incentives for change, and limited capacity and resources to work with.

Chapter Seven brings together the pieces discussed in individual chapters. It offers a preliminary answer to the overarching question 'How has it happened that the reform has evolved and unfolded the way it has?' This answer is contextualized in the reform's evolution and movement from the policy level to practice that was captured in the narrative in Chapters Two through Six. In addition, it notes international influences and incorporates a discussion of the role of globalization in the Czech efforts to transform the education system.

While the local-global perspective explains a great deal about the reform, until this point, the study has made little use of the wealth of scholarly literature on reforms, although some of the research has been introduced in individual chapters. With the prospect of generalization and additional insights into the narrative, Chapter Eight highlights six propositions from prior policy research that bear on the case and seeks to identify areas in policy implementation that might have otherwise gone unnoticed. The research introduced here primarily originated in the English speaking world and one might argue to what degree it can be applied to the Central European context. But policy research has no tradition in the Czech Republic and few theories to draw on so an introduction of an alternative framework may bear some utility.

Chapter Nine concludes the story of the reform with a discussion of both perspectives presented in Chapter Seven and Eight – one contextualized in knowledge of local circumstances and global pressures on the reform, and one interpreting the case

through the lens of prior research on reforms. It teases out how each perspective contributes to understanding of the story and how the two perspectives complement one other, creating a richer and more nuanced explanation of the case. It also proposes some policy recommendations and implications of this study for future research.

## **CHAPTER 2: THE POLITICAL ERA AND EDUCATION STATE: HISTORICAL LEGACIES AND CURRENT SITUATION IN CZECH EDUCATION**

The aim of this study is to understand a complexity of a reform and thus it is essential to first examine the context to which the reform was introduced. But simply describing the current affairs of Czech education is not going to be sufficient. The Czech education system has long historical traditions and its own "grammar of schooling" (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). The historical legacies and events that shaped the Czech nation and its education over centuries continue to affect people's perceptions of the system, its problems and its opportunities. For that reason, an inspection of the existing context, i.e. the education system and the political era, must begin with the past.

The Czech Republic (Bohemia and Moravia) is a small country of 10 million people situated in the middle of Europe, between Germany on the West and the Slovak Republic on the East. Although the country's geographical position is in Central Europe, in the more recent history, Czechs have been described as Eastern Europeans while in the more distant history, the Czech nation was seen as part of Western Europe. The distinction between Eastern and Western speaks of political influences that ruled the small nation often caught in the middle and pulled in various directions. To this date, Foreigners unfamiliar with the Czech Republic tend to think of the country as a former part of the Soviet Union. Although this was never the case, 40 years of the communist rule (1948-1989) earned the nation the position in Eastern Europe. Historically and culturally though, Czechs have been closer to their Western European counterparts. All this information may seem trivial in a dissertation that focuses on analyzing a current

educational policy but reforms do not exist in a vacuum, and their enactment is strongly affected by cultural practices, shaped and colored by a nation's history. Czechs are humbled by the more recent history and proud of the long foregone past, and as a consequence, the education system has been swayed to reviving some relics of the more distant past, building new links to the West and discarding associations with the more recent history that is connected to the East (and the Soviet Union in particular). This is of course not a clean-cut process because the traditions cannot be easily separated into what is Western and what is Eastern, and more importantly not everything that can be linked to the West can work in the current system, or should even be tried out for that matter. And in the same vein, not everything that originated in the communist past deserves to be dismantled or discarded. Czech policy makers did not approach the rebuilding of the system after 1989 uncritically but given the complicated and complex circumstances, new structures that emerged present numerous tensions and paradoxes. This chapter lays down the history that will make these tensions and paradoxes presented in later chapters easier to comprehend.

### Czech education in history

#### *Jan Amos Comenius, the teacher of nations*

Czechs take great national pride in their association with the celebrated 17<sup>th</sup> century humanistic scholar and forefather of contemporary educational theories Jan Ámos Komenský (Comenius). And while many continue to praise our association with the European humanist, in many respects, Czech education goes ironically counter to Comenius' teachings on education. Comenius spent much of his life developing philosophy of education and can be considered as the founder of a system of progressive



instruction (Piaget, 1999, p.4). In a passage quoted by Piaget (1999, p.5), Comenius wrote:

Craftsmen do not hold their apprentices down to theories; they put them to work without delay so that they may learn to forge metal by forging, to carve by carving, to paint by painting, to leap by leaping. Therefore in schools let the pupils learn to write by writing, to speak by speaking, to sing by singing, to reason by reasoning, etc., so that schools may simply be workshops in which work is done eagerly.

But Comenius' philosophy did not leave a strong trace of influence in his homeland and rather than in progressive ways, Czech education developed traditionally. As a protestant refugee, Comenius fled Bohemia after the Battle at the White Mountain of 1620 where Czechs were defeated by the Habsburgs, and developed his philosophy in exile. For three centuries onward, Czech lands were ruled by the Habsburgs, and Czech education was strongly influenced by German educational philosophy, and Herbartianism in particular. The new curricular reform implies that the Czechs return to some of these old ideas and premises of progressive education, and rectify the trajectory that the education system has taken over the past centuries.

#### *Maria Theresa's school reform*

In contrast to the U.S. or Scandinavian nations where public education developed as an institution of local control, the Habsburgs established and governed education from the top-down. The origins of the education system in Czech lands as a public affair are linked to the year 1774 when the empress Maria Theresa issued the General School Ordinance and established a school commission in each province to govern three kinds of

schools: normal schools, high schools, and community, or elementary schools for all children aged 6-12 (Roider, 1973). The school reform that Maria Theresa initiated was quite revolutionary at the time and the year 1774 is considered to mark the beginning of compulsory education in Czech lands.

School attendance was not strictly enforced from the very beginning because the school infrastructure had not been fully developed and not every community had a school building. But the development of the infrastructure was eased by the state taking over Jesuit schools. Maria Theresa's Ordinance came a year after the pope had dissolved the Jesuit order, which had a dense network of schools. The pope thus freed a great wealth that the Jesuits had possessed including their school buildings and teachers (Ingrao, 1994). The infrastructure has a foundation that continued to be built upon and by 1780, some 500 new schools opened in addition to those that had already existed (Roider, 1973).

Historians portray Maria Theresa as a strong leader and a politician who was concerned with humanitarianism. Her Ordinance reads:

We, Maria Theresa...offer to each and all of our loyal citizens...our grace and present the following for their observation. Because nothing is so dear to us as the welfare of those lands entrusted to our administration by God, and since we are accustomed to paying strict attention to their best possible improvement, so we hold it true that the education of youth of both sexes, which is the most important foundation for the true happiness of the nations, deserves a thorough examination (Roider, 1973).

Maria Theresa was concerned with human conditions of people living in the empire but she was also a politician who understood that common people's well being was connected to the economic and political prosperity of the empire. Her reforms can be seen as a reaction to the dire conditions of the Empire depleted by wars and poverty, as well as the changing social conditions that accompanied the transition from feudalism to industrialization. But her motivations to introduce compulsory education may be irrelevant for this study. What matters is that she created foundations of a strong tradition of education state whose legacy still lives. Parents learned to send their children to school and respect the state as the primary authority responsible for their children's education. This idea still holds true for the Czech education today. As one policy researcher said:

...when you talk to people e.g. in Scandinavia where the system grew from the bottom, where parents established schools for their children...at about the same time as [schools were being established] here, the systems significantly differ because of that. What works there and doesn't work here is the civil oversight and civil care of schools. Here, the view that is strongly engrained is that the state takes care – [the attitude] we send children to school so be glad that we do that and that's it for us. So, for example, attempts to introduce parental school boards etc. have been quite problematic and it basically has not worked very well.

Maria Theresa's reforms led to strengthening the central government, which held the ethnically, economically and culturally diverse empire together. The strong central governance survived centuries after Maria Theresa died, and it regained and strengthened its power when the communist regime seized rule over Czechoslovakia in 1948.

Although the system has been significantly decentralized over the past nearly two

decades, the legacy of centralized power is still very much alive as evidenced from remarks that interviewees made. In the words of a high ranking official from the Czech Ministry of Education as he described the current system:

A great number of responsibilities have been transferred on the lower levels but the system continues to behave as if this was not the case. For example, local administrators require if not a directive, than at least an opinion from the Ministry whether they can do this or that, although the legislation does not forbid them to do that...that tendency to have things confirmed from above is still there...

The school structure that Maria Theresa's Ordinance created has more or less stayed in place until today, namely the elite academic secondary school—the gymnasium. Maria Theresa requested that education be provided to all children of age 6-12. Parents could have their child educated at home but if they did not have the financial means to pay for a tutor, they had to send their child to a public elementary school (Roider, 1973). If they wished for their child to continue with education, the child could attend a middle school (Hauptschule) and later the elite university preparatory high school, the Gymnasium (Ingrao, 1994) which has survived centuries and continues to be an inherent part of the present educational system.

Aside from control of school attendance, the strong central powers also regulated teachers and teaching. All teachers were required to receive training from normal schools, which were established in the capital of each province of the empire (Ingrao, 1994). The Ordinance introduced basic guidelines for school instruction:

Each teacher must instruct all students together in one classroom. To use class reading time effectively, he should make use of tables and other reading methods

as prescribed. In short, he must follow exactly that which is contained in the books of methods passed out for the instruction of teachers. Instruction must not concentrate immediately on committing things to memory or on plaguing the children with rote learning of necessities but on improving their understanding (Roider, 1973).

Following the Ordinance, in 1775 the General School Commissioner Johan Ignac Felbiger published even more detailed guidelines for school instruction in the Methods Book (František Morkes, 2004). Felbiger's Methods Book carried traces of influence of Comenius' teachings but those ideas gradually evaporated as the German Herbartianism became a fashionable trend in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and with its focus on knowledge, recitation, and rote learning overshadowed the ideas that implied progressive and constructivist education.

Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the original structure of the education system further evolved and underwent more changes, namely in secondary education. New types of secondary schools were established -- Gymnasium continued to be the elite 4-year university preparatory school, next to so called "Reálka", which was more practically oriented polytechnic school. Multi-year secondary schools (i.e. 6-8- year academic high schools) entered the system and ran parallel to the 4-year gymnasium, and high school exit examinations were introduced. The end of 19<sup>th</sup> century also marked the emergence of pre-school education and vocational education.

#### *Education in independent Czechoslovakia*

The end of World War I in 1918 created an opportunity for Czechs and Slovaks to unite and on the relics of the Austro-Hungarian Empire create a sovereign democratic

federation Czechoslovakia. Czechoslovakia's development was quite promising until 1938 when key European leaders met in Munich and gave much of the country away to Hitler. In Czech history, the period of 1918-1938 is referred to as the First Republic and after the collapse of communism in 1989, Czechs turned to this time period as the bright times of the past. During the First Republic, Czechoslovakia adhered to democratic principles and counted among the most industrialized and advanced nations in Europe. Education was widespread and educational philosophy was marked by progressivism, which manifested itself in a number of experimental reform schools promoting student-centered pedagogy (Glenn, 1995).

This brief history of democracy gives the Czech Republic some advantages when compared to other post-socialist nations because it offers some ideals, democratic principles and education history that Czechs can return to on build upon. Czechs are quite proud of this time period and tend to glorify it. Using words from Andre Roberts' dictionary of Czech popular culture (2005):

...fond memories are held of [the First Republic's] cultural achievements and its bourgeois pastimes. Many covet images of well-dressed middle class citizens whiling away time in luxurious coffee houses, attending elegant soirées, and traveling abroad on vacation... The communists did all they could to discredit this golden age; they portrayed it as a time of poverty, exploitation, and oligarchical rule... these prejudices all disappeared with the fall of communism. Present-day Czechs of virtually all political stripes turn to the First Republic for inspiration and symbolic capital (p. 137).

When the iron curtain fell in 1989 and Czech reformers began looking for ways to change the educational system, one of the things they did was to revive the institution of elite, multi-year (6-8-year) academic high schools, which first occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> century and thrived during the times of the First Republic but ceased to exist when the communist regime came into power. In today's system, the research community views the revival of these elite schools rather negatively. Researchers argue that these elite schools contribute to increased inequalities that Czech educational system fosters because they pull higher achieving students from regular schools as early as at the age of 11 and provide them with a different kind of education than most other children get. Sorting of children to these schools has a lot to do with their socio-economic background and the education of their parents but the Czech elites have been strongly opposed to the abolishment of these institutions.

*With the Soviet Union forever and never otherwise*

After the end of the WWII, communists began gaining on popularity in Czechoslovakia and in 1948 the Communist Party seized power. What followed were 40 years of authoritarian single party rule. The communists wrapped the borders of Czechoslovakia in barbwire and cut off the country from the West. From then on, the Soviet Union and other socialist countries were the only acceptable partners. The Soviet Union in particular served as an example of perfection and a model to emulate. Educational philosophy in Czech and Slovak schools came to draw heavily on Soviet pedagogy. Schools strongly focused on cognition and scientism, and paid only marginal attention to social and personal development of children (Matusová, 1997/98).

The communist government was aware of the power of education and used it as a central platform for spreading its ideology. Schooling became completely subjugated to the political agenda of the party with the explicit goal to train “new socialist citizens” who would be disciplined and loyal to the communist regime (Glenn, 1995).

The ideological control of the party over education tightened even more after Prague Spring of 1968 when Czechoslovak government unsuccessfully attempted to create “socialism with a human face”. The efforts to reform socialism in Czechoslovakia presented a major threat to other socialist governments in the Warsaw pact so they crushed it by sending their troops to Czechoslovakia on August 21, 1968. The years that followed are known as the period of political “normalization” which launched massive repressions. The Soviets oversaw installations of new communist leadership loyal to the politics in Moscow. The normalization dismissed “tens of thousands of intellectuals and artists out their jobs, relegating them to menial labors as stokers, window-washers, or night-watchmen. Others were allowed to keep their jobs, but at the cost of publicly pledging gratitude to the Russians for the invasion. Most Czechs survived normalization by keeping their heads down.” (Roberts, 113)

Education strengthened its mission of teaching children to be obedient and to conform (Matusová, 1997). All school activities were closely monitored. The communist party had a local organization or a committee in each school and thus ensured that schools were employing politically reliable teachers who complied with the regime’s objectives. Teachers who showed disagreement with the regime’s practices or who would not conform to the ruling ideology were at risk of being reported by the committee and persecuted. As Václav Havel, a playwright and a political prisoner during the



communist times, wrote in 1975 a protest letter to the president of Czechoslovakia and the General Secretary of the Communist Party Gustáv Husák: "For fear of losing his job, the schoolteacher teaches things he does not believe; fearing for his future, the pupil repeats them after him" (Glen, 1995, p.179). An excerpt from a letter written by a schoolteacher in 1975 further illustrates the difficult position that many teachers had to face:

I appear before my class and, as ordered, I recite things which I do not agree with. My students know this and also disagree but they keep silent. But this is exactly where my situation becomes painful; I have to feel ashamed in front of my children and at the same time grateful to them but I cannot help worrying about the kind of character traits they are developing and about what they are going to be like as future citizens of this country. (as cited in Kusin, p.204)

Monitoring activities of schools and teachers was just one realm of the party's intervention into education affairs. The party also took a proactive role in launching a campaign of systematic political indoctrination of education although it often meant that many children learned things contradictory to their parents' values and beliefs. The Education Act of 1984 charged schools with the responsibility to prepare youth for "life and work in developed socialistic society and for defense of the socialist homeland." Schools were given the task to form pupils' "marxist-leninist world ideology, socialistic ideological consciousness, ... socialist and proletarian internationalism and class consciousness" (Czechoslovak Socialistic Republic, 1984, ¶7). Communist ideology and Marxism-Leninism permeated school curriculum in all subjects however impossible it may seem. A proponent of the regime's ideological indoctrination in schools was quoted

in Kusin (1978) to say: "there is no science without communist party-mindedness" (p.97). Key ideological concepts such as 'Lenin', 'Red Army' and 'October Revolution' were introduced as early as in kindergarten (Glen, p.175).

Soviet scientism organized subjects so that they mirrored the sharp divisions of the scientific classification of disciplines; textbooks were highly academic and children were overloaded with large amounts of information that they typically memorized and reproduced (Matusová, 1997/98; Watson, 2000). Basic education was reduced from 9 to 8 years as was the norm in the Soviet Union, and this change resulted in further increase of information overload because academic content was compressed to fewer years (Glenn, 1995). Russian was the compulsory foreign language and children had to study it from 5<sup>th</sup> grade onwards. History curriculum featured achievements of the workers' movement, and lists of Communist party conventions and their agendas (for an example, see themes for high school exit examination in history from 1980s in Appendix B). Instructional practices went hand in hand with the ideology, i.e. plurality of views was not permitted, and critical thinking and individualization were discouraged.

The presence of the ideology was also physically displayed. Many people of my own generation may still remember the omnipresent slogans such as 'With the communists to better times' or 'Capitalism is the scourge of humanity' that decorated the halls in our schools. Some may even remember verses and songs about happy life in socialism that we memorized and recited at formal social events, or the bulletin boards in our classrooms that we embellished with newspaper articles commemorating political events important to the regime such as the anniversary of Lenin's death, or the Great October Revolution of 1917.

Apart from the curriculum, the party also controlled access to schools, namely secondary schools and universities. Oftentimes, children of prominent communist officials were able to get access regardless their intellectual abilities and achievement, although the formal mechanisms of school mobility were based on students' academic performance. On the other hand, children from families that did not show the correct attitudes to the communist regime could be kept away from the schools they desired to attend. Through its arms of control, the regime punished its opponents, scared off those who could have been inclined to dissent, and kept everyone in line. The government successfully enacted politics of fear. Using Havel's words again:

For fear of being denied the opportunity to continue studying, a young person enters the Youth Movement and performs as necessary; fearing that his son or daughter won't have enough points to gain access to a school in the monstrous political points admission system, a father accepts various political responsibilities and does 'voluntarily' what is required of him. (Havel, 1999)

The point system that is referenced in Havel's quote was not a transparent system that one could make sense of but everyone knew that Party membership, or an affiliation with the Party and its important members, counted in university admissions as well as in job promotions.

On the more positive side, education during the communist times was free of charge at all levels; it was provided to all, and high literacy rates were achieved early on, although literacy was wide-spread already during the times of the First Republic when even by European standards, Czech society put "unusually strong emphasis on education for the widest groups in society" (Education Policy Association, 1999, p.32). The

communist regime maintained the solid school infrastructure, and supplied all schools with the equipment they needed. Children were provided textbooks and in the early grades also some basic school supplies. Additionally, they were also fed. The state provided free snacks and subsidized school cafeterias. It also funded programs of “school in nature”– times during the school year when the entire class spent several weeks in the woods, typically in a mountain or a spa resort. Some of these provisions still exist although they function under financial constraints and funding for them has shifted from the state to parents.

### *Velvet Revolution of 1989*

In 1989, as communist regimes in Eastern Europe began to crumble, Czechoslovakia had its Velvet Revolution which brought an end to the communist dictatorship. One could argue that despite the Party's effort, schools had not succeeded in their mission to indoctrinate the young generation with obedience and loyalty to the regime because the Velvet Revolution was set to motion by a movement of university students. The movement began with events of November 17 when university students in Prague commemorated the fiftieth anniversary of closing of universities by the Nazis in a government-approved march. As the students were parading through the streets, they started denouncing the communist regime (Roberts, 2005) and calling for freedom. Slogans included 'Academic freedom' or 'Why continue learning non-sense?' (Vlček, Růžička, & Zvěřina). The government responded with sending riot police to the scene. The police blocked off the march and disbanded the peaceful protest with brutal beatings.

It was not the first time when the riot police used violence against the regime's opponents but November 17 was different in that the protestors were young university

students, not political dissidents. Soon after the incident, a rumor spread that one student was killed. Given the seriousness of the rumor, the media was compelled to comment on the incident. The TV screened an interview with the allegedly killed student, showing that the student was alive and well. Nevertheless, the black and white footage in otherwise color TV, and apparent bruises and swells on the student's face suggested that the media may have been omitting some information about the brutality of the police. Party censorship was working its way and it was difficult to gauge what was true, what was not, and what was being withheld. The student who had participated in the march, political dissidents, and actors wanted to make sure that the society learned about the events. Thus, they began disseminating information about the November 17 events through their own channels that they had formed. The dissidents and members of various reform initiatives established Civic Forum – a movement calling for an investigation of the beatings, dismissal of officials responsible for the violence, and release of political prisoners. University students created a coordinating and information committee, sent student representatives to towns around Czechoslovakia to talk about the Nov 17 events, and called a general strike, which gradually spread throughout the country. Actors interrupted many of their performances in theatres around the country and discussed the November 17 events with their audiences. Within days, thousands of people started filling the streets of cities across Czechoslovakia, calling for democracy and demanding the communist government to resign, which it did on November 28, 1989 (Vlček et al.). The peaceful overthrow of the regime entered history as so called Velvet Revolution, and Czechoslovakia found itself at the threshold of a new historical and political era.

## The new political era

In the global context, the demise of socialism signaled a triumph of capitalism, which manifested itself in quick moves of the post-socialist societies to abandon any establishments that had associations with the socialist past. As Joel Samoff (1999) described it, the new notion that prevailed was that "everything that can be linked to socialism, however tenuous the link, is clearly flawed, precisely because of that link" (p.56). People turned their attention away from the Soviet Union and looked onwards to the West as the new authority. The Czechs and Slovaks also dug into their pre-communist history, which provided some alternative models for the restructuring that ensued.

The early 1990s were highly turbulent with changes taking place simultaneously at all levels of social and political life. A side effect of the new nation building was a split of Czechoslovakia in 1993 into two sovereign nation-states, the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic. Each of the two new democracies has pursued its own destiny since then although some general characteristics of educational change were common for both nations. Educational change in the 1990s mirrored the entire liberalization movement that was sweeping across the society – the democratically elected leadership worked to increase school diversity, unleash market forces, and open up schools to the society.

Many grassroots movement of early 1990s initiated change, which happened almost organically. Legal provisions and top-down decisions followed rather than steered the early stages of transition (Čerych, 1999). In 1990, the first democratically elected Parliament instantly modified the Constitution and expunged Articles proclaiming the leading role of the party and education in the spirit of Marxism-Leninism (Průcha & Walterová, 1992). This led to immediate changes in the school curriculum: Marxism-

Leninism was dropped altogether and Russian ceased to be the mandatory foreign language. The rhetoric celebrating socialism, and pictures of Lenin and communist officials instantly disappeared from schools and textbooks.

The Parliament also amended the Education Act of 1984 and adopted new provisions that provided a legal frame for the establishment of private and parochial schools. Moreover, it also revived the First Republic's elite multi-year academic secondary schools. New educational programs and curricula emerged as well. Public primary schools that had previously followed one national curriculum were given the possibility to choose from three types of curricula. Apart from that, a number of alternative pedagogical movements such a Montessori, Waldorf, or Dalton plan also found their way to the system.

The central powers began loosening up: universities gained significant autonomy (although fiscally, they are still dependent solely on the state budget); school principals' decision-making powers were augmented, and teachers' freedom in instructional practices expanded (e.g. choice of textbooks). A more recent reform in public administration further reshuffled the distribution of powers and strengthened the role of regions and local communities in school administration. Regions now carry a full responsibility for establishing, abolishing and administering secondary schools, and municipalities are in charge of administering primary schools and pre-schools.

There were also major changes in school financing. The principle of voucher mechanism has replaced automatic allocations of funds to schools according to their previous budgets so in the current “normative system”, money follows the student, and

funds are diversified according to the school type (Čerych, 1999). The state however continues to control teacher salaries and directly pays expenditures on salaries.

All in all, governance has grown decentralized and the state moved from a strictly controlling role to a coordinating one.

Qualitative change inside schools and in teaching practices occurred to a lesser extent. Although there are individual teachers and principals who introduced new schools, new courses, and new instructional practices, one can only speak of small pockets of change. According to the Annual Report of the Czech School Inspectorate for the academic year 2003/2004, less than 10% schools chose to go against the grain and follow a curriculum alternative to the traditional school (Czech School Inspectorate, 2004). "Much of the teaching has remained teacher directed and fact based; pupils continue to be assigned a passive role" (Polyzoi & Cerna, 2001b, 79). On the more positive side, the Czech School Inspectorate noted that schools today are better equipped, principals more informed and teachers well prepared. Nevertheless teaching, especially in middle and secondary schools, continues to be heavily teacher-centered, overwhelmingly concerned with content and memorization of facts (Czech School Inspection, 2004). Knowledge is transferred with little opportunity for students to learn how to apply it. Classroom presentations, discussions and debates are rare as is any active engagement of the students (Czech School Inspectorate, 2003).

The many changes that did take place in the closing decade of the 20th century were unprecedented in their breadth and scope, and yet they fell short in effecting the deep, profound and large-scale change that reformers hoped for at the onset of the transition. Complaints continue to prevail that schools still carry the legacy of the



communist times when education stressed literacy, numeric skills and factual information but discouraged independent thinking, formation of one's own opinion and an open dialogue. As Keith Watson wrote (2000), the educational systems in communist countries "were inflexible and they failed to develop problem-solving skills, higher order thinking, creativity, initiative and a spirit of inquiry" (p.57), and these traits continue to characterize education in the Czech Republic today.

In the context of the Czech Republic working to return to Europe and once again be viewed as a strong European democracy, policy makers called for deeper change in schools and internal school transformation. Clearly, any deep and fundamental change in how things have worked for centuries is going to be challenging. In the words of Jiří Kotásek (1992), a highly respected Czech professor and educator, "it is not inconceivable to consider that forty to fifty years will be needed to improve our education. This coincides with the estimated two-generation turnover to repair the socioethical and spiritual devastation "(p.43). But proposals for change have been drafted, strategies developed, and with the new Education Act of 2004 and the curricular reform embedded in it, the basic concepts of the envisioned change have been laid down.

#### The education state

Hodgson and Spours (2006) discuss the education state as an important dimension in policy analysis that manifests and reinforces the dimension of political era. Looking at the education state means mapping various key actors who constitute the landscape of education policy and play a role in influencing the flow of ideas in policy arenas. In democratic nations, education state includes governmental organizations and regional bodies, pressure groups, associations, and think tanks as well as individuals who exert a

degree of influence at different points in the policy process (Hodgson and Spours, 2006, p.687).

The education state in the democratic Czech Republic lives with the past legacies of strong central governance but continues to move towards increased decentralization and devolution of powers. Despite administrative decentralization, the central focus of the policy environment still gravitates towards the Ministry of Education and education ministers who have the institutional power to draw proposals for governmental hearings, draft legislation, channel distribution of state funds to schools, and issue various directives and regulations that affect the functioning of the education system and schools within it (White Paper, 2001). The Ministry serves as an umbrella organization for a number of institutes that it houses. These include: Institute for Research in Education; Center for Reform of High School Exit Examinations renamed in 2004 to Center for Evaluation of School Results; the Czech School Inspectorate, National Institute for Further Education, and other organizations related to the Ministry. The Institute for Research in Education is particularly important for the curricular reform because it authored the text of the new curricular Frameworks and has assumed charge of coordinating the reform's initial implementation and pilot.

The role of the Ministry of Education is being redefined from the strictly controlling and administrative authority to one that creates a vision, coordinates education, supports reform ideas and serves as a connector between the general public and state bodies. However, the general public and policy actors outside (and even some within) the ministerial Institutes continue to perceive the Ministry as a largely ineffective bureaucracy unable to give up its administrative functions and unfit to perform the role of

a change agent. In the words of an education professor who was engaged in the development of new educational policies and worked with the ministerial officials in various advisory roles:

The Ministry has been trying to move away from doing pure administrative work...but I think that so far they have not been very successful. It still sees things only in the perspective of finances, how we must reduce the number of teachers, how much money we have available for operational costs...The Ministry is still an administrative apparatus. It's not an agency for improving the quality of teaching and educational outcomes... There is a strong administrative tradition here. They, as administrators [at the Ministry], feel responsible for allocating funds, keeping records, observing laws, issuing regulations, and the majority of the people who work for the Ministry are economists, lawyers, some are educators, but within the Ministry, they all take on the mentality of an administrator who monitors, gives orders. That idea that the Ministry creates conditions for innovation and change, that does not exist in their conscience, which is given by the Austro-Hungarian tradition and tradition of such Ministries in general.

A ministerial administrator was even more critical:

The Ministry should first of all focus on conceptual, strategic tasks and reduce the administration... there is virtually no one at the ministry who would think conceptually... You would need a magnifying glass to find someone with whom you could talk about more conceptual issues...

Efforts to innovate and seek alternatives to the traditional teaching have been generally linked with people and organizations that stand outside of the Ministry and its Institutes. Democracy facilitated establishment of various reform groups calling for "humanization of education, a focus on development of critical skills and problem solving, and diversification of curricular options" (Polyzoi, p.74). These groups have been concentrated in various non-profit organizations, educational associations and think tanks, and involve reform-oriented teachers, educational entrepreneurs, researchers, and university academics. Polyzoi and Cerna (2001) noted that the influence of reform groups has diminished since the early 1990s with the Ministry selectively choosing to incorporate some ideas of the reformers into concrete proposals while ignoring others. Interviewees largely confirmed that the influence of reform groups on policy decisions has not been very strong. An educational expert and a protagonist of the reform ideas described his experience with collaboration with the Ministry as follows:

We tried to educate them [the Institute] through critique and advice – we did both...I cooperated with them for quite some time, I criticized them and I wasn't alone in both...Most people who initially worked with them eventually gave up because it was simply impossible -- their proposals and attitudes were not desired. And then we tried to criticize them, but they do not react...we do not have any political instruments to push our ideas through.

The depiction of the policy scene so far suggests that the policy scene is divided into two camps: the Ministry that is somewhat ambivalent (sometimes it listens to the non-traditionalists and outside groups and sometimes it doesn't) and the progressive groups. Naturally, the situation is more complex. Not all people working for the Ministry

and its Institutes are bureaucrats without a vision. A university professor who has served as an advisor to the Ministry said:

The Ministry is a systemic organization that is trying to unsystematically help.

There are many individuals who help, who are good and who work hard but because communication between individual departments and offices of the ministry is non-existent...they have no clue what they are doing so they produce documents that contradict one another or overlap.

Also, not all non-governmental organizations represent progressive ideas and call for a reform, at least in the sense of advocating for fundamental shift from the existing content driven educational model. There are two discipline/subject associations that are visibly on the policy scene and that have earned a reputation that would classify them, at least in some instances, as traditionalists. For example, an Association of History Teachers strongly opposed the curricular reform when the reform was first introduced to the public on the grounds that the reform encourages integration of subjects, which can be threatening to the culture and quality of Czech education. In a somewhat similar vein, the Association of Czech Mathematicians and Physicists which has had some influence over the decisions of the Ministry, has been portrayed by some interviewees as largely conservative, and unable to see alternative ways to mathematics teaching and learning. The Czech Republic has yet to see the math wars that have played out in the U.S. The prevailing view on mathematics teaching and science teaching in general is largely uncontroversial. In interviews with school practitioners who teach mathematics or sciences, the practitioners often noted that teaching mathematics or physics is straightforward and cannot really be done differently; students have to memorize a set of

rules before they learn a new concept. The predominant notion was that alternative, constructivist approach to teaching might be possible in history or social sciences but it is unlikely to work in exact sciences where things are given. As one teacher put it: "You cannot teach students without asking them to master some facts. How can I search the Internet for information on acceleration when I don't know what acceleration is? They simply have to know something first".

Besides the various non-profit organizations and education associations, many of which stand for introducing progressive concepts in education, there are a number of individuals who have become prominent on the Czech educational policy scene. So far, this study has referred to educational experts, entrepreneurs, researchers and university professors as if they have clear roles. The fact of the matter is that these individuals often wear several hats and can't be placed into any one single category as they speak from the point of view of different experiences. An education entrepreneur may be someone who is for example engaged in a testing agency but at the same time may have affiliations with a university as a professor, be associated with a research think tank, and serve as an advisor to the Ministry.

As for notable institutions that make up part of the map of the Czech policy scene, there is for example the Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (so called ISEA), which has authored a number of research studies in education or the Center for Education Policy that has also had a say in the country's strategic documents. Then there is SKAV, the Standing Conference of Educational Associations, which represents various independent initiatives (currently some 17 associations) and has been prominent in the reform movement in that it has organized regular round table

discussions around important topics in education. SKAV has served as an important counter balance to the ministry – SKAV representatives have provided advice to the Ministry but they also represent an independent voice that is often critical of the actions of the Ministry. Apart from other organizations and initiatives, e.g. the well-established project Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking that provides professional development to teachers to promote alternative instructional practices, there are also two test development agencies that can claim some impact on school instruction and educational policy. One of them is called the Kalibro project and its focus is on the development of formative tests and self-evaluation tools for schools. The second one, so called Scio, is a testing agency conceptually similar to the American ETS, developing admission and diagnostic tests that schools can choose to purchase and administer. The two testing agencies have, among other things, produced reports that provide empirical evidence on the deficiencies of the current educational system and thus serve as an argument for change. For example, Kalibro has analyzed student performance on formative assessment and validated PISA findings that Czech students show difficulties applying their theoretical knowledge to real problems. Scio, on the other hand, has provided insights into the policy discussions related to university entrance examinations and the proposed high school exit examination reform. In conversations with teachers, teachers sometimes pointed to the tests produced by these two agencies as sources of ideas for instruction so both agencies also exercise some direct impact on school instruction.

A discussion about key policy actors cannot ignore the general public, parents, students, and teachers. As suggested earlier, the long tradition of state responsibility over education has made the general public somewhat apathetic and uninvolved in education.

People are used to leave educational affairs to the state and they are generally content with the education system. Some researchers would argue that the contentment often stems from a lack of knowledge of how the system works (Straková, Basl, & Veselý, 2006). A survey conducted in 2006 by the Czech Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences showed that 59% of respondents were content with the educational system in the Czech Republic; 19% did not have any opinion on the matter and only 22% were dissatisfied (Straková et al., 2006). When the respondents were asked whether Czech primary and secondary schools need fundamental reforms, the numbers slightly shifted: nearly half of the population did not think that reforms are necessary, 18% did not know or did not care and 36% said yes to reforms. "The bad news for the curricular reform is that only 16% respondents consider the development of general skills important" (Straková et al., 2006, p.1).

Parents have traditionally played only a marginal role in how education is conducted, and mostly stayed uninvolved although on some occasions they raised their voices. For example, in 2006, the city of Brno decided to reduce the number of elite multi-year secondary schools and parents who saw this decision as a threat to their children's future united, wrote a petition and collected some 2500 signatures (Lidovky.cz, 2006). Their protest did not sway the city's decision but it was highly publicized and noticed. The Education Act of 2004 introduced local school boards to Czech education, thus giving an opportunity to parents to be represented in their children's schools. But according to the 2006 annual report of the Czech School Inspectorate, although these boards now exist, they get minimally involved in schools' operations and they are only beginning to search for their practical functions (CSI, 2006). So far, they have not played



a very strong role in the education system and their activities have been largely formal and symbolic.

Teachers continue to be cautious participants in the change process (Polyzoi & Cerna, 2001b). Results from the survey conducted for this study and collected from 89 teachers in four pilot high schools indicate that teachers are divided in their opinion about the need for a fundamental reform in academic high schools: 44% did not think that such a reform is needed; 56% felt that a change was necessary. Whether in favor of the curricular reform or not, most teachers agreed that they teach too many things disconnected from reality (67%) and that content should be reduced (68%). However, there is little that could get them implement the changes even when they think that they are desirable. Teachers' jobs are already demanding but their salaries and social status is low. The survey results provide some evidence to this claim with 78% teachers perceiving the status of their job as low and 73% viewing their salaries as inadequate (Table 1). The reform does not offer any incentives for change; in fact, it is asking teachers to do even more than they currently do, and to many that may be discouraging rather than motivating them to become change agents.

**Table 1 - Teachers' perceptions of the status of their profession**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	--	--	Agree	Strongly Agree
The Czech society values teachers	12.7	58.2	6.3	2.5	19	0
I am content with my salary	28.6	37.7	6.5	5.2	22.1	0

(%)

The survey results also suggested that many teachers remain in the profession because they enjoy teaching. Although teacher education programs produce the highest

percentage of graduates in comparison to other areas of study, most graduates from these programs do not enter teaching (Matějů & Straková, 2004). The Master's degree they need to become qualified teachers allows them to find more lucrative jobs outside of teaching.

In all, a large part of the society does not see the need to innovate instructional practices and keeps a distance from the efforts to reform the educational system.

"Although some change has been observed within schools through lateral diffusion, active support by parents and students and innovative attempts by teachers, on the whole, tend to be rather isolated and uncoordinated" (Polyzoi & Cerna, 2001b, p.79). This statement still seems to hold true.

### Summary

The Czech educational system is indebted to its relatively long historical evolution. The education system was established from the top down and for centuries it was governed by the state. Czechs briefly experienced democracy between 1918 and 1938 and during this time, progressivism was introduced in a number of experimental schools. Nevertheless the communist regime once again steered the system towards the traditional teacher-centered education. Teachers represented the extended authority of the regime, schools followed Soviet scientism, and students' job was to memorize information without questioning it. The demise of communism in 1989 clearly demarcated the beginning of a new political era that represents the political ideology of free markets, decentralization, pluralism, and democracy. The transitional period from socialism to capitalism initiated with the regime change has been characterized by introducing these principles into the system. The role and functions of the Ministry of

Education that holds the political leverage in the system are being redefined, and the work of the Ministry varies with election cycles and individual ministers.

Although significant changes have occurred in governance, administration and school financing, teaching largely seems to be caught up in the old ways of transferring large quantities of information at the expense of dialogic processes that would facilitate students' independent thinking and application of knowledge. Interviews with reformers showed some individuals' disappointments, perhaps even disillusionment about opportunities that were missed during the reconstruction of the society and education in 1990s. The 1990s opened with a spirit of excitement in the society about sweeping changes that were to come but there was also chaos and instability as the new leaders of the country were only beginning to learn to lead. It is hard to judge how things could have been but it is understandable that no revolution in schooling occurred. Teaching and learning in schools with an educational tradition spanning over 200 years is deeply rooted in its established ways. It is a historical circumstance that these ways largely did not coincide with the democratic principles that the Czech Republic now pursues. The sharp change in the political regime in 1989 shook the society to its core but the robustness of the educational system ensured that it resisted fundamental changes and preserved its continuity. In part, this was perhaps because the Czech society never experienced a sense of educational crisis begging for major fixes.

Still, the new political era that came after 1989 established conditions for change: the Ministry has devolved powers to the lower levels, new actors emerged on the policy scene, and a dialogue has begun about the need to continue transforming the system. But in a nation where education has been traditionally the concern of the state, engaging the

society in such a dialogue has been a challenge. Only a handful of participants seem to be talking, leaving the general public uninvolved and somewhat apathetic, as various reports pointed.

One of the purposes and functions of educational policy is to marshal change, manage it and give it direction (Taylor et al., 1997). It is plausible that with the right interventions, things might change faster, and in the direction that corresponds with the demands of the current times. But in all, history has left schools and teachers unprepared to take on new roles and to become decision makers who hold significant responsibilities. The new political era and configuration of the education state might have created conditions for change but fundamental shifts in philosophy of teaching and conceptualization of schools that the current curricular reform implies are unlikely to take off on their own, without incentives for change, massive capacity building, and 'reculturing' of the society (Fullan, 2001).

## CHAPTER 3: EXISTING SCHOOL SYSTEM

Chapter Two contextualized Czech education in history, and described the current political era and key players who are involved in shaping and re-shaping education in the Czech Republic. The aim of this chapter is to provide additional description of the current state of affairs in Czech education and lay out the structure of the system and challenges the system faces so that the reader can develop a better understanding of the scope and significance of the new curricular reform. First, individual school levels are discussed and cultural practices of schooling introduced. The chapter then focuses on elements of the system that present tensions and that have implications for the curricular reform.

### Pre-schools as sites of innovation

Pre-school education has been the source of pride in the Czech Republic, particularly over the past decade as many pre-school centers came to look less like schools and developed into houses of creativity and play. This is a fairly interesting progression that several interviewed university professors mentioned although there is little research that would capture the change and explain it. Pre-school education has had a strong tradition in the Czech educational system for more than a century. It has unfolded in the spirit of European traditions of holistic personal and social development, and stands in contrast to the content-driven educational model that permeates all other school levels.

The overwhelming majority of Czech children start their education in pre-school centers at the age of 3. During the communist times, public education also included crèches for children up to 3 years of age but since 1990 public spending on early

education has decreased and most crèches closed down. The government's alternative was to extend maternity leave from 2 to 3 years (28 weeks paid at 69% of earnings followed by a flat rate benefit until the child reaches 4<sup>th</sup> birthday) (OECD, 2006, Annex E, p.304). Thus, children under 3 typically spend time at home with their mothers or less commonly with their fathers who can also take the parental leave of absence.

Although pre-school education is voluntary, almost 90% children attend (OECD, 2006). This fact is partially indebted to the cultural habits and affordable costs. The costs are shared between the state, municipalities, and parents. Municipalities found and close the centers, appoint the centers' heads and cover the running costs with parents' contributions capped to a maximum of 50% (OCED, 2006). The fees that parents have to pay typically range between 300-1000CZK per month (approx. 20-70USD), although cost varies from a center to center depending on the number of children enrolled, local sponsorship, and economic strength of the municipality. Many children stay in a pre-school all day. Most pre-schools employ a cook so the children receive structured care as well as hot lunch and snacks. Parents pay additional fees for these lunches but the overall cost is still relatively low. Low-income families can apply for a reduced rate or a waiver of the fee. With the new Education Act of 2004, the last year of pre-school became compulsory and thus free of charge.

### Primary school

When children enter a primary school, they encounter a whole new experience when compared to their pre-school experience. School becomes much more structured, and cognitive development comes to the forefront. To use Andrew Roberts' (2005) cultural dictionary:

Grade school is a disciplined affair which packs children full of facts and rules. The school day begins with children either walking or taking public transport to school. Upon arrival, they put away their shoes and don slippers. When the teacher comes into the classroom, students immediately stand up and do not sit down until the teacher greets them with 'Dobrý den, posad'te se' (Good morning. Take a seat.) Under communism, teachers were required to stick closely to the textbook (a habit they have maintained even today). So much that learning takes place with students reading aloud or reciting poems they have memorized.

Dictations are another common exercise, their goal being to reinforce spelling.

Quizzes take place frequently, a random student being called up to the front of the class to answer oral questions from the teacher. Grades are delivered immediately and out loud. A single class of approximately thirty students remains together for all eight years of elementary school (for grades one through four, they usually have the same teacher). Each class has to take care of its own bulletin board where it posts important announcements and anniversaries (in the past mainly of a political character). One of the highlights of the school year is škola v přírodě (nature school) when the entire class spends a week in the woods. Students finish school with a strong set of fundamentals and a large supply of memorized facts and dates, which leads them to score well on international tests. On the other hand, they are actively discouraged from creative or independent thinking. (p.153)

While this description still largely holds true and Czechs would likely recognize the portrayal as accurate, the Czech School Inspectorate noted that instructional practices have been changing, particularly in the first stage of primary education. In the absence of

research studies that would map the conditions and changes in Czech education, the Czech School Inspectorate's annual reports serve as the main source of evidence that reflects the situation in Czech education – the Inspectors perform hundreds of observations and school visits every year and assess what they encounter against a set of criteria the Inspectorate had developed. The reports bring news that is good especially for grades 1-3 where the Inspection found high quality instruction and teachers using a variety of methods and instructional practices effectively motivating kids (Czech School Inspection, 2004). However, the Inspection's report spoke less positively about the second stage of primary education (grades 5-9) where the instruction focused primarily on factual knowledge. The report reads: "teachers mistakenly included all content from their textbooks (i.e. content that expanded, informed or illustrated the basic content) and required students to master it in its whole" (Czech School Inspection, 2004).

Primary education lasts nine years. Children typically move through these nine years in cohorts with 20-30 other children. For the first four years, the cohort has one and the same teacher. From fifth grade on, the students have the same homeroom teacher but a different teacher for each subject. It is quite common for the same subject teacher to stay with the class until the end of primary education – for example the same mathematics teacher teaches the group from grade 5 until grade 9.

#### Selectivity of the system

When asked about the key features of the Czech educational system, interviewees frequently talked about the system's high selectivity that for some children begins at age 11 and in some cases even earlier. The following words of an educational researcher represent a view that interviewees generally shared:



The educational system in the Czech Republic is too selective. It still divides children among the good ones and the bad ones. It fulfills the function of choosing the good students, providing them with demanding academic education, and it parts with the other children early on. And the problem is that this society accepts it as that's how things should be...And the instruction reflects it...the encyclopedic instruction for those kids that can handle it...and those who can't get de-motivated.

Interestingly, embracing democracy did not mean leveling the playing field for all children but further increasing the system's selectivity, which was already high in comparison to other democratic nations (Bártová, 2004; Čerych, Koucký, & Matějů, 1998; Matějů & Straková, 2005b; Straková, 2002). In the early 1990s, the government reinstated First Republic's elite multi-year (6-8-year) academic high schools that run parallel to primary schools and 4-year-academic high schools. These institutions serve roughly 10% of the population (Matějů & Straková, 2005b), pulling children out of regular primary schools after 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade. The selection into these schools is conditioned by entrance examinations and parents' pressure to have their child receive academic education earlier than after completing primary education as is the norm for most other children. But the selection of students into elite schools may start even earlier – some children may leave after 3<sup>rd</sup> grade to attend primary schools that e.g. put stronger emphases on foreign language study (Matějů & Straková, 2005a).

Researchers generally agree that the revival of the 6-8-year academic secondary schools has been problematic. These schools do not necessarily serve the most talented students but they tend to cater to children from advantaged backgrounds, and thus

reinforce elitism and increase social stratification (Matějů & Straková, 2005a). Early specialization is considered unhealthy because ten- or eleven-year-olds are more likely to be driven by their parents' interests than their own abilities, which are not yet fully developed to show what specific talents they might have. Additionally, primary schools also suffer because they lose highly motivated students who help to create healthy competition in schools. Yet, any attempts to eliminate or reduce the number of the multi-year high schools typically end in vain because they face strong resistance from parents and Czech elites. The educational researcher quoted earlier further said:

The Czech elites do not adopt the attitude that the educational system should open up more and serve children who have not been so lucky in life, that it should in fact serve all, and pay more attention to the kids who are left behind. But it's very difficult to persuade the elites about this because they continue only seeing the benefits for their own children. The problem of this society is that we do not have the elites that would be more generous in how they view social problems.

But the multi-year academic high schools are not the only ones that enforce selectivity. For the majority of students who do not enter the multi-year academic high schools after 4<sup>th</sup> or 6<sup>th</sup> grade, the first selection mechanism many encounter are entrance examinations from primary level to the secondary level. Secondary schools, particularly 4-year academic high schools and technical-vocational schools choose their students through entrance examinations that they develop themselves on the level of the school building, or purchase from a testing agency if they can afford to do so. The examinations thus vary from a school to school. The decision on admission criteria is in the hands of school principals and the common practice has been to administer the locally developed

tests and select students based on knowledge they demonstrate on the test. Historically, secondary schools have been divided into three types of schools: academic college preparatory high schools (so called *gymnázium*), technical/vocational, and lower-vocational/ trade schools. The academic track is the most prestigious and also tends to be the most selective one. The lower tracks on the other hand often do not use entrance examinations at all and accept student who did not get in the academic of technical/vocational schools.

#### Academic high schools vs. other secondary schools

Academic high schools represent the highest track of secondary education among the three main tracks in the Czech secondary education system. The proclaimed goal of academic high schools is to provide liberal arts education and prepare students for university studies. Academic high schools thus serve as a vehicle to university education even when standards of universities are unclear and entrance examinations vary from institution to an institution, and between programs of study.

Studies in academic high schools lead towards attainment of upper-secondary education with a high school exit examination (*Maturita* in Czech), which serves as a prerequisite for applying to a university. However, other schools besides academic high schools can also deploy high school exit examinations -- namely four-year technical/vocational schools but also some lower vocational schools. While academic high schools adhere to the same national curriculum, technical/vocational schools offer highly specialized, professional education (40% of the curriculum is in general liberal arts, 60% in chosen specialization) (National Institute for Vocational Education). There are over 250 different specializations (curricula) offered in technical/vocational schools

(National Institute for Vocational Education) including preparation for a career in nursing, business administration, engineering, lab work, kindergarten teaching, and many others. Lower-vocational schools train plumbers, carpenters, car-mechanics, hairdressers etc., and instead of *Maturita*, they typically lead to professional certificates. Thus, students who complete lower-vocational schools are not qualified to apply for university admission, which makes the pool of competitors for the limited number of seats that universities offer considerably smaller.

The distribution of students among the three types of secondary schools is uneven and has been undergoing changes since 1989. The communist regime invested heavily in vocational training, with education in academic high schools offering little comparative advantage. The Labor market was skewed towards industrial production and artificially controlled by central planning. As the Czech Republic entered the new political era of free markets, it saw many industrial giants collapse with the consequence of climbing unemployment rates, especially among people with vocational education certificates. University education has turned into human capital investment promising high returns, and demand for secondary schools leading to *Maturita*, and specifically to academic high schools rose. As a result, the proportion of students with *Maturita* has been on an increase and in 2005 it reached 56%. Of all secondary school graduates, 19% graduate from academic high schools (see Table 2).

Table 2 - Numbers of high school graduates according to school type

<i>High schools</i>	<i>Number of graduates</i>	<i>%</i>
Academic (high school exit examinations)	25,449	19.15
Technical/vocational (high school exit examinations)	49,356	37.14
Lower vocational (professional certificate)	58,081	43.71
<i>Total</i>	<i>132,886</i>	<i>100.00</i>

Institute for Information in Education, September 2005

### *Teaching and learning in academic high schools*

Because the focal point of this study is a curricular reform for academic high schools, it is necessary to acquaint the reader with the culture of teaching and learning in these schools. I have mentioned earlier that academic high schools adhere to the same national curriculum. Similarly, there will be the same curricular framework for all academic high schools unlike technical/ vocational schools, which will be guided by different frameworks for different specializations. As explained in the methods section in Appendix A, academic high schools became the focus of this study in part because they will all follow the same national Frameworks and in part for pragmatic reasons. The data collection coincided with a pilot of the Frameworks in 16 academic high schools around the country and the pilot provided a unique opportunity to gauge initial response of teachers to the reform.

### *Organization of instructional time*

Schools have gained considerable autonomy in comparison to the situation before 1989, but the Ministry of Education continues to govern a number of organizational aspects of education with decrees, directives, regulations and recommendations that specify individual provisions of the Education Act. For example, the Act stipulates that a teaching hour equals 45 minutes. A decree further outlines the organization of the school year; i.e. that a school year begins on September 1 and ends on June 30; Christmas holidays last from December 23 to January 2 etc. (Czech Republic, 2004). In similar vein, the Ministry also controls the total number of instructional hours taught per week and the instructional time allocated to individual subjects. A total instructional time is capped to 31 hours a week although the most recent update of the regulations from September 2006

allows school principals to add 2 more hours of instruction per week if they wish to do so. Minimum hours of instructional time for individual subjects are also set – the Ministry prescribes that during four years in an academic high school, students must have at least three hours of mathematics per week, three hours of Czech language and literature per week, three hours of two foreign languages each etc. (for details, see Appendix C). Altogether, students typically have 10-13 subjects each week with a variable number of hours in each. The schools determine practical aspects of the schedule – e.g. which three hours a week will be devoted to mathematics in a given cohort and who will teach the course. Additionally, principals also have a certain number of flexible hours that they can use according to their schools' specific needs and desires. For instance several more hours can be added to strengthen some of the core subjects or to create seminars and electives.

Similarly to primary education, students move through secondary schools in cohorts of typically 25-30 students who take all the classes together. With the national regulations for instructional time, a cohort's school schedule and courses are largely set. As students progress to higher grades, they gain more flexibility, and they may choose up to four electives, depending on what their school offers. The electives are generally connected to the core courses; they tend to extend the content and deepen students' knowledge in a selected subject. For example, a common elective is a conversational course in a foreign language that gives students more opportunities to practice the foreign language they learn. Another example is a seminar in history, typically offered to seniors as a substitute for regular history, which is compulsory only for the first three years of high school.

### *Content of instruction*

The Ministry outlines 13 core subject areas in the national curriculum and these are more or less synonymous with the school subjects that all students in academic high schools take every year. Taking mathematics as an example, unlike the U.S. where mathematics translates into a number of separate courses such as Pre-algebra, Geometry, Trigonometry etc., mathematics in Czech academic high schools literally means one course titled Mathematics that lasts for four years and encompasses algebra, geometry, trigonometry, calculus etc. as individual units of the course that are lined up in a prescribed sequence. The same applies to the other subjects. In other words, each subject is structured to encompass all available knowledge within that subject area.

Historically, the subjects taught in Czech schools have been delineated within established boundaries and the Ministry has detailed specific content for each. For example, history has traditionally included national and world history as well as art history. It has been taught chronologically, in terms of events divided into five main historical eras. For each era, teachers needed to cover a long checklist of topics: e.g. for the early modern historical period, there were 49 topics such as German national movement, revolutionary events in Italy, Spain, Russia and France – all being one topic; Reforms in czarist Russia, Crimean war, Berlin Congress and Civil war in the U.S.A. being another; and 47 more. Students typically have two hours of history a week for three years with the option to continue taking history in the fourth year as an elective. Given the large amounts of information packed into two hours a week for three years, history generally ends up being reduced to extensive and barely manageable lists of dates, names and events that students memorize. This exemplifies a problem that weaves through

education in Czech schools – content is heavy on information and teachers are left with little time to explore any topic in substantial depth, let alone to try out methods other than lecture and recitation.

### *Instructional practices*

In the interviews, teachers talked about the "algorithm of teaching" or the "typical", "traditional" way of teaching. The "typical" scenario looks like this: A teacher enters the classroom; students stand up to greet the teacher, and sit down when told. The teacher sits at a desk in front of the classroom and opens the cohort's class book where s/he records the topic of the lesson s/he will teach, and marks the names of the students who are missing. When a homeroom teacher teaches the lesson, s/he has an additional obligation to check if students who were absent have a signed slip explaining their absence. After taking care of the administration in the class book, the teacher often moves to her/his own notebook where s/he keeps the names of all students and their grades, and randomly calls one of the students to the front of the classroom for a public review.

While the student is being questioned about previous lesson's content, the rest of the class watches. Sometimes the teacher gives the other students a task to keep them busy.

Typically, the review takes 5-10 minutes. When it is over, the teacher announces the grade and sends the student back to her/his desk. The remaining approximately 30 minutes of total instructional time can then be devoted to the new material that the teacher needs to cover. Most frequently, this is done through a lecture. While the teacher talks, students are busy taking notes – when they come home, they will need to review and memorize the material for next class in case they are called in front of the class for a review. Sometimes, students ask questions during the instruction time but in the



interviews, teachers often suggested that it only happens occasionally because it is difficult to get students to talk. Additionally, with the tight time constraints, there is a danger that discussions steer the class away from the content that needs to be covered.

In 1999, the Czech Republic participated in TIMSS-R video study that examined teaching mathematics in seven countries (Australia, Czech Republic, Hong Kong, Japan, Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United States). This study gathered evidence that allowed researchers to describe lesson signatures in individual countries and compare teaching and instructional practices, and the nature and content of the lessons among the participating countries. The previous paragraph loosely and speculatively described what one might see in a Czech classroom, but the results of TIMSS-R study provide evidence that is scientifically robust and paints a more valid and reliable picture of teaching practices in Czech schools, although it is representative of only 8<sup>th</sup> grade mathematics lessons. However, in terms of the lesson structure and teachers' use of time, it is possible that similar patterns that TIMSS-R found in mathematics teaching would be found in other subjects taught in Czech schools.

As the study reported, the signature mathematics lesson in the Czech Republic was characterized by a prominent emphasis on review of previous material (U.S. Department of Education, 2003). In 100% of the sampled lessons, teachers focused on review and performed it typically by calling one or more students to the board to publicly solve a problem. The purpose of these reviews was to evaluate the students and grade them as well as re-instruct old knowledge. According to the study, various forms of the review consumed 58% of lesson time and they were followed by introduction of new content, which was done typically through a whole-class instruction. Besides the public

reviews, another signature aspect of teaching mathematics in Czech classrooms was a relatively high number of discrete problems presented in one lesson. Most problems were set-up using mathematical language or symbols only while only 15% of problems were set up with real-life connection (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p.85), and the focus of teachers' work with the problems was generally aimed at using procedures. Students' work in pairs or small groups was relatively infrequent. The TIMSS-R results also showed that the Czech Republic had a lower percentage of problems in which students had a choice of solution methods, and that most problems were solved by "simply giving results only without discussion of how the answer was obtained" (U.S. Department of Education, 2003, p.129).

The results of the TIMSS-R study are consistent with how interviewed teachers described the "algorithm" of teaching in Czech schools. They spoke about public reviews, which some of them said were required by their school principal; they also spoke about lecturing and giving students ready-made information because there was a lot to cover and time constraints were high. When asked about experimenting or trying out new methods that are not typically used, interviewed teachers would describe brainstorming, group work or games as the methods that are new and different from the typical algorithm of teaching. For example, one teacher described an alternative activity as follows:

We did brainstorming on the board. It was in literature. I asked the students what they knew about the author and wrote it on the board and surprisingly they knew quite a bit. Then I distributed a text of a story that the author wrote cut into strips, and I would always ask a question about it. I would write the question on the

board, have them all read through the text and then they all tried to find an answer to the question. I thought this was much more effective than if I just tell them to go home and read the text... But often such methods collapse because there is not enough time.

### High school exit examinations

Description of the educational system in the Czech Republic and academic high schools in particular would not be complete without talking about high school exit examinations (*Maturita*). These exams have been an inherent part of the educational system for more than 150 years, although in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century they were restricted only to academic high schools (František Morkes, 2003). Gradually, they found their way to technical/vocational high schools and now some lower vocational schools can administer them as well. The high school exit examinations are school-based comprehensive exams summarizing the high school academic experience. Students take the *Maturita* in four subjects: Czech language and literature, and a foreign language are the two mandatory subjects; the other two subjects depend on the student's choice. The examinations have been primarily oral; for Czech language and literature, students additionally have to write an essay. The Education Act of 2004 newly gives principals the opportunity to determine the form of the exams – e.g. students can combine oral, written and practical examinations, or they can also write and defend a school-leaving thesis. Currently, each school is responsible for preparing and administering its own exams. Teachers determine approximately 30 areas in which students will be examined in each subject (see example from history in Appendix B). They then devote a great portion of

instructional time in the last year of high school to reviewing content from the previous years to help their students prepare for the exams.

The exams are administered at the end of the senior year, typically in May or early June. Each student is relieved from instruction for a week prior to taking the exams. Then s/he comes to school for an assigned half-day to sit for the exam in all four subjects. On the day of the exam, students come to school dressed in formal clothes, and for each subject individually draw a topic out of a hat. Before coming in front of an examination jury, they receive 15 minutes of preparation time without the possibility to use any reference materials or notes. The exam itself also lasts approximately 15 minutes during which students are expected to talk about the topic they drew and answer any questions that the their subject teacher and the jury ask. After completing the exam in the last subject, the jury convenes for evaluation and announces the result, grading performance in each subject individually.

With the changes in Czech education over the past decade and a half, these traditional high school exit examinations have become a contested issue. Prior to 1989, the educational system was more uniform and the exams were believed to be equally challenging in all schools that gave them. But since the liberalization of the school market after 1989, the secondary school exit examinations seem to have grown as diverse as the schools that develop them. Complaints about the high school exit exams have come from all directions and frequently private high schools are being blamed for lowering the standards. School principals complain because they believe they have been losing students to some competing (private) schools, which are promising the credential of a high school diploma with *Maturita* for less than the public academic high schools.

And universities started complaining because with the numbers of applicants that multiplied after 1989, unreliable exit exams did not help them in any ways to select students. The exit examination results do not carry any informative value about what the students actually know and thus cannot be considered as a valid measure in the admission process. Finally, a team of OECD experts that reviewed Czech education in 1995-96 also criticized the extant examinations as solely school-based and incomparable; and perhaps more importantly as a waste of energy, time, and resources because the exam results are not used as a measure of quality or an instrument that would point to any direction of future development of the school (OECD, 1996).

The Education Act of 2004 introduced a significant change in high school exit examinations. They are to have two components: a common (state-controlled) and a profile (school-based) part. The Ministry of Education will introduce a set of standardized tests for the common part of the exams, and schools will develop their own exams, depending on the school's profile and focus. The new exit exams were to be launched in the academic year 2007-2008 but the reform sparked a controversy, and has been put on hold. It has been evolving since mid 1990s, long before it was written into a law, and its goals have expanded and changed over time. Although tests are being developed annually, it is still not clear what the reform should do, i.e. whether the new tests should serve as a school evaluation tool, whether they should serve as minimal standards that students would be required to reach, whether they should unify curricula among different types of schools, or all of these. The most recent education minister advocated for a postponement of the reform until 2010.

## Higher education and university entrance examinations

Achieving *Maturita* is a required prerequisite for applying to a university.

*Maturita* is thus a relatively high-stakes exam although the overwhelming majority of students who progress through schools that offer *Maturita* usually pass. But even higher stakes are attached to university entrance examinations. In the absence of any national or standardized university entrance examinations, the content of university entrance examinations is determined locally, by individual schools, departments, and study programs. Universities have limited numbers of seats and thousands of applicants that they have to keep out, so many entrance examinations are designed to weed students out rather than select them in. Often, the exam tests look like trivia quizzes, but they exert an enormous influence on curriculum at lower educational levels, particularly academic high schools, which view it as their job to prepare students for university education. Thus, any discussion of curriculum in academic high schools must tackle higher education and the university entrance examinations as a mechanism of surrogate content control.

As mentioned earlier, the proportion of students who attend schools leading to *Maturita* nears 60% of a given age cohort and only 60% of these students who have *Maturita* apply to universities (Matějů & Straková, 2004). However, not all get past the university entrance examinations or perform well enough to get in. Matějů (2004) estimated that less than in the end, only one quarter of all students from the 18-19-year-old age cohort (fresh secondary school graduates) enter universities. The overall proportion of admitted students is higher because it includes students from other age cohorts as many reapply year after year until they succeed getting in; some programs are easier to get in than others and according roughly 18% end in study programs or

universities that do not represent their preferred choice (Matějů & Straková, 2004). The situation is quite peculiar: in a country that has one of the highest secondary attainment rates in Europe (nearly 90% people attain full secondary education), in the end only 12% graduate from universities (Hrubá, 2004; OECD, 2004). This number places the Czech Republic behind the OECD average of 23% and U.S. average of 38% (OECD, 2004). The situation has been gradually changing, and every year universities slightly increase the number of students they admit. Also, the structure of university studies has been changing – in the past, only long 5-year programs existed, leading to a Master's degree but with the introduction of Bachelor's studies as the first level of university education, it is likely that more students will complete the shorter Bachelor's programs and the number of graduates will increase. Nevertheless contrasting the current numbers of university graduates in the Czech Republic with other nations, the difference is striking.

Historically, Central and Eastern European higher education has been selective (Mauch & Sabloff, 1995), and the paradigm of university as “élite” institution is widely accepted by the society. During the communist times, education was skewed towards vocational training and people pursued higher education more for personal enrichment than for any financial rewards. The market liberalization following 1989 changed the value of education, and university degrees began to count as an investment into human capital that can yield high earnings (Čerych, 1999; Freeman, 1995; Koucký, 1996; Kozma, 1998; Mauch & Sabloff, 1995; McMullen, 2000). The strong economic motivation that higher education suddenly acquired led to a sharp increase in demand, and universities have opened up as their capacities allowed. However, their capacities were still insufficient and they have not been able to meet the demand. Even though the

number of accepted students nearly doubled between 1997 and 2005 (see Table 3), there are still thousands of applicants who are left behind although they would qualify for admission, i.e. they pass the entrance examinations but with the limited seats, some universities and programs can afford to accept only a certain number of those who topped the list.

**Table 3 - Numbers of university students between 1997 and 2006**

<i>Year</i>	<i>1997/98</i>	<i>1998/99</i>	<i>1999/00</i>	<i>2000/01</i>	<i>2001/02</i>	<i>2002/03</i>	<i>2003/04</i>	<i>2004/05</i>	<i>2005/06</i>
Number of students	177,723	187,148	198,961	209,298	223,008	248,756	274,192	282,958	296,435

(Czech Ministry of Education, 2006)

Part of the problem of limited access can be attributed to finances – public universities are not allowed to charge tuition and they are fully dependent on funds from the state budget, which are constrained. University professors are immensely underpaid, and many capable academicians and young graduates choose to work for private sector or leave for the West. Because of the constrained budgets, universities are unable to substantially expand their capacities, attract good quality teaching force, and accept all students who would qualify for admission.

To some extent, the organization of university studies has also been problematic. Until 1998, studying at a university meant studying in a single five-year program that led to a Master’s degree. The higher Education Act of 1998 introduced a Bachelor’s degree but for a number of years, the bachelor programs were not successfully integrated into the higher education system and ran parallel with the long 5-year Master programs, which prevailed. Many undergraduate programs thus found strong competition in the long Master programs and lacked continuation in short Master programs, which were largely absent. As a result, many undergraduate programs often led to a dead end; also because



the society had not learned to ascribe much value to bachelor's degrees. The situation began to change with a 2004 amendment to the Higher Education Act. The long 5-year programs are now being gradually phased out, and connecting short Master programs introduced (Czech Ministry of Education, 2006), with the consequences that undergraduate education has been expanding. These changes are taking place in response to the Bologna declaration that the Czech Republic signed and that bounds signatory countries in Europe to create a common European Higher Education Area where degrees are mutually recognized and organization of higher education converges towards the same model. In the Czech Republic, the clearer demarcation between undergraduate and graduate studies should foster a more balanced educational system that is more apt to effectively regulate supply and demand.

Establishment of private higher education institutions has affected the situation of limited access to tertiary education only marginally. Most private universities have not functioned as serious competitors to the public universities because they were not accredited to offer degrees equivalent to the degrees conferred in public universities. Additionally, most students cannot afford to pay the tuition so public university largely remains the first choice. The 2005 annual report on conditions in higher education in the Czech Republic indicated that 91.7% university applicants applied for admission to public universities while only 8.3% applied to private higher education institutions (Czech Ministry of Education, 2006).

Under the given circumstances, universities and study programs turn to stringent admission procedures that help them weed students out. This is not equally true about all universities and study programs. There is a hierarchy in popularity of different schools

and study areas. For example, law, economics, and social sciences are in high demand, and thus they tend to have the smallest number of available slots in proportion to the number of students who apply. Technical universities on the other hand may not even deploy entrance examinations, because they are likely to have enough seats to satisfy all their applicants, although their drop-out rates are high after the first year -- roughly 30% (in some schools as many as 50%) students leave because they cannot keep up with the demanding curriculum (Czech Ministry of Education, 2006).

As discussed earlier, the entrance examinations tend to be developed locally and they vary from institution to institution, and among study programs. Czech higher education is highly specialized in the sense that it does not provide any general liberal arts education (a responsibility of secondary education) but offers studies within delineated boundaries of a specific study program that students must select prior to applying. Students generally take entrance examinations in subjects that pertain to their chosen field. For instance, students aspiring to go to medical school typically take entrance examinations in biology, chemistry and physics. Students applying to architecture may have to first take talent examinations (e.g. examinations that involve drawing); if they succeed, they proceed to entrance examinations in mathematics, descriptive geometry, art history and architecture. Students aspiring to study a foreign language take written and oral examinations in the foreign language, history and literature of the areas where the language is spoken and so on.

In addition to the subjects pertaining to selected field of study, universities also include foreign language tests and a test of "general knowledge" which can incorporate virtually any subject and any kind of information. But even within the individual

subjects, it is difficult for students to know what to prepare for. In interviews with teachers, many complained about the university admission practices and described the tests in ways that echoed to the following quote of a history teacher:

My poor students... They attended seminars and collected entrance tests from previous years and then they would come to us [history teachers] because they did not know and we did not know either. Those were awful things [on the tests], for example details from Bulgarian history or the names of Parisian Communards – not the main ones, those you would know...also something about WWI, but it was a battle that we could not find anywhere...

There are virtually no rules; universities and university departments entertain complete autonomy in setting up their admission policies and procedures. The development of the university entrance exams often falls on faculty members in individual programs and departments, many of whom have had no preparation and expertise in test development. Unsurprisingly, in the past, some university entrance tests were found to have low reliability, poorly constructed items containing mistakes, or questions asking for knowledge that had no justifiable connection to the selected program of study (Scio, 1999). In the words of one university professor: "The university entrance exams are completely nonsensical. We all know that. It's still the same ...everywhere. Still the phone books [meaning long lists of trivial and disconnected information], everybody knows it is non-sense but with the numbers of applicants...". The tests typically include sections that call for factual knowledge, and in that sense they drive secondary schools to emphasize factual knowledge and memorization of large quantities

of information. The focus on factual knowledge in Czech education is strong and it appears to have no limits. As a ministerial official described it:

It's a crazy vicious circle where the teachers at academic high schools for example prepare their students for the entrance exams to the Law School and then suddenly the students are prepared for the tests, so the Law School has to come up with even more difficult tests because they can accept only one tenth of the applicants. So the academic high schools start teaching more non-sense...

### Summary

Czech education takes pride in the positive developments in pre-schools that show more child-centered pedagogical approaches. Other sources of national pride include well-established vocational schooling, and a dense network of publicly funded extra-curricular art schools where many Czech children learn to play an instrument or take art lessons with highly qualified teachers. Generally, in comparison to many of their Western European counterparts, Czech teachers are highly qualified – by law they are required to have a Master's degree to teach at all educational levels except pre-schools.

As a recently conducted survey showed, the Czech general public is largely satisfied with the educational system (Straková, Basl & Veselý, 2006). Czech students fare relatively well in international studies like PISA or TIMSS. The 2003 PISA results were especially satisfactory, placing the Czech Republic among the top performing countries in sciences and mathematics and average in literacy skills (OECD, 2004). But when closely analyzed, researchers find that the same international studies also point to problems underlying Czech education. Disparities in student outcomes according to the type of school (academic, technical-vocational, lower-vocational) are alarmingly large:

students in the lower vocational schools are far below their counterparts in the academic high schools (Bártová, 2004; Matějů & Straková, 2005b; Straková, 2002). These disparities count among the largest in Europe and closely correlate with family background (Čerych et al., 1998). Schools do not perform a function of a social equalizer but instead, they seem to contribute to an increasing gap between students from advantaged (educated) and less advantaged family backgrounds. In addition, while the overall results in international comparative studies may appear to cast a positive light on the Czech educational system, they also reveal that Czech students have difficulties with tasks based on creative and independent thinking (Simonová & Straková, 2005).

The Czech education system fails to create equal opportunities for all children but the society at large does not perceive it as a major problem that needs to be addressed. As several interviewees pointed out, the Czech society seems to largely embrace the belief that some students are apt for academics and others are not. Discourse on equal educational opportunities is virtually absent and any efforts to raise the issue tend to be dismissed as attempts to reinstate the “communist equality” – a notion that has negative connotations, particularly within the more educated circles of the society (Matějů & Straková, 2005b).

Thus, Czech educational system continues to be highly stratified and elitist – a phenomenon enforced through stringent selection mechanisms, typically in the form of entrance examinations from one level of education to the next. Driven by the entrance tests but also influenced by cultural and historical traditions, teaching in Czech schools emphasizes knowledge of facts. Instructional practices rely on the deeply embedded content-driven educational model and the system does not favor alternative, more

student-centered practices, which are restricted to a minority of reform-oriented schools.

"Teachers set lesson goals exclusively in terms of content and do not consider it their responsibility to develop students' skills and attitudes" (Simonová & Straková, 2005, p.9)

The education system as a whole produces students who have learned to reproduce information from diverse academic disciplines but who have difficulty connecting the different pieces of knowledge they possess and apply it to real life problems (Botlík & Souček, 2002; Matějů & Straková, 2005b).

Those who would like to see a fundamental change in Czech education view the prevailing content model of teaching and learning as inadequate, out-dated and in need for change but informal content control mechanisms such as entrance examinations, and some university entrance examinations in particular, typically based on factual knowledge, make it difficult for teachers to move away from content-driven education. The curricular reform, which attempts to reconfigure the system and bring attention to the skills and competencies that Czech students are lacking, is thus facing major hurdles that will not be easily overcome.

## CHAPTER 4: POLICY GESTATION

The previous chapters described the historical and political context of Czech education and current issues that the educational system faces. This chapter marks a shift from focus on the contextual factors of policy to the policy itself. To match it with the conceptual framework introduced in Chapter One, this chapter leaves the realm of the political era and education state and moves in the arena of the policy process represented by Bowe and Ball's policy triangle model. The goal of this chapter is to capture the interplay of the politics, policy actors and ideas as they manifested themselves in the development of the curricular reform. In chronicling the circumstances that led to the policy development, the chapter begins with an account of the chaotic conditions that a country transitioning from Communism to democracy experienced through the 1990s and that prepared the ground for the educational transformation. The idea that something fundamental should change in the Czech education system has been present ever since the collapse of the communist regime, but in the midst of other policy issues, it has not gained much prominence until more recent years. The development of a strategy and goals for transformation thus took an unusually long time. This chapter chronicles that time and interprets the policy gestation in the light of Kingdon's theory (1995) on how policies arrive at governmental agendas.

### Towards an overarching educational strategy

Undeniably, the landscape of Czech education has transformed significantly over the past decades. The changes were more a result of spontaneous reactions to the past and organic adjustments to the new conditions than a product of carefully thought-out

decisions that would steer the transformation towards a particular vision. In developing educational policies, the Czech Republic was lagging behind other post-communist countries (Mitter, 2003) and Czech reformers were short of seeing the more substantial changes in teaching and learning that they had hoped would unfold. In the turbulent years of the 1990s, education stood secondary on the policy agenda to economic and social reforms. For most of the 1990s, the Ministry of Education appeared to have functioned in the absence of a plan that would direct its activities and policy-driven change processes. The situation was exacerbated by a high turnover of Education Ministers. Since 1990, the nation has seen 10 Ministers of Education – when averaged, this would give each Minister approximately 1.7 years in the office. As the Ministers were changing, so were the agendas. A university professor involved in the educational transformation characterized the first 10 years of transformation in the following way:

Although lots of things were here, it was necessary that one of the Ministers...would take the positive [aspects of education in the CR]... of course, the state had a decisive role, the school committee in the parliament etc. but they should have agreed on something and create a vision where to begin and where to go, why and in which direction Czech education should be steered over the next 10 years. And then take that as a starting point for all organizational, structural, legislative changes. That should have been done at the beginning. It was not and instead education was extreme in that each year there was a new Minister and depending on how it was polarized politically, whenever there was a new minister, even if the previous minister had done something good, the new minister went in the opposite direction. And that complicated the process of



transformation. At a time when teachers were enthusiastic, when there was desire to change things... a great deal of energy was wasted because of the chaos and the aimlessness.

### "Quality and Accountability"

The development in educational policy was sluggish but that is not to say that there were no attempts to create a comprehensive approach to change. Non-governmental educational organizations and associations were the first to put proposals on the table but they had no political leverage that would allow their voices to be heard. By default, the task was up to the Ministry of Education and individual Ministers who, to a varying degree, had the power to move ideas on political agendas. An early attempt on the side of the Ministry to draft an overarching strategy can be linked to a report titled "Quality and Accountability", which was released in 1994.

In this document, the Ministry tried to identify problems facing Czech education and craft solutions to them. It is interesting to note that the brief, 30-page report was framed primarily within the discourse of Czech educational history, achievements since 1990, and continuation of transformation.

The transformation of our education system is now entering a new stage. In this stage we have to add new qualities and objectives to the results already achieved: we have to balance and stabilise the education system, articulate and rationalise its structure, place emphasis on its quality and evaluation and establish clear rules which will not stifle initiative and creativity. (Czech Ministry of Education, 1994, p.16)

The report noted that Czech education still carries the legacy of the 19<sup>th</sup> century educational model with heavily centralized governance and limited access to higher levels of education. Since 1948 "the Czech education system along with the whole of society was gradually distorted, even though its foundations remained and many teachers sought to maintain its traditions and standards. Contamination by incompatible elements of a foreign model [Soviet education] and a massive ideologisation which affected especially the social sciences and humanities led to uniformity, and to a drop in the standards achieved" (p.4). The report positioned the Czech Republic as a country that was "isolated from the developments in the democratic world", which were described in terms of rights and freedoms of the individual, the 'human factor' as a driving force for development, and 'high-quality education and training for all'. The proposed remedy for the deficiencies of the past can be summarized as: further democratization, decentralization, and diversification of the system.

Within the most common discourses that involved democratization, decentralization, and diversification of the system, the strategy went on to propose significant changes in curriculum. This is where the seeds of the current curriculum reform based on a two-tiered curriculum model can be found. The strategy established that the state will develop general educational standards and schools will submit their own "educational programmes" containing "educational goals, the structure of time allocation and subject-matter, the method of evaluation of pupils and the way in which the programme is completed" (p.29). The new curricular policy was envisioned to lead towards "diverse educational supply and greater choice of educational paths" (p.18).

Although the document referred to itself as the "starting point of educational policy", it remained largely unnoticed and it never performed the function it had proclaimed. Not only did the new curricular policy never materialize during the 1990s, it wasn't even talked about.

### New Educational Standards

Various progressive education groups and associations continued calling for a more substantial change. The curriculum reform proposed in *Quality and Accountability* was not yet happening but in 1995/96 the Ministry published new Standards for Education in primary and secondary schools (Polyzoi & Cerna, 2001a). These standards somewhat relaxed the content demands of the old national curriculum but they kept the form of content outlines, i.e. the traditional lists of topics that imply mastery of factual knowledge as the ultimate goal of education. They allowed teachers to adjust up to 30% of the course content and schools could modify up to 10% of the overall curriculum (i.e. distribution of time to individual subjects) (Polyzoi & Cerna, 2001a). However, that has produced little change. Under the pressure of high stakes entrance examinations from one school level to the next, teachers felt that they could not substantially reduce the content and use their instructional time more effectively. Additionally, they still found the newer standards too overloaded in content. In short, these measures were not sufficient to generate the fundamental change that the education activists had wished to see and schools continued to prioritize transmitting large quantities of factual knowledge at the expense of dialogic, democratic education that would encourage students to think and form their own opinions (Botlík & Souček, 2002; Straková, 2002).

People commonly continue to describe education in Czech schools as cramming. In describing the educational system, many Czechs would use metaphors such as that schools focus on producing *walking encyclopedias* rather than independently thinking individuals, and that the national content outlines resemble *phone books*, i.e. they tend to be long lists of disconnected facts. But these characteristics also constitute the Czech grammar of schooling. They are familiar to all and they represent values that many people still adhere to (i.e. the view that an educated person is a person who knows a lot of things). Thus for many, content and curriculum were not the burning issues that needed a solution. But other educational matters gained saliency, namely the problem of high school exit examinations alluded to in the previous chapter, so the curriculum reform was buried for several more years.

#### Curricular reform in the shadow of high school exit examinations

In mid 1990s, everybody seemed to be calling for a change in the high school exit examinations. Principals wanted to see standardized tests that would compare schools and show which schools were better and which worse; universities also seemed to favor the idea because the existing highly variable exit examinations did not provide them with much usable information about students' achievement. The calls from the bottom of the educational system coupled with 1996 OECD country report's criticism of the extant high school exit examinations. The report criticized the examinations for being solely school-based and incomparable; and for wasting energy, time and resources because their results were not used as a measure of quality, or an instrument that would point to any direction of future school development (OECD, 1996). Finally, the reformers did not completely oppose the idea of reforming the exit examinations either. Since the curricular reform was

not happening, they believed that assessment measures that everyone seemed to want could serve as an instrument for changing the curriculum. So they too supported the proposal. An education professor who was engaged with various stages of the policy formulation commented that:

...[the reformers] really seemed to think that they could change the quality of teaching in secondary schools. The idea that the high school exit exam could dictate to teachers to teach more intelligently, that was there. I think that at the beginning, they certainly did not think that the exit tests would only measure more accurately what is already being done in schools, which became clearly evident some 2 years later.

Policy makers also thought that where they saw no possibilities to influence fully autonomous universities and their entrance examinations, standardized high school exit tests might help. The hope was that state exit examinations would yield comparable results, which universities could deem reliable and valid. With such measures of high school knowledge, there would be less need for universities to continue their stringent practices of weeding students out by means of entrance examination tests that often ask for knowledge of trivia. Consequently, selection of students to universities might be fairer and more efficient. In short, the proposal to reform high school exit examination became a garbage can proposal (J.G. March, 1974), offering solutions to a number of different problems including unregulated competition between secondary schools, curriculum change, and university entrance examination.

According to the accounts of several interviewees, one ministerial official adopted the idea of exit exams as his pet project. He was said to be a capable manager who had

sufficient political power, and hence was able to establish a new institute under the umbrella of the Ministry -- the Center for Reform of High School Examinations -- to exclusively take charge of the high school exit examination reform. In the words of an educational researcher who was involved in work of the Ministry in an advisory role, this person was:

...obsessed with the idea and he pushed it through to the Ministry... so somehow it happened and it grew on the Ministry. He was quite capable so he ensured that an institute was established that would take care of the exit exams ... he then went on to do something else but the exit exams [the idea of standardized tests] have somehow continued to live in the system...

What was not happening with the idea of the curricular reform was happening with the high school exit exam reform -- extant examinations were clearly identified as a problem and many voices were demanding a solution. The strong voices at the bottom calling for a fix were supported and legitimized by external forces (OECD) and resonated with policy makers, who were under pressure to respond to their constituents. In Kingdon's terms (1995), the problem, policy streams and politics came together, and a window of opportunity opened for the high school exit examination reform to materialize.

The new Institute for Reform of High School Exit Examinations began developing pilot tests, and in 2001 published test catalogues for each school subject. These catalogues were subsequently distributed to schools, which were led to believe that standardized tests would be launched soon. As the reform was taking a life on its own, opposition against it grew. The first pilot tests were far from the kind of transformative

tests the reformers had envisioned. They mirrored the overloaded content covered in schools on the grounds that students had to be tested on the content they had studied in school (i.e. not on skills that school was not leading them to develop). The content in the newly published catalogues was thus not significantly different from the detailed national curriculum that many wanted to see revamped. Those eager to see a fundamental change began to worry that rather than pushing for change, the exit exam reform would preserve the status quo, and thwart any attempts to change curriculum and instructional practices so they fought to stop policy makers from institutionalizing the reform. Within these colliding streams, the space for the curricular reform began opening again.

The high school exit examination reform has been put on hold and its launch has been postponed several times. The idea of high school exit examination reform is now fully accepted in the system and continues to live with the Institute, whose name has been changed to Center for Evaluation of School Results and whose activities have been expanded to evaluation and assessment of school outputs after 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. In more precise terms, the Institute has developed into a state-run testing agency that continues to design pilot tests for the future state secondary school exit examination, while also developing and administering tests for 5<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders as part of new school evaluation movement. But the disputes over the standardized exams have continued. The Education Act of 2004 affirmed that in the future, state exit tests constitute a part of the high school exit examination, but it remains unclear when the reform will be launched on full scale, and how the tests will be conceptualized. The first tests were scheduled for 2008 but elections in 2006 reconfigured the political scene once again and the new Education Minister has advocated for further postponement of the tests. The Minister argued that at

the current stage of development, the tests could do more harm than good because they are not ready and need more work. The Parliamentary School Committee has approved the proposal to postpone the exams and in summer 2007 the Senate reaffirmed the decision. It has become clear that the standardized tests will not be launched before 2010 or later (ČTK, 2007).

#### How the idea of reforming curriculum resurfaced again

In contrast to the high school exit examination reform, which emerged more organically with a strong push from the bottom of the policy scene, the ideas of the curricular reform had to wait for a new window of opportunity to be re-introduced and noticed. In the second half of 1990s, the high school exit examination reform topped the educational policy agenda and there was a great deal of hustle and bustle with the establishment of the Institute for Reform of High School Exit Examinations, development of first tests, pilots of the test, and ensuing debates which all those activities sparked. While all this was taking place, the Czech Republic still had not adopted any strategy for the overall educational transformation. The educational system continued to operate under an amended Education Act of 1984, and although policy makers thought it necessary to develop a new bill and re-think the existing paradigm of education and schooling in the Czech Republic, the events were progressing slowly and piecemeal policy making continued to prevail. The breakthrough for the strategy, and coincidentally for the curricular reform came during the term of Education Minister Eduard Zeman who served in the office from 1998 to 2002.

Zeman made it his goal to initiate a comprehensive strategy that the education system clearly needed. This presented an opportunity for the reformers to contribute to



the political debates, and for the curricular reform to resurface. Under Zeman's leadership, the Ministry first developed goals for educational policy, which were approved by the government in 1999 as the first step towards the new strategy. The Minister then proceeded to announce "Challenge for Ten Million" -- an invitation for the 10 million inhabitants of the Czech Republic to participate in a public discussion and express their views on education in the Czech Republic (White Paper, 2001). The governmental goals, the outcomes of the public discussion, analyses and assessments carried out by foreign experts, and other key policy documents which emerged at approximately the same time provided the foundation for the development of an overarching strategy titled National Program for the Development of Education.

The strategy, commonly referred to as the White Paper, was authored by a team of respected educational experts, researchers and university academics under the leadership of education professor Kotásek. The Czech government approved it in February 2001 and by doing so, revived the ideas of internal school transformation and curricular reform.

The White Paper reintroduced the curricular reform as one of the key elements of educational transformation and outlined key premises of the reform:

- 1) Space is opening up for further development of schools' autonomy, for full use of their potential, for greater development of teachers' creative abilities, for greater flexibility of the education system, and for greater effectiveness of education...

- 2) ...The new conception of curriculum, which is not based simply on acquiring as much factual knowledge as possible, will be used in developing both the framework and school educational programmes...Education will have a new orientation: *to learn how to know...* avoiding a flood of trivial information but learning how to process information, turn it into knowledge and apply it, being able to think and assess critically; *to learn how to act and live together...to learn to be...*At the same time, the important things are a quality *system of values*, the development of adequate sociopersonal characteristics, an understanding of one's

own personality, respect for others, the ability to understand the spiritual dimension of life...

3) ...*A number of new topics* are emerging, such as European integration, multicultural education, environmental education...*Links between subjects, integrated teaching and new forms of teaching* will be applied, facilitating inner differentiation and even individualization of education.

(White Paper, 2001, p40) (italics in the original)

### The 'White Paper' versus 'Quality and Accountability'

The White Paper offered an encompassing view of transformation that spans from school administration and financing to internal school transformation, i.e. "*changes in educational content, methods and forms of instruction but also a change in the school climate and environment* (p.18)". The transformation was envisioned as a process that will lead to the development of schools as houses of creativity and innovation, marshalling a model for a democratic society where students have a stronger voice and teachers act as their partners.

In contrast to the 1994 document *Quality and Accountability*, which argued for educational transformation from the point of view of Czech historical continuity, the White Paper framed its arguments in an international education perspective. The key ideas stayed the same but they were wrapped in a new package. Anyone who would look for detailed references to the national educational heritage would not find much in the White Paper. The first paragraph of Chapter 1 of the document begins with words: "We live in a time of major and unpredictable social changes whose impact goes far beyond our own country" (p.13). In this vein, the strategy goes on to formulate general aims of education primarily with regard to the international context in which Czech education finds itself. The text states: "the basic trends of the development of education systems in developed democratic countries will be projected into the main strategic guidelines of

Czech educational policy" (p.19). The discourse positions the Czech Republic as a recipient of global trends rather than an active participant in their formation. Global trends are implicitly taken for granted, and as something that Czech educational policy needs to mirror.

Further, the White Paper brought in the global discourses of *knowledge society*, *information age* and most importantly *lifelong learning*, the latter providing the main frame for the argument for change:

A new concept of *lifelong learning for all* has emerged, whose implementation has become a goal for both international government organizations (European Union, Council of Europe, OECD and UNESCO) and all developed and developing countries. Therefore we too have accepted it as a goal (p.17).

According to the strategy, the implications of pursuing lifelong education as a goal are far-reaching. It means "a profound transformation of an education system that is as radical as the introduction of compulsory schooling was at the beginning of the Industrial Revolution two hundred years ago" (p.17). The strategy warned that:

...if we do not deliberately undergo a long-term programme of changes..., the education system will gradually cease to be able to resist to external impacts such as bullying, drugs, violence, further weakening of families, consumerism and a passive way of life, civic detachment, political and economic destabilisation, or to try and compensate for these. It will no longer reflect the development of society, or be responsive to its continual new demands. *Thus the only way to become an equal and fully-fledged member of a globalized world will be closed to us* (p.20)

[italics in the original]

## External political pressures and migration of discourses

The document's use of globally converging discourses of *knowledge society*, *information age* and most importantly *lifelong learning* demonstrates how discourses travel and how they are re-appropriated in national contexts. Lifelong learning emerged as a new concept in Czech policy texts in response to trends in the European Union (e.g. in 'Czech education & Europe: Pre-accession strategy for human resource development, 1999'), which the Czech Republic was aspiring to join at that time. While for the Czech Republic, it was a newly emerging discourse; its history had been longer in international and transnational contexts represented by UNESCO, OECD, and the EU (Education Policy Association, 1999). Using Norman Fairclough's terminology (Fairclough, 2005), it can be said that Czech policy makers re-contextualized the discourses circling in OECD, UNESCO and EU's documents, and appropriated them for their own purposes.

The excerpts from the White Paper showed that the international context played an important role in Czech educational policy making. Under the given circumstances it would be surprising if it didn't. In 2001, the Czech Republic aspired to enter the European Union, which it did as of January 1, 2004. Accession to the EU required the Czech Republic to harmonize laws and regulations with those of the EU, and meet a number of requirements that the EU set. The strong desire "to return to Europe" had characterized the development in the Czech Republic ever since the collapse of communism in 1989. As the Czech pre-accession strategy stated:

...it will be necessary to introduce into Czech education certain principles, strategies and concrete measures which are characteristic of the development of the education systems of modern European democracies, and which have been adopted by the European Union as recommendations, and implemented in European programmes. It is imperative that the Czech Republic be imbued with, or at least, inspired by them (Education Policy Association, 1999)

The policy developments in the Czech Republic undeniably show traces of inspiration by the referred principles and trends. Clearly, there were political motives that helped the appropriation of the new discourses but that may not be the whole story. Global discourses have become a strong rhetorical tool serving to legitimize policy ideas while at the same time promoting them. Edwards et al. (2004) closely analyzed the use of the discourse of lifelong learning in a UK Green Paper *The Learning Age* (Edwards, 2004), and showed how the discourse created a crisis narrative that would appeal to a range of different audiences. Hardly anyone could argue against the benefits of lifelong learning. "Lifelong learning is positioned to harness the desires and values of those working in the terrain; it attempts to seduce" (Edwards, Nicoll, Solomon, & Usher, 2004, p.144).

In a similar vein, the White Paper also operated with the same crisis narrative that served to establish the reality of the importance of lifelong learning, legitimize various proposals for educational transformation, which all appeared to fit within the discourse of lifelong learning, and justify the necessity of fundamental reform.

It is tempting to suggest that the curricular reform as part of the envisioned educational transformation could have been designed as a symbolic policy to appease

those who wished to see it enacted as well as foreign policy circles watching that the Czech Republic followed all the necessary steps for integration into the EU. But I do not think that it is the case. First, the White Paper was not merely a document created by politicians, done to people, and void of the voices of educational activists and progressives who were calling for a fundamental change. On the contrary, the team that authored it consisted of many who could be described as reformers, i.e. people who have been striving for a deep change. Secondly, the ideas of the curricular reform did not stay on the paper but began to materialize in a concrete policy text of the new Frameworks that teachers will have to respond to in their locally produced curricula. Thirdly, even if the discourses had symbolic political functions, new discourses can become institutionalized and shape change – they do not simply reflect the social reality but co-construct it. As Edwards et al. stated (2004): "We are positioned by this rhetoric and position ourselves in relation to it. The rhetoric is therefore very real and very powerful and should not be dismissed as merely spindoctoring" (Edwards et al., 2004, p.149).

#### Origins of the ideas

As discussed in the previous section, when compared to *Quality and Accountability*, the White Paper framed the strategic changes it proposed in a new and a distinctly different discourse. However, that does not mean that the ideas changed. The White Paper preserved the key concepts outlined in *Quality and Accountability* and developed them into a greater detail. In regard to the curricular reform, the premises of a new multi-tiered curricular system continued to hold: the state will be responsible for defining a national curricular framework, and schools will have to write their own curricula, thus constructing their own ways of fulfilling the national frameworks. The

change of curriculum is envisioned so that it "is not based simply on acquiring as much factual knowledge as possible" (Czech Ministry of Education, 2001, p.40).

The new idea not yet present in *Quality and Accountability* but highly prominent in the curricular reform relates to the concept of *key competencies* as the new goal of education. *Key competencies* are expected to serve "as an instrument for transforming the encyclopaedic conception of education" (p.41) and thus help to accomplish the change away from narrow focus on factual knowledge. The White Paper equated the path towards this goal with further decentralization of the system, increased school autonomy and teacher professionalization. But by introducing *key competencies*, it has also formed a new discourse of competencies, and terminology previously unknown to the Czech policy audience. This discourse further exemplifies the earlier discussed re-contextualization and appropriation of transnational discourses – in this case, the discourse is clearly connected to recent educational policies of the EU and OECD publications (Rychen & Salganik, 2001). I will pay closer attention to competency discourse in the Czech Republic in Chapter Five.

Apparently, with the recently institutionalized curricular reform the idea of decentralized curriculum re-emerged in the Czech Republic but where did it come from in the first place? Some interviewees saw its evolution as a natural response of the system that had been too tied up by strong centralized governance. In the words of a ministerial official:

The ideas emerged because they were necessary. Simply, the system and the content outlines from the pre-revolution times were outdated and there were

expectations that things will get re-evaluated, that a new content, conception and purpose of education will be worked out.

While it was certainly true that the educational mechanisms deployed during the communist times were out of synch with the new political era, asking teachers to develop their school curricula – an activity for which they had been historically unprepared – appears to be a major change in course that signals more than an evolutionary continuity. Undeniably, other forces had interfered. Interviewees agreed that although there was a need to challenge the existing status quo, the ideas for accomplishing the task were instigated by foreign (Western) educational models. The following quotes illustrate that notion:

I think that the original impulse was rather foreign, although not uncritically accepted. But to say that the reform specifically stems from how things were developing here, at least in the minds of those who launched it, I would not say that. Teachers' work with existing content outlines certainly was not something so shameful that it would need a change. The historical situation does not pressure anyone and people would happily continue doing what they had been doing before.

(education professor)

...experiences from abroad and foreign pressures were perhaps most effective [in propagating change]. Experience of the countries that we wanted to catch up with, mainly Scandinavia, Denmark, the UK, those were the key drafters. And then,



there were foreign experts who were coming during the 90s, from OECD and they provided some recommendations...

(education professor, advisor to the Ministry)

...since we have become part of the EU, adjusting to global trends is perhaps unavoidable...

(high ranking official from the Ministry of Education)

These three quotes suggest a strong influence of foreign pressures on policy-driven change in Czech education. One might be inclined to say that the Czech reforms are indebted to global and international trends. However, that is only a part of the story. Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the international forces combined with internal needs and shaped policy ideas in ways that accommodated both. Scholarly literature documented the challenges and virtually the impossibility of separating the "outside" and "inside" forces that drive national policy making (Anderson-Levitt & Alimasi, 2001). The curricular reform in the Czech Republic displays the same muddiness and blurring of boundaries. The policy ideas have been shaped and reshaped by their contexts. Clearly, some impulses came from elsewhere but the appropriation of new ideas and discourses that accompanied them was quite deliberate. The Czech Republic is explicitly trying to adjust to new transnational trends, catch up and be in the know, but also tune its educational system with the existing socio-political conditions in the country.

#### The curricular reform and new Education Act

Once the White Paper was approved, the Ministry was prepared to begin translating its ideas into a new Education Bill. The first draft of the bill came in 2001

relatively soon after the publication of the White Paper. In this bill, the curricular reform played only a marginal role but the high school exit examination reform was at the fore (Mezera, 2001). This mirrored the public standing on both reform proposals – the exit examination reform was highly visible and publicized; the newspapers wrote about it; some secondary schools had participated in the pilot of exit tests, and various interest groups were taking a stand on the issue. In contrast to that, the curricular reform was largely unheard of with the exception of educational activists, educational experts, and academicians who stood at its inception.

By the time the bill was drafted, the controversy over high school exit examination fully unfolded. The goals of the reform were in conflict with one another and the purposes unclear. For example, the high school exit examination reform was claiming to strive for a minimum standard of common knowledge for all students but there were also hopes that exit tests may replace university entrance examinations and serve as instruments of student selection. Aside the high school exit examination controversy, there were other problems with the bill. Namely, it proposed to abolish multi-year academic high schools but that idea ran into strong resistance of the elites. In all, the bill had slim chances for survival and predictably, it was rejected. The entire document appeared problematic. There were numerous procedural mistakes, conceptual tensions, and a number of unresolved issues that still needed to be addressed. In the words of a journalist who writes about education: "The bill has evolved into a document that is inconsistent and unbalanced, where some of its sections are contradicting goals and principles outlined at its beginning. It has become a bill about schools, i.e.

institutions, rather than a bill about education, which is what its title states" (Hrubá, 2001/2002).

In 2002, Education Ministers changed and the new Minister Petra Buzková was determined to have a new bill passed during her term in the office. Although she earned a reputation of a Minister who did not understand educational matters, as a lawyer and a skilled politician, she was able to take charge of the new bill and reshape it so that it would gain consensus among different stakeholders. The rewritten bill came before the Parliament in 2004 and the curricular reform gained a more prominent role in it. Next to the state high school exit examinations that remained in the picture, the curricular reform formed the backbone of the bill. While the state exit examinations polarized the political spectrum, hardly anyone would disagree with the idea that schools and teachers should have increased decision-making authority in curricular matters, which is essentially what the curricular reform involved. In a contested terrain, the curricular reform found little opposition and represented the piece of the legislation that most people could agree with and thus worked as a unifying element and a point of confluence where consensus could be reached. As one university professor said: "the Ministry used it as an argument to get the bill passed". Whether that is really true is disputable but it is plausible that the curricular reform might have functioned as a selling point and contributed to the successful passage of the new Education Act.

With the new Education Act, both reform proposals were reaffirmed and institutionalized. The Act came into effect in January 2005. By that time new Frameworks for pre-school and primary education had already been written, piloted and approved and in line with the new Act, schools were expected to develop their own

curricula for their first graders in elementary and middle schools, and start teaching from them within two years, i.e. in the 2007-2008 academic year. The pilot version of Frameworks for academic high schools is currently awaiting a final approval after it has been tested in 16 high schools in the country. If these Frameworks are approved before the end of 2007, academic high schools will have to join in and develop their own curricula by 2009.

### Summary

The gestation of the curricular reform has been a lengthy process. The idea to introduce a two-tier curricular model and transfer more decision making authority to schools has been floating around at least since 1994 when it was described in a report *Quality and Accountability* – the first attempt of the Ministry of Education to outline a comprehensive strategy for the development of education in the Czech Republic. However, the report remained unnoticed and education continued to evolve organically in directions that were not systematically steered towards any particular goals. There was no sense of crisis in curriculum, and thus no urgency to look for a solution.

In contrast, high school exit examinations came to be identified as a major problem that needed to be fixed so policy makers' attention focused there. The reform of high school exit examinations could draw on strong support in all levels of the policy system. The bottom called for national standardized tests that would yield comparative results among secondary schools; the top had political interests in advancing the reform because it was recommended by foreign experts; and education activists also supported the idea in hopes that national exit tests would create pressure for change in curriculum

that was otherwise unlikely to happen. Gradually, high school exit examination reform became the prevalent reform movement of the late 1990s. It took a life on its own – a new Institute for Reform of High School Exit Examinations was established under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education and first pilot tests started to be developed. However, their quality was dubious and faced heavy criticisms of the activists who saw that rather than promoting change, the tests were reinforcing the existing status quo because they were modeled on the existing content-driven curriculum. All this was happening in the absence of any overarching strategy or a goal.

Education activists continued calling for a substantial change and when Minister Zeman came to office in 1998, he responded by focusing on the development of a comprehensive educational strategy. He initiated a debate on educational change and entrusted a team of educational experts and academicians (many of whom sided with the activists' views) to author the strategy known as the White Paper. The White Paper laid down the basic principles of the transformation, including the idea of a national high school exit examination and further decentralization in curriculum, among other things. As Zeman's term was coming to an end, the transformation principles and namely the national high school exit examinations were translated into a new Education bill in 2001. However, the bill was rejected and Zeman left the office without the record of much needed new Education Act. Minister Buzkova who came after Zeman was more successful. During her cycle, the bill was reworked and passed in 2004, this time with stronger emphasis on the curricular reform, which was marginal in the previous bill.

The progression of events of how the curricular reform developed since early 1990s and eventually gained prominence in the Education Act of 2004 can be explained

with Kingdon's theory on the policy process. Kingdon (1995) proposed that for policies to appear on the policy agendas, three things must coincide: streams of problems, policies, and politics must come together. The three streams flow through the system independently of each other and only at critical times when windows of opportunities open, they become coupled. In other words, the policy process does not show rational linearity in that participants first identify a problem, then seek solutions to it, generate alternatives, and move the best one on the policy agenda. Policies often precede problems and even when it happens that an existing policy proposal can be attached to a salient problem, the political climate may not be receptive and the policy would still not make it on the agenda. Many things happen separately and become coupled at critical times (p.206).

From Kingdon's perspective, the curricular reform can be viewed as a policy solution to a problem that, for the large part of the 1990s was not really seen as a problem. There was no apparent crisis with the existing curriculum that needed to be solved and policy makers were busy focusing on other issues, such as the high school exit examinations. When the time came under the leadership of Minister Zeman to develop an overarching strategy for the development of Czech education, the ideas of the curricular reform re-emerged. The basic principles of the curriculum reform were very similar to those outlined in *Quality and Accountability* in 1994 but there was an apparent discursive shift. The White Paper framed the rationale for a fundamental transformation in global and more specifically European discourses of lifelong learning, knowledge society, and information age. All these discourses were new to the context of education in the Czech Republic but they carried a sense of urgency that helped to legitimize proposals for

change. In Kingdon's terms, the policy found a problem to be attached to -- the strategy that needed to be developed provided the space where the curricular reform could exist and the overall climate of the end of 1990s with the Czech Republic's plans to return to Europe as a member of the European Union justified the reform as a valid effort to further democratize Czech education and bring it up to par with its Western European counterparts.

Still, the first bill of the new Education Act of 2001 largely ignored the curricular reform. Kingdon's third stream, the politics, at that time dominated by the contested idea of national high school exit examinations, was not yet fully receptive to the reform. The political soil became more fertile in 2004 with the second Education bill. The year 2004 was also the time of the Czech Republic's official integration into the EU and the concepts proposed in the new curricular policy (and in the White Paper) were closely aligned to the ideas on educational policy promulgated in the EU. But perhaps more importantly, in the new Education bill, the curricular reform represented the least controversial section and functioned as a platform on which policy makers could find consensus needed to pass the bill. The window of opportunity was open, the problem existed (passage of the new Education Act), the solution (the curricular reform) was on the table, and the political climate was receptive to it. Thus, the curricular reform officially made it on the agenda and became an important element of the new Education Act of 2004.

With the passage of the Act, it became evident that the policy ideas were to be materialized in practice. The Act mandated that each school produce its own curriculum to respond to the new national curricular frameworks. The Act came into effect in

January 2005 but the implementation of the reform was staggered with primary schools being asked first to develop their curricula by 2007 and other school levels to follow. In the meantime, the reform was piloted in 16 academic high schools around the country, with three of these schools serving as data collection sites for this study.

With the passage of the Act, the curricular reform was sealed for policy makers who then handed it down to implementers to figure out. The implementers will have to make sense of the reform from the concrete policy text, namely the new national Frameworks that embody requirements on what locally produced curricula need to include. Next to the Frameworks, other representations of the policy, e.g. a handbook on curriculum development, newspaper articles, seminars and information disseminated about the reform will likely guide teachers and school principals in their response to the policy. The next chapter will thus explore how the reform ideas are presented in various texts that have been circulated among those who will enact the policy, what messages are conveyed in policy documents related to the reform, and how these messages travel through various information channels to the field of policy practice.



## CHAPTER 5: THE POLICY AS TEXT

Previous chapters dealt with the context of Czech education and forces that affected the policy development process. This chapter examines the policy itself, i.e. the written text of the new curricular frameworks. This text pops up in school principals' offices as the main representation of the policy and the main clue to the reform. The text plays a central role in the implementation process and needs to be examined for its content, structure, and underlying assumptions. Texts gain meaning when they are read and interpreted by their audiences so the chapter does not examine the text alone but zeroes in on the text's representations in the media as well as its readings by school principals and teachers.

The Frameworks have been authored by the Institute for Research in Education – an organization under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education – and piloted at all school levels. This study specifically focuses on the Frameworks for secondary academic education, mainly because the time of the data collection coincided with the Frameworks' pilot project in sixteen academic high schools around the country. In the absence of supporting curricular materials, lesson plans or guidebooks, these schools relied on consultations with the Institute and the text of the Frameworks to construe their meaning of the reform. They were expected to test the Frameworks but there was also an additional expectation that teachers in these pilot schools would contribute to a Handbook on development of school curricula, which would help other schools with the curriculum-writing process when the reform is fully launched.

## The content of the new Frameworks

### *Key competencies, attainment standards and content*

Following the approval of the White Paper in 2001, the Ministry entrusted one of its institutes – the Institute for Research in Education (Výzkumný ústav pedagogický – VÚP) – with the development of curricular frameworks for each school level, i.e. pre-school, primary and secondary academic.<sup>1</sup> The team of the employees of the Institute worked to ensure that the ideas of the curricular reform articulated in the White Paper were translated into the new Frameworks. In line with the vision presented in the White Paper, the most significant characteristic of the Frameworks is their new conception of education. In the words of one academician:

Czech school is built upon knowledge...that has become a target of criticism, justifiably. This is going to change... The Frameworks represent the first effort in the Czech Republic to understand curriculum as a function of what a student needs to attain, not just a list of content topics [one has to know].

The new definition of educational goals has been articulated in terms of so called *key competencies* (a term previously not used in Czech education) whereas key competencies are defined as "knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values that are central to an individual's personal development, his/her active integration in society and future life fulfillment" {VÚP [Institute for Research in Education], 2006 #342, p.8}. In other words, instead of a detailed outline of content coverage as has been the norm, the new Frameworks emphasize schools' function to develop students' competencies that will prepare them for lifelong learning. Schools will be required to focus on five key

---

<sup>1</sup> Frameworks for technical/ vocational and lower-vocational secondary schools are being developed by another ministerial institute – the Institute for Vocational and Professional Education

competencies to: 1) know how to learn; 2) solve problems; 3) communicate; 4) develop social and personal skills; and 5) develop civic skills.

Next to key competencies, which represent the most general level of the Frameworks, the document sets attainment standards for each of the 14 subjects that were covered in the previous curriculum. For example, in the subject *Czech language and literature*, the standards begin with statements such as:

- ▷ The student distinguishes varieties of national language and appropriately uses them according to communicative situations
- ▷ In analyzing selected texts, the student will be able to describe basic characteristics of Czech language and explain the principles of its evolution and current evolutionary tendencies

(Institute for Research in Education, 2006)

The attainment standards establish what a student should be able to do; some of them imply activity based education, some also specific content. For example, the formulation that a student will be able to "describe basic characteristics of Czech language and explain the principles of its evolution" suggests content coverage of what the previous curriculum listed under the topic:

**Introduction to studies of Czech language and methodology**

Czech language – national language of Czechs; formal and informal languages.

Norms and codification.

Development of Czech language. Indo-European languages. Slavic languages and their classification.

Slovak language and Czech language.

(Czech Ministry of Education, 1999, p.33)

Following the attainment standards, the Frameworks then identify content. When compared to the previous prescriptive curriculum, these lists of content topics are less

detailed. For example, the old curriculum named specific literary movements (e.g. futurism, expressionism, Dadaism, surrealism, Anglo-American modernism) that teachers were expected to cover in the subject 'Czech language and literature'. The new Frameworks require that: "A student will be able to describe fundamental characteristics of key periods (in Czech and world literature) and significant literary movements, and be able to name their representatives, and characterize and interpret their contribution to the development of literature and literary thought" (Institute for Research in Education, 2006, p.15). The list of content that follows does not name specific movements as the previous curriculum did. Instead, it broadly states: "literary tendencies and movements" (p.15), leaving it up to the teacher to determine what to consider significant and subsequently cover in instruction.

In sum, when comparing the Frameworks with the old curriculum, the new components are key competencies and attainment standards. The Frameworks still outline content but they do so in shorter lists and more general terms, handing down the decision on details of units and topics to teachers. Specifically for 'Czech language and literature', there is another novelty that did not exist in the previous curriculum -- the Frameworks introduce communication and interpretation of texts and new areas of study, and give them the same prominence as they do to literary history, which dominated the old curriculum.

#### *Subject integration, cross-curricular themes and instructional time allocations*

The new Frameworks also introduce changes in organization of instructional time and instruction. They further relax instructional time allocations and bring attention to the possibility of integrating subjects. The old curriculum listed fourteen subjects (courses)

and set minimum instructional time per week for each. In contrast to that, the Frameworks group thematically related subjects such as biology, chemistry, physics, geography and geology into bigger content categories, and set time allocations for the category as a whole. This gives some flexibility to schools to determine how much instructional time they will allocate to each subject within the category.

The eight categories include: 1) Language and language communication; 2) Mathematics and its application; 3) Man and nature; 4) Man and society; 5) Man and the work world; 6) Art and culture; 7) Man and health; 8) Information and communication technologies. For example, the Frameworks establish that during the four years of high school, students must have accumulated twelve hours of instruction per week in the area "Man and society (history and social science)". Schools will decide how to divide the time between history and social sciences; if both subjects will be traditionally kept as two separate courses or introduced through new courses. The schools will also have the authority to decide in which years the content for these subjects will be covered. The old curriculum was more prescriptive – schools had to offer a total of at least six hours of history (two hours per week for the first three years, i.e. 2+2+2) and six hours of social sciences (1+1+2+2).

The new arrangement of subjects into larger content categories has spawned some misunderstandings. Sometimes journalists, and consequently teachers who learn about the reform from newspapers think that the content categories are synonymous with new subjects or courses, and that they have to integrate several old subjects they perceive as distinctly different into one. To give an example, the Frameworks do not require that subjects such as chemistry and biology are collapsed into one course but if schools wish

to do so, they may. If they choose to maintain the traditional organization of subjects (courses), the groupings suggest connections between the subjects within the same content category.

Another new characteristic of the Frameworks are so called 'cross-curricular themes'. These are themes and topics that had not been formally incorporated in the old curriculum. They include: 1) personal and social education; 2) education for thinking in European and global contexts; 3) multicultural education; 4) environmental education; and 5) mass media education. For each theme, the Frameworks provide a list of topics to be covered. Schools' job is to infuse their curricula with these themes in any ways that suit them, whether it is introducing the themes through projects, diffusing them into existing subjects, or creating new courses.

In all, the Frameworks represent a relaxation in organization of subjects/courses, instructional time allocations, and content, giving schools more flexibility in how they will structure their curricula. At the same time, they introduce new themes and topics that schools must incorporate in their curricula. The text of the Frameworks itself summarizes its function in the following four bullet points.

The Frameworks:

- Establish only basic parameters for organization of education and hereby create a wide space for variability in designing local school curricula;
- Significantly reduce the amount of normative components in the direction towards the higher grades [of academic high schools] and thus enable schools to more effectively enact their educational purposes and flexibly reflect educational needs and interests of their students;
- Delineate minimal instructional time allocations for individual content areas;
- Enable integration of content.

(Institute for Research in Education, 2006, p.79)

## The text as a discourse

The Frameworks like any other policy text carry with them what Bowe and Ball (1992) described as "possibilities and constraints, contradictions and spaces" (p.15) and leave it to the implementers to determine the outcomes. But policy texts are also instances of social action (Luke) and as such they represent underlying assumptions and articulate a set of beliefs about how education change can be achieved. There are three key assumptions that were present in the White Paper and continue to resonate throughout the Frameworks.

First, the relaxation of state requirements in the realm of curricular decisions (i.e. content, subjects/courses taught, time allocations for individual content areas) is a manifestation of the idea that diminished control of the state and enhanced autonomy of schools and teachers will lead to changes. The reform claims to greatly augment teachers' autonomy on the premise that schools and teachers will be able to better draw on the resources they have available, and thus become more effective in serving their students; greater autonomy is linked to improved effectiveness and efficiency. The pursuit of autonomy in the name of increased effectiveness and efficiency are instances of neo-liberal discourse that has been present in the Czech Republic since 1989. The autonomy discourse also entails the belief that autonomy will empower teachers, unleash their creative potential and initiate bottom-up change. The underlying assumption here is that the existing content outlines constitute the core of the problem and schools' augmented freedom will solve it. There is also an embedded belief that teachers have the creative potential to change things, that they want to reduce the content overload and do things differently, and that they have the capacity to initiate the desirable changes. In all, the

discourse of autonomy exemplifies a shift from state control to individual management, and from central planning to decentralized governance, which is believed to be more efficient and effective.

The second big idea embodies the view that if educational goals change, the instructional practices also will be likely to change. The starting point was that current school instruction is ineffective and irrelevant to the world we live in. The traditional goals of Czech education have rested on the 19<sup>th</sup> century concept of erudition (Kotásek, 1992) stressing memorization of large amounts of factual information (Spilková, 2004). In the world at the threshold of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the body of available information continues to grow and schools can no longer encompass it all. Thus, they need to shift their orientation on something other than providing students with information, asking them to memorize it. The new goals, formulated in terms of "key competencies" should steer teachers' attention from knowledge as an end to knowledge as a means to a new end – students' preparation to apply what they know in day-to-day life. The assumptions that underpin this idea are that teachers will notice the new goals, rethink their work and apply different instructional practices. The key competency discourse marks a shift in traditional conceptualization of education but it is also a manifestation of global discourse, showing that the Czech Republic is in the know because it follows global movements and trends set out by European educational policy, which established key competencies as an objective for the member states in pursuit of "Europe of knowledge" (Eurydice, 2002).

The third big idea represents the view that schools should lead students to connect different pieces of knowledge and information together to become well-rounded



individuals. Education should lead to formation of social attitudes, values and behavior, and pay attention to themes such as multicultural or environmental education that are pertinent to the context we live in. The reform introduces a set of five "cross-cutting themes" and obliges schools to diffuse them across their school curricula. These themes should build connections between subjects while encouraging cooperation between teachers. The assumed effect is that in order to determine how to include cross-cutting themes into their school curriculum, teachers will have to collaborate and work as a team. The discourse of connections and collaboration again manifests a significant shift in beliefs about teachers' work. Traditionally, boundaries between subjects have been clearly demarcated, schools focused primarily on cognition and teachers have worked as experts in their field without being pushed to exchange ideas and collaborate. The Frameworks envision a new kind of teacher, who thinks conceptually beyond subject boundaries, shares information with his/her colleagues, and collaborates with others to avoid duplicity in subject content and reinforce connections between subjects.

#### Clash of ideologies

As discussed in the previous chapter, the curricular reform was unnoticed for a relatively long time. There was little sense of urgency among the general public to fix curriculum because the existing curriculum was not necessarily viewed as a burning issue that needed an immediate solution. The Frameworks emerged in silence and most people would have likely never heard about them until now when the mandate that schools produce their curricula has come into effect. But educational associations and various interest groups followed the evolution of the reform, and one association in particular vocalized its stance on the new Frameworks in the popular media, thus attracting

attention of the general public to the reform. The association in question was an association of history teachers (ASUD) and it represented voices of opposition against the reform and the Frameworks.

ASUD protested against several points in the new Frameworks. The Framework's organization of subjects into the larger content categories and the implication that subjects could be integrated appeared particularly scandalous. The commentary that ASUD offered on the first version of the Frameworks stated:

Although the purpose to integrate subjects has been denied or trivialized by the employees of the Ministry and the Institute for Research in Education, it is possible to find this requirement and recommendation in several places [of the frameworks]. We reject this idea...under the current conditions, we cannot accept it... Integration of history with other social sciences taught at academic high schools would be a path to dilettantism.

(ASUD, 2003, p.15)

...in the new conception of education, systematically conceptualized history teaching may disappear from schools. We consider this a serious threat to the process of forming historical consciousness in young generations, a violation of the right of all students to conceptual and meaningful information about the development of the world, Europe and our nation...For that reason, we appeal to preserve history as an independent subject...

(ASUD, 2003, p.14)

These quotes illustrate the challenge the reform ideas pose to the established ways of thinking about content and teaching in Czech schools, and teachers' job and identity. If the reform is indeed asking teachers to integrate subjects (which it is not – it only makes it possible), then it is asking them to redefine themselves. Such a demand may understandably be threatening to many. A disciplinary power struggle comes through ASUD's concerns as well – the history teachers were concerned that history may be erased from the school curriculum altogether if integrated with another subject and that historians might lose their voice in constructing educated citizens. The history teachers decided to fight to show that their subject is as important as other subjects, and that it should deserve an independent status. Perhaps the image of curriculum with integrated history was also daunting because it would compromise the traditional notion of an educated person.

What is perhaps more significant - ASUD also protested against the state's transfer of curricular decisions into teachers' hands:

We consider the request that teachers will develop their own curricula ill-conceived and wrong; it can be assumed that it will lead to either following the old curriculum or textbooks, which are not (or do not have to be) approved... Teachers use their time to full capacity to prepare methods – select instructional practices, materials, motivate and assess students etc... Historians focus only on particular segments of history and teachers are expected to know all historical periods and literature... but they have neither the capacity nor resources and information... The proposed solution clearly transfers the **responsibility for**

**content and educational outcomes from state (the Ministry) to schools and individual teachers** who can be easily blamed for subsequent failures.

(ASUD, 2003, p.16-17, brackets and bold in the original)

We see teachers' freedom somewhere else (namely in motivating students, selecting suitable materials and instructional methods, assessment, regional history, students' interests etc.) and we do not view expert advice on selection of specific content as limiting and constraining but as qualified and necessary help – such that teachers abroad receive.

(ASUD, 2004, Naše hlavní námitky,b), brackets and underline in the original)

When reading the objections to the reform ideas, it becomes apparent that a clash of ideologies is at stake, namely beliefs about the role of the state in education. The new Frameworks signify a move from a state run educational model to a model where the state coordinates and monitors results but schools and teachers take on an increased share of responsibility for the topics they will choose to cover. The reconfiguration of responsibilities implies further changes in the role of other educational stakeholders, e.g. regions and text publishers. ASUD feared that this liberalization would lead to chaos and decrease in educational quality; the proponents of the Frameworks on the other hand expressed distrust in state's governance and hopes that less state control and more local control will improve things. This clash of ideologies appears important but it did not come through very strongly in the debates encircling the reform as these debates turned into fights over time allocations and subject integration.

It is interesting to note that ASUD was the only interest group that came forward openly protesting against the reform. One might speculate that the protest came from a

misunderstanding of the reform, particularly in regard to integration of subjects.

Although other associations and interest groups did not join the protest, observations of statements that appeared in the media, and interviews with teachers and principals suggest that ASUD's stance on the issue is not isolated, particularly in respect to the state's role in education. A number of teachers believe that by handing down curriculum writing to schools, the state is ridding itself of responsibilities that belong to it. It is not uncommon to hear a teacher say that his/her job is to teach, not to conceptualize the content.

#### Implementation strategies and support mechanisms

Among other things, ASUD raised questions about the preparedness of the country for the big transition from centralized to decentralized education, and vocalized its concerns about the Frameworks' implementation.

...We consider the proposal **unacceptable** for the following reasons:

- a) insufficient conceptualization of content of history – of goals, concepts, facts, methods etc.;
- b) transfer of development of content outlines from experts (philosophers, historians, educators, and teachers) to individual teachers
- c) insufficient space for history for all students in academic high schools
- d) lack of preparation of teachers in universities, failure to secure suitable conditions for instruction (amplified by the proposal to dissolve the network of teacher-education centers)
- e) ill-considered liberalization of instructional content on a scale that would lead to damaging students in their preparation for university entrance examinations

(unless a new system is pursued); content has not been established, in spite of the fact that the Center for Reform of High School Exit Examinations has engaged in costly projects – probes, tests, pilots of the tests etc.

Since 1989, no **conception of teaching history in a democratic society** has been developed. We consider it necessary to give this task to scholarly history institutes as a prerequisite for other actions.

(ASUD, 2003, p.18) [brackets, bold and underline in the original]

Ever since the reform has begun to materialize, educational associations, experts and academicians have expressed concerns that the state had failed to secure support and funding for the reform's implementation. In 2004, in efforts to cut budgets, the Ministry abolished its network of teacher professional development centers and encouraged regional administrative units to take over the support of their local centers, and thus determine their fate. The Ministry ran into heavy criticisms for that. In words of one university professor: "the professional centers could have helped with the implementation but the Ministry has knocked off its only instrument that would allow it to influence schools."

On another level, the Ministry has been criticized for failing to organize any information campaign that would introduce the reform to the general public including teachers, and explain the reform's purposes and goals. If an information campaign happened, then it was partially indebted to ASUD's initiatives. The association sent its protest to a number of popular newspapers and ASUD's representatives were interviewed on TV (ASUD, 2003). The vocal protest sparked some discussions although many conversations stayed in the realm of professional journals and on-line journals which

function as outlets for debates among teachers, educational experts and academics but do not reach wider audiences.

### The language of the Frameworks

The text of the Frameworks itself spans close to 100 pages and takes the reader straight into the matter of the new curricular model without trying to provide any rationale why such a model is being introduced. Expectations are stated as a matter of fact: "The purpose of education in academic high schools is not to transfer the largest volume of isolated information, facts and dates to students, but to equip them with a systematic and balanced structure of knowledge, teach them how to classify information into a meaningful context of daily life and motivate them so that they would want to continue developing their knowledge and skills through their lives" (Institute for Research in Education, 2006, p.7).

The discursive shift discussed earlier (i.e. the concept of key competencies vs. content, life-long learning and so on) has been evident not only in the ideas and beliefs that the Frameworks represent, but also in the language the text uses, namely in the new terminology that it introduces. The Frameworks quite visibly display the discursive shift that is characteristic for the entire reform. Overall, the text is not very reader friendly. Its tone is informative and managerial, and the language highly technical; in some instances even foreign to Czech educators. The technicality of the text manifests itself in the use of new terms such as key competencies (*klíčové kompetence* in Czech), attainment standards, cross-curricular themes (*průřezová témata* in Czech), educational strategies, content areas, content disciplines etc. – which are not easy to understand even when the words are familiar. The authors of the Frameworks seem to be aware of it since they

provide a four-page glossary in the end of the document to help readers make sense of the different expressions used.

People in policy circles seem to have grown accustomed to the new terms but teachers and principals are struggling with them. Some of the terms are words that are completely new to the readers (i.e. the principals and teachers who will have to decipher them). For example, the term "curricular" alone poses some challenges. To teachers in non-pilot schools who largely had not even seen the new policy at the time when they were interviewed (Fall 2005), the new terminology meant virtually nothing. When asked if they had heard about the "curricular reform" – a term that policy makers commonly use – it turned out that for the interviewed teachers, it was the first time that they encountered the word "curricular" and some were even surprised by it. The following excerpt from an interview illustrates this point:

I: Have you ever heard anyone in this school mention the "curricular reform"?

T: No. The word [curricular] scared me when you said it. I really don't know.

Another teacher replied saying: "I don't understand the word "curriculum" ...

"curriculum" for me is something like a run or a cycle so I don't know how to understand "curricular reform".

The discomfort with the word *kurikulum* and the language of the reform in general was also evident in some of the survey data collected from pilot-school teachers. In response to an open-ended item asking teachers to list five words they associated with the "curricular reform", several teachers wrote things such as "too many foreign words," "pseudo-scientism," "Curriculum vitae," or "Biography". The last two expressions specifically point to the semantic problems with the word *kurikulum*. Most Czechs know this word primarily from the expression "Curriculum vitae" but not as something that



would be related to education. Traditionally, teaching and learning in Czech schools have been governed by *učební osnovy* a *učební plány*, which I loosely translate as content outlines and instructional time allocations. People do not seem to understand why the word *kurikulum* is now being used and what it might mean. As one teacher put it: "I don't know why it is called that way. The name is misleading, it does not explain anything".

Even among teachers in pilot schools who were immersed in the reform, complaints surfaced in regard to the language of the Frameworks. "In some places, it was so difficult that one had to read it three times before one could understand what it is about. You really need to read it with a commentary", said one interviewee. Another respondent described her encounter with the policy text in the following way: "When I first read the Frameworks, I was thinking: am I so stupid that I don't understand it or what? It's all words, words, words, mainly foreign words so that it looks grand..."

While the word *kurikulum* is mainly used to qualify the reform and does not necessarily mean that implementer's lack of understanding of the word will thwart the reform efforts, it points to a phenomenon which has unfolded around the reform as people are trying to make sense of it -- the language of the reform seems to obfuscate and complicate its implementation, which is admittedly still in early stages. A more important example of language that constitutes the essence of the reform is the term *kličov<sup>é</sup> kompetence* - key competencies. Similarly to the word *kurikulum*, the term *kompetence* has featured in Czech language, but under a different denotation than the reform introduces. A common understanding of *kompetence* is authority or jurisdiction as in a sentence: An administrator is *kompetentní* to issue a permit, in other words: An administrator has the authority to issue a permit. A glossary on a web page administered

by one of the Institutes of the Ministry of Education provides this commonly known definition but additionally lists a definition for *kličové kompetence* (key competencies), which constitute "fundamental knowledge, skills and abilities that can be universally applied in common working and life situations" (Institute for Information on Education (Ústav pro informace ve vzdělání), 2007).

Taking the reform's language into account, the implementers are facing additional challenges. They are being asked to develop an understanding of their new responsibilities and new concepts but their meaning making is contingent upon deciphering language and words that are also new.

#### *Political significance of the language*

The use of the new terminology is rather significant. Language has power -- it creates a certain reality, it evokes meanings and images that affect people's beliefs, and it also employs linguistic devices that function as political symbols (Edelman, 1971). Edwards et al. (2004) argue for locating educational practices and policies within rhetoric because they view educational policy inherently as a rhetorical practice that is not neutral. If we understand rhetoric primarily as an act of persuasion, then we must ask: who is the policy trying to persuade and about what? Since the policy does not speak the language of teachers, the international context inevitably comes into play again. As discussed in the previous chapter, international forces played a strong role in the formation of the curricular policy in the Czech Republic, and the use of terminology such as 'key competencies' provides evidence for the traces of foreign influence. The Czech Republic was aspiring to join the European Union and that meant harmonizing the nation's policies with those of the EU. While the EU does not have an official educational policy that

would be binding to its members, it has been increasingly exerting a great deal of influence over national decision making in educational matters. The EU advocates principles of co-operation, exchange of information, and mobility of people. It also publishes statistical reports and national reviews, which together with information disseminated by OECD and international comparative studies help to shape an emerging European educational culture.

So far, EU's most remarkable step towards creating a common European educational policy has been embodied in the adoption of the "Lisbon Strategy" in 2000. The Strategy called for Europe to become "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy by 2010" (European Council, 2000) and education was identified as key to success in attaining these goals. The EU encouraged its Member States to align their educational systems with the demands of a knowledge-driven economy and society. In the years that ensued 2000, the Lisbon Strategy has generated a host of documents, among them a concrete outline of strategic goals and objectives, and a detailed work plan for implementation. "Key competencies" were identified as one of the main objectives that the Member States should strive for in their educational systems and the Members States agreed that they would steer their educational systems towards the set goals.

With the Czech curricular reform's attention to the "key competencies," it is obvious that the policy makers fulfilled their task. From a distance, it may look like an act of policy borrowing and imitation but it has been argued that such actions go beyond. Policy borrowing has been described as a process "when policy makers in one country seek to employ ideas taken from the experience of another country" (Phillips, 2004). But

the recent developments in Europe cannot be explained in terms of transfer of ideas from one place to another. Instead, what we see is an emerging supra-national educational culture (Lawn & Lingard, 2002), and it is understandable that countries are beginning to implement what they mutually agreed upon. The Czech Republic is not alone in moving its education from knowledge towards key competencies. Nevertheless, not all Member States have chosen to transfer the terminology alongside the ideas. For example, Ireland and U.K. feature terms such as "key skills," Italy draws on "abilità fondamentali," and Spain uses the term "capacidad" (Eurydice, 2002). It is then interesting that the Czech Republic adopted the language of the Lisbon protocol when such language had little basis in the prior experience or sense-making of Czech educators.

One possible explanation is that sharing a discourse evokes a sense of participation in that discourse and in the case of the Czech Republic, the literal translation of 'key competencies' into *klíčové kompetence* can be viewed as a political move symbolizing the Czech Republic's connectedness to Europe and its expression of loyalties to the EU. Post-socialist countries are still in the process of re-constructing their identities and they turn to their Western counterparts for inspiration and for legitimacy. Often, this involves "adopting the language of the new allies" (Silova, 2004).

#### *Language in search of practice*

Explaining the use of 'key competencies' in terms of its political importance is probably not the whole story. The discursive and linguistic shift can also be read as part of new national building, in which the Czech policy makers are trying to break away from the past and underscore the move in the new direction through the use of new language. The term *klíčové kompetence* carries no policy memory and no connotations

evoking the communist past that corrupted many words and expressions. *Kompetence* thus can be read as starting afresh.

But the new language also manifests an important conceptual shift. Because competencies imply application of knowledge and doing, targeting the development of competencies is expected to encourage teachers to apply more constructivist and active-based approaches, which are largely unfamiliar to many. In that sense, the language of key competencies is a language in search of practice. In a system that has been previously ruled by a centralized conception of “official” knowledge, the new terminology could help people notice and realize the conceptual shift. Along these lines, one teacher articulated an interesting insight: "The reform is heavily based on change of terminology which is supposed to lead somewhere. As far as I know, based on some theories that I read, it stems from Whorf-Sapir theory that language affects thought. So for that reason, the term *kompetence* is good." Simply put, the new discourse could be noted more easily when it draws on new linguistic figures.

Discourses may lead to change in beliefs or habits of action although such effects depend on a variety of factors including long-term habitus, characteristics of social actors, and other circumstances (Fairclough, 2005). Linking the idea of discourse and change with more conventional policy implementation literature, one might suggest that the substantial content of the policy also plays a role as a factor that shapes implementer's response to policy. And this is where the complexity of implementation further increases. Policy texts tend to be ambiguous, in instances even contradictory because they respond to various pressures and interest groups. They are rarely a product of a single author and thus they embody different views. The Czech Frameworks are no exception. They

represent a mix of the new and the old where the new focus on competencies is coupled with the old notions of lists of content topics. One interviewee presented the following view of the Frameworks:

The employees of the Institute [for Research in Education] -- they meant well.

They wanted to introduce some modern elements into our system but they did not really know how to do that. And because they do not have colleagues who would be able to give them some advice on that, and it is no easy thing to do... So they copied some enlightening ideas from foreign curricula and were not able to take it into a form when it would be possible to implement it. So there are very nice formulas there, the key competencies are described well. No one can disagree with the beginning. And then there is a list of content. And that's really not much different from the old curriculum. The link between the competencies, which are described on a very general level, and the individual subjects is completely absent.

In context of the text as the main clue for implementation, translating the policy to practice is a daunting task. Implementers encounter a number of different messages and in the absence of curricular guides or subject-specific guidelines for translating the general competencies into concrete practices, they are left to construe the meaning of change within their established routines.

#### Text distribution and consumption

##### *Pilot projects*

Policy makers produced the Frameworks and handed them down to a sample of pilot schools so that they could test them in practice and generate feedback for revisions.

There was also an expectation that the pilot would lead to the development of a Handbook on curriculum development that will serve as a guide for all schools when full implementation unfolds. Pilot schools thus functioned as policy brokers – it was left to them to develop an understanding of the reform as they were responding to it, and model their response to other schools.

The Institute for Research in Education launched the first pilot in primary schools in 2002. Initially, 56 schools entered the pilot but only 18 were able to complete their school curricula according to the specified requirements and within set time frame (Institute for Research in Education (VÚP), 2005). The schools were given one year to develop their curriculum and another year to test the curriculum in practice, gather materials for the Handbook, and help the Institute with training lecturers who would disseminate the information to other schools. These goals turned out to be too ambitious for the given time frame and were not quite met. However, the pilot generated information that helped the Institute to revise the Frameworks and draft an updated version, which was subsequently published on the Institute's website in early 2004 and the general public was invited to comment on the Frameworks. The public discussion was open for two months after which the Institute proceeded to summarize the results and draft the final (fourth) version of the Frameworks, which was subsequently approved as the official one. From the point of the approval of the final version, primary schools around the country had two years to develop their school curricula for their first graders in elementary school and first-graders in middle school, and as of September 1, 2007, they new curricula have become the basis of instruction.

The Frameworks for academic high schools followed similar trajectory of development, i.e. they were piloted, then revised, released for a public discussion, and fine-tuned one more time for the final version. Drawing on the experience from the pilot in primary schools where the initial number of pilot schools was found to be too high, the Institute recruited a reduced number of sixteen high schools, and took a slightly different approach to working with the schools. Given the high number of schools in the first pilot, the Institute did not have the capacity to monitor each school. The first pilot drew on electronic communication between the schools and the Institute. For the pilot in academic schools, the Institute wanted to establish a closer link with the schools so each school was assigned to an employee of the Institute who served as a liaison, ensuring information exchange between the Institute and the participating school. The Institute's representative monitored his/her school, visited the school-site on occasions and helped his/her school deal with any issues that surfaced.

The pilot in academic high schools began in September 2004 with a series of meetings for school curriculum coordinators who were beginning to learn about the Frameworks and about the components that their school curricula were required to contain. The task for school coordinators was to form a team of teachers in their school who would write curricula for individual subjects as part of the whole school curriculum. The actual curriculum writing in schools began around summer 2005 and continued until spring 2006 according to a timetable developed by the Institute. During the time between September 2004 and spring 2006, the Institute facilitated eight meetings for school coordinators and there were also several subject-specific meetings for teachers. The



Institute's employees communicated with their assigned schools and checked that the curriculum writing progressed.

*Interactive policymaking?*

While the previous section suggests an open and interactive communication about the policy text that continued to be shaped, some interviewees did not have a sense that it was quite the case. Pilot-school teachers varied in their views of their opportunities to influence the Frameworks and shape the policy. In some pilot schools, teachers felt motivated to participate in the project in part because they saw it as a chance to affect policy. But there were also teachers who completed the task by following instructions, which they saw as set. These teachers felt that they were constrained by a number of rules (e.g. follow a specific format in their curriculum writing, use and avoid certain verbs etc.) with little possibility to co-create or affect the policy.

The communication was restricted to the Institute and the pilot schools, with little information sharing outside of the closed circle. The results of the pilot were not publicized in any media or disseminated to schools. Also, teachers varied in perceptions of their access to information. In one high school, teachers wanted to see some examples of the curricula written in the pilot primary schools but that proved to be a more complicated task that they had envisioned. One teacher described it as following:

Often, when we did not know where to go and how to continue, we searched the Internet and the pilot primary schools but we couldn't find anything...I was able to find it [primary school curriculum] only thanks to my mother who is also an educator [in a primary school]. She was supposed to start working on her school curriculum so they had two sample curricula in their office in the drawer and were

allowed to borrow them and look inside. So that's how I was able to peek into it, in this sneaky way, and see for example how they formulated their attainment standards etc...

Contrary to that, a school principal in another high school felt content with her school's access to information: "Thanks to the Institute... we were even able to see five complete primary school curricula". These disparities could have been a result of poor communication between the school coordinator and the representative of the Institute, or a result of ineffective communication within schools. Regardless, this example suggests that supporting materials were not always present, and exchange of information was not completely smooth and open even within the closed circle of the pilot schools and the Institute.

Researchers, academicians and educators outside of the pilot felt mostly left out of the shaping of the Frameworks. As one academic noted, "The first version was more or less closed to public, the second version was briefly available and the third one was only on-line". Although Internet access is more available these days, not all schools and teachers have an easy online access. In one of the non-pilot schools, teachers had access to the Internet only in a small computer lab for students so they largely did not know anything about the Frameworks, or other materials that the Institute published on its website. Evolution of the Frameworks similarly to the gestation of the idea to reform curriculum was thus taking place in relative silence with the exception of the earlier discussed reaction of the association of history teachers (ASUD) which slightly stirred the policy scene, and helped to "publicize" the reform. Largely, interviewees continued to complain about the lack of public discussions:

State discussions are absent here...The state discusses things by opening a conversation about a proposed document but it is published online so only people who are able to find it, read it and are interested in it can comment on it...And usually, the period open for discussion is short so one hardly has time to read through it all, let alone think about it. So that misses the boat...The broader public does not even notice.

The discussion that was taking place around the Frameworks was "not as lively as it could have been" as one teacher described it. Perhaps, this is no different than policy making elsewhere but it can also be interpreted as a reflection of the culture where debates and discussions had not been taking place for a long time and people did not learn to actively participate in politics, even in cases when it concerns them. One might suggest that the apathy of the general public in the Czech Republic may not be much different from other places but one interviewee shared an experience from England where he saw a distinct difference in public's participation in policy making:

When I was in England, I was fascinated by the public debates on education – that does not exist here. Parents [here] take care of the fate of their child but issues of education as a social phenomenon – you get zero reaction. When you talk to teachers, they will speak about burning issues such as their [low] salaries etc. but more abstract and general educational issues such as societal needs, there is no chance...

#### *Newspapers on the curricular reform*

As suggested earlier, the Ministry has been heavily criticized for failing to organize any systematic information campaign about the reform. The broader public,

including teachers in non-pilot schools, thus relied primarily on the popular media to learn about the reform. Education in the Czech Republic has been on the periphery of public interest and the information in the media has been rather sparse. However, that does not lessen the impact that the messages about the reform may have on policy implementation and teachers' preparedness for change.

Partially indebted to ASUD's vocal protests, the public took some notice that there was an educational reform although the messages about the reform might have been somewhat misleading. What came through the discussions around ASUD's protest was that the Association of history teachers believed the reform was integrating existing subjects and that such a deed may endanger the quality of Czech education.

To get an overall picture of the representation of the reform in the mainstream media, I searched through the archives of on-line versions of three mainstream newspapers (Mladá Fronta Dnes, Lidové noviny, and Hospodářské noviny) and identified 34 articles (published between 2003 and June 2007) that directly pertained to the curricular reform. Unfortunately, only a portion of all articles written on the topic between 2003 was accessible because one of the newspapers (Lidové noviny) did not allow for searching prior to October 2005.

Out of the 34 articles, 19 were primarily neutral in tone, focusing on informing the public about changes that the reform is expected to generate. The other 15 articles introduced the reform but also cautioned about constraints facing the implementation or they directly criticized the implementation. None of the articles criticized the reform itself. The reform seems to be accepted by the popular media as a positive development in Czech education. Largely, it has been portrayed as a major change; several articles

even spoke of a "revolution" in Czech education that should bring an end to the encyclopedic nature of education in Czech schools based on memorization of large amounts of information and cramming. "Painful cramming of historic dates and chemical formulas will soon end in schools. Learning will be more fun and children will be able to use the information they acquire in school in practice" (Kubálková, 2006). On the whole, the reform has been depicted as a move away from the old conception of education to a new one where application of knowledge will come to the forefront. Some of the headlines that appeared in the newspapers read: "Cramming is over, children will mainly learn to work with new information" (Blažková, 2005) and "Schools are preparing for a reform that should remove cramming" (iHned, 2006).

Many of the articles implied content reduction and significant changes in instructional practices. In fact, expressions such as "new style of teaching" or "teaching in new ways" feature quite prominently although it is not quite clear what the new styles or ways of teaching and learning should be. The reader mainly learns that the new ways will be different from the traditional transmission of facts, that they should be more fun and that they will focus on the individual. "Schools should get used to a completely new style of teaching: such that will respond to individual needs of each child" (Blažková, 2004).

The popular newspapers also prominently displayed the discourse of new freedom granted to schools and teachers. They announced that the reform abolishes the "rigid" and "stiff" ministerial content outlines and gives schools and teachers freedom to teach their own way. From reading the mainstream newspapers only, one may form an impression that the freedom is unlimited. Only some articles point out that teachers'

decisions will be bound by "attainment standards" that establish what students should be able to do when they complete education.

The articles generally explain that the new freedom will allow schools to profile themselves and thus distinguish themselves from other schools. They also contend that the freedom will make it possible for schools to move content around, create new electives, and integrate subjects if they choose to do so. Surprisingly, several articles falsely claimed things such as "a new subject Man and Society will incorporate current history, civic education and in part, geography" (Kubálková, 2006).

As for the core of the reform, the "key competencies", the newspapers were silent on the topic with the exception of one article that introduced the term "*kompetence*" and explained it. Given that the reform is based on new terminology, it is striking that nearly all articles ignored it. Nevertheless, that does not mean that they ignored the idea of shifting educational goals although the view they offered on the subject was fragmented. Mostly, the newspapers focused on only one aspect of the new competency goals – students' work with information -- and presented that as the goal of the reform.

"Cross-cutting themes" whose purpose is to bring salient topics such as environmental education, media or multicultural education into school instruction, have not been explicitly addressed in any of the articles with the exception of one. The idea was largely ignored and in places where it was mentioned, the information tended to be distorted. For example, one article (Machálková, 2006) talked about the cross-cutting themes such as environmental education or multicultural education as new courses that will be introduced into schools.

In conclusion, the reform has been represented as a major overhaul of current education and a revolution in Czech schooling. The articles did not try to persuade the public that the reform is important or necessary; they mainly kept a neutral and informative tone and appealed to the readers with claims about "the end of cramming" and "new ways of teaching". The key message that has been reiterated in nearly all the articles was that the reform grants schools and teachers freedom in curricular decisions and that this freedom is expected to "open up creative space" for teachers and schools, and generate fundamental change in what is taught and how. In many respects, journalists tended to inflate the scope of the freedom that schools and teachers will gain without providing much information on the new rules of the reform. In respect to the new language that characterizes the reform and key concepts that the reform introduces, the media was largely silent.

#### *The role of non-profit educational associations*

Somewhat alarmed by the inaccurate information that many newspaper articles distributed in regard to the reform, and in reaction to the absence of state-run information campaign that would explain the purposes of the reform to the Czech public, non-profit associations stepped in. SKAV, Permanent conference of educational associations, began to organize a series of regular monthly round table discussions and seminars related to salient topics in Czech education, inviting policy actors from different levels of the system, including representatives from the Ministry of Education, university professors, school practitioners, and journalists. Although these seminars have proven fruitful and important, the association has had limited capacities to perform large-scale information dissemination and has been reaching out to a minority of educational stakeholders. In the

words of one interviewee: "It's always the same people who show up. It does not reach out to new people. It's generally the progressive school principals".

Other non-profit educational organizations have contributed to the reform efforts through devising professional development activities and workshops for teachers. Also, the state has launched a professional development project titled "Coordinator", training educators to assume the role of school coordinators in their school, and manage teacher teams as they produce their school-based curriculum. The project has been quite important -- it appears to be the only systematic effort to prepare at least one educator from each school in the country for the reform. However, critics noted that it arrived late – most school coordinators from primary schools were trained in spring 2006 when their schools should have been nearing a completion of the school curriculum writing (primary schools were required to begin teaching from their new curricula in September 2007) (Zika, 2006). It is still good news for secondary schools given that the reform in these schools will be fully launched in 2009.

### Summary

The curricular reform rests on the text of new curricular Frameworks, authored by the ministerial Institute for Research in Education. The Frameworks mark a victory for the education activists – the ideas they wanted to see introduced in education are finally embedded in a national policy. The Frameworks emphasize a shift in educational goals from knowledge to so called "key competencies"; they offer greater flexibility to schools and teachers in organization of subjects and courses, and also in selecting content they will cover. On the whole, the reform embodies the belief that if schools and teachers gain more authority in curricular decisions, instructional practices will grow to be more



effective and relevant, and the quality of teaching and learning in Czech schools will improve.

Education activists welcome the effort and view the Frameworks as a good starting point for change. However, there is a long way from policy text to practice and in the absence of specifications of desired outcomes and intended purposes of the reform, teachers have to find their own path. The main clue they have is the text of the Frameworks. The implementation strategy has been designed to follow this trajectory: the Institute has authored the Frameworks, pilot schools will decipher what opportunities and constraints the Frameworks offer, and whatever conclusions they reach, they will share with the rest of the schools in the Czech Republic. The sharing will be done through pilot school teachers' contributions to a Handbook on developing school curriculum and to a web portal that has been devised as supporting mechanisms for the implementation. Principals and teachers who participated in the pilot will also share their experiences and knowledge as lecturers and trainers of future trainers. In sum, the diffusion starts with decoding the text of the Frameworks; school principals and teachers' interpretations are expected to lead to the development of supporting materials for other schools. Thus, this chapter zeroed in on the text of the Frameworks and its various representations that are available to the general public.

The Frameworks were developed in relative silence. The reform was not widely publicized and for a relatively long time, schools and the general public knew little about its existence. The Institute did not make the early versions of the Frameworks available, at least in the case of the primary school frameworks. When the Frameworks did surface, they sparked some opposition. This opposition helped to advertise the reform because it

featured in the media, although it gave the reform somewhat negative advertising. Namely, the Association of History Teachers vocalized its protest because it read the Frameworks as a major threat to the quality of Czech education and history teaching in particular. The representatives of the Association understood that the Frameworks were requiring schools to integrate different subjects (e.g. social science and history) into one. They also protested against decentralization of curriculum because they perceived curriculum and content design as the responsibility of the state, not teachers who, according to the representatives of the association, should conserve their energy to focus on teaching. The Association's protest was not a mere expression of discontent with the text of the Frameworks and the reform the Frameworks represent, but an ideological clash with the neo-liberal trends and diminished responsibility of the state that the reform promulgates.

In absence of systematic information campaign, educators' opinions on the reform were slanted by the protest of the Association of History Teachers publicized in mainstream media and newspapers. As the full-scale launch of the reform in primary schools began approaching in the 2007-2008 academic year, newspapers have produced more articles about the reform. However, in many cases this also meant more misrepresentations of the reform. On occasions, some articles were misleading and they distorted the reform's ideas, namely in regard to the integration of subjects or "cross-curricular themes" that some articles introduced as new school subjects. But overall, the media was largely positive about the reform although the reform's implementation has been criticized in length. The articles informing about the reform tended to inflate the

possibilities that the reform offers, and present the reform as a major overhaul of Czech education based on significant liberalization of powers that schools have.

Looking more closely at the text of the Frameworks, it is somewhat understandable why it has produced misconceptions and misunderstandings. The text is highly technical and draws on a number of terms that need to be deciphered. In some instances, it introduces terms that Czech teachers perceived as foreign. Namely, the concept and the term "key competencies" which constitutes the backbone of the reform appears problematic and further complicates implementation because it is new to the Czech audience, and educators appear to be at a loss when they need to ascribe a meaning to it. The text of the Frameworks reflects current education trends in the EU. The observation of the trends as well as appropriation of terminology may be interpreted as a signal to the world (or at least to the EU) that the Czech Republic is in the know, keeping abreast with the latest trends in the EU. But the deployment of new terminology can also be interpreted as an attempt to break away from the past and a prelude to a new future. The new language carries the possibility of inspiring new ways of thinking, leading to new instructional practices. In that sense, it's a language in search of practice. But as much as it carries that possibility, it makes implementation more challenging.

In all, the Frameworks appear to be a mix of new ideas (key competencies) and old practices (content), and the early implementation gives an impression of an erratic process where support comes after implementation steps have been taken rather than the other way around. The case of the Czech curricular reform manifests disconnect between policy and practice notoriously known in educational research. The macro level does not

reach out enough and the micro level is waiting with suspicion to see what is going to happen. In the words of one school principal:

The greatest mistake is the lack of communication with the people here at the bottom...Early on it should have been explained why the purpose is such and such, why the content is that way...and that is not really happening.

The reform ideas seem generally appreciated but if the policy makers do not sufficiently communicate the rationale and motivation of the reform, the reform implementation may lead to what Spillane et al. termed "lethal mutations" (Spillane, Reiser, & Reimer, 2002, p.416).

## **CHAPTER 6: THE PROCESS OF IMPLEMENTATION IN A SAMPLE OF ACADEMIC HIGH SCHOOLS**

The enactment of the new Frameworks is an unfolding story. The Czech Republic has devised the curricular reform as an instrument of change that will lead to "internal school transformation" and improvement of quality of instruction in schools. A number of assumptions underpin the policy and its implementation, namely that increased teacher autonomy in curricular matters will unleash innovation and creativity; focus on key competencies will impel teachers to search for new teaching methods; and diffusion of cross-curricular themes throughout school curriculum will push teachers to collaborate more closely with one another. At the same time, these assumptions have not been articulated into any specific reform goals and outcomes. Under such conditions, the space for implementation is wide open and the role that teachers will play in the implementation process is particularly crucial as their understanding of the reform may produce qualitatively different responses than policy makers anticipate. Policy research in the past decade has paid a great deal of attention to teachers' role in implementation and this chapter focuses on that. More specifically, in conjunction with the theoretical framework presented in Chapter 1, this chapter explores the arena of practice, which will focus on school practitioners' understanding of the reform as a precursor to their actions that will ultimately determine the policy effects.

The context of practice constitutes the third tip of Bowe and Ball's policy triangle, which stands at the center of the conceptual framework. According to Bowe and Ball, policy texts have real consequences in practice as they are being confronted and re-

interpreted by their readers. "Policy writers cannot control the meanings of their texts. Parts of texts will be rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous, etc...different interpretations will be in contest, as they relate to different interests" (Bowe & Ball, 1992, p22). Their premises were precursors to later theories that focused more closely on practitioners' interpretations and sense-making of policies. Particularly the work of Spillane and Coburn brought attention to the social and cognitive processes involved in policy implementation.

In this study, information on practitioners' interpretations and meaning-making of the reform has been gathered in two waves of data collection primarily through interviews with school principals and teachers. There was also a survey conducted to provide richer descriptive information about teachers' initial responses to the reform. The first round of interviews was conducted in two non-pilot and two pilot high schools. Teachers in the non-pilot high schools provided insights as to what they felt needed to be changed in the system and what they would expect the new reform to do. However, they largely had no knowledge of the content of the new curricular policy. Thus, the continuation of data collection focused on pilot schools only. Out of 16 high schools in the country that were piloting the reform, three were selected as sites for interviews with teachers and principals, and two more participated in the teacher survey. Details about the data collection, site selection, interviews, and surveys are included in the appendix.

This chapter reports key themes that surfaced from the interviews. It is a chapter about teachers' reactions to the reform rather than about the teachers themselves. All teachers who agreed to participate in the study were guaranteed anonymity. In some cases they criticized their school leadership and were guaranteed that their principals or

assistant principals would not be able to identify them from the study. For these reasons, this study does not paint portraits of the participating teachers and simply reports what these teachers had to say. Also, teachers are mostly not associated with any school in particular unless what they say suggests that their institutional context played a role in shaping their view. One might argue that the institutional context always affects how people within the institution interpret the tasks they face. This is likely true but exploring such links would be a subject for another study. This study reports themes that cut across institutional borders and in various forms surfaced in interviews across school sites.

In each school, responsibility for the school curriculum fell on a relatively small number of teachers. Typically, one teacher was in charge of writing curriculum for one subject area and it was up to him or her whether s/he would manage to get feedback from other colleagues teaching the same subject. Thus, the pool of teachers who were actually implementing the reform in these pilot schools was relatively small, given that there are 12 core subjects (which are more or less synonymous with courses) taught in Czech academic high schools. Some teachers were engaged in the curriculum writing because they felt excited about the reform but most of the teachers interviewed in this study participated because no one else in their school would or because the responsibility fell on them as the heads of their subject matter department. Due to time constraints, it was not possible to interview each teacher who was engaged in the curriculum writing so interviews in each of the three pilot school focused on 3-4 teachers (Czech language, history, and social science teachers as these subject areas tend to be most criticized for content overload and transmission teaching that the reform is set to change). The first round of the two waves of interviews also included a teacher in each school who was not

actively engaged in the reform implementation with the purpose of getting a sense of the degree to which the implementation of the reform was or was not a whole school effort.

In all, 13 interviews conducted in non-pilot schools and 20 in pilot schools provided data for this chapter. Themes reported here reflect answers to questions that focused on the curricular policy's assumptions: teachers' autonomy, key competencies, and collaboration within schools. When prompted to talk about their views of the reform, teachers also discussed what they perceived as hurdles and difficulties of the process – these areas also constitute the main themes that characterized the conversations. Most of the teachers interviewed had taught in the same school for 10-15 years and were in their mid-career. At the same time, in each pilot school one of the interviewed teachers also happened to be a relatively new and young teacher (teaching less than 5 years). However, the age and experience of the teachers did not point to any significant differences in how these teachers viewed and understood the reform. The survey was sent to teachers in five pilot schools and generated 89 responses (53% response rate), which were used to triangulate the information from the interviews and to provide a fuller portrayal of pilot school teachers' reactions and attitudes towards the curricular reform.

A note: How will school curricula be judged?

The reform is built around a mandate requiring schools to produce their own school curricula, assuming that the process of school curriculum writing will lead to improved quality in Czech education. There are countless interpretations of the notion of increased quality exist. Newspapers tend to equate the reform primarily with less cramming, new teaching styles, and development of students' skills to work with information. Policy makers present even a wider variety of perspectives of assumed



goals: improved quality means focusing on individual students; making connections between different subjects; establishing cooperative working environments where teachers collaborate; changing the power distribution in the traditional student-teacher relationships; better preparing students for the job market; effectively utilizing available resources and so on. The following quote illustrates how broadly some state officials viewed the reform's intentions. In the words of an administrator from the Czech School Inspectorate:

You can see that the reform steers towards personal development of students and if our students find jobs at the European market, if they are willing and able to work in other countries because they for example know foreign languages, then it will show that the reform has been successful and right.

A high ranking official from the Ministry of Education characterized the reform's goals in the following way:

The goal is to create a new type of curricular document where the core of the change lies in moving from one centrally created document, the content outlines, to a two-tiered curriculum...Contrary to the previous documents...the formulation of the new documents [the school curricula] emphasizes so called "competencies", abilities not just to know a particular area but also actively use it in various situations.

These quotes suggest that the vision of what the reform should do is rather blurred. The absence of specification of intended outcomes creates an open space for interpretation and action. The reform is practically handed down to teachers who will draft solutions to it and determine its effects and outcomes.

One wonders how the effects and outcomes will be judged. Compliance with rules and regulations have been traditionally monitored by Czech School Inspection, which is a state institution that played the role of the education police. The political reconfiguration in the Czech Republic has impelled the institution to redefine its purposes so that it can serve as an evaluating and advisory agency rather than a strictly controlling body although such major transformation has been slow to come. Currently, the Czech School Inspectorate has also been undergoing a transformation under new leadership and it is not clear what role it will play in the curricular reform. If the Inspection is transforming itself to function as an evaluating agency, one might expect a strong and active presence of the Inspection in the pilot of the curricular reform as a way for the Czech School Inspection to prepare itself for the new task.

Some interviewees reported that the Inspection was initially involved in the pilot of the Frameworks but its engagement gradually faded because the institution did not consider itself to be the evaluator of the policy, and school curricula were only in the process of being written so the Inspection had little to evaluate. The Inspectorate is bound by law to monitor schools' compliance with mandates and regulations. For the curricular reform, this likely means that the Inspection will assess whether schools meet all formal requirements imposed on local school curricula, i.e. whether the locally produced curricula meet all the mandatory requirements including a self-evaluation report, prescribed sections that need to be included in the curriculum such as school characteristics, assessment plan etc. It is premature to speculate whether that will be the case or whether the Inspection will devise criteria that will go beyond monitoring

compliance to evaluating the quality of school's response to the reform. At the time of writing, this remains to be open.

### Teacher Autonomy and the National Curriculum

One of the reform's underlying assumptions in regard to augmented autonomy can be spelled out in the following way: The existing prescriptive content outlines (national curriculum) constrain teachers' work and prevent them from taking initiative, actively engaging students, and exploring non-traditional instructional practices. If the state relaxes the outlines and gives teachers and schools more latitude in their curricular decisions, they will use their professional judgment and adjust instruction to their own needs, to their students, and to the new educational goals. In short, by giving more freedom to teachers in the realm of curricular decisions, the problem is being framed as too little freedom and too constraining content outlines.

Although teachers generally agree that the traditional content outlines cover excessive amounts of information, they do not necessarily perceive the outlines as such a major constraint as they tend to be portrayed. Other mechanisms in the system besides the content outlines appear to function as surrogate arms of content control, pushing teachers to overload students with large quantities of information. Results from the teacher survey (see Table 4) indicate that in comparison to content outlines which bothered 14.1% of teachers, teachers felt more limited in their work by university entrance examinations, lack of instructional materials, class-size and yet even more by students who are uninterested to learn.

**Table 4 - Teachers' perceptions of their work constraints**

*To what extent do the following constrain your work?*

	Not at all	A little bit	Quite a lot	Extremely
Content outlines	32.9	51.9	10.1	3.8
University entrance exams	36.7	26.6	27.8	6.3
Too many students in class	11.5	34.6	42.3	11.5
Students who are not interested	3.8	34.6	43.6	17.9
Lack of instructional materials	9.1	45.5	33.8	11.7

(%)

The content outlines themselves were not seen as a major constraint perhaps because teachers exercised a degree of latitude in deciding how closely they followed them. On paper, all teachers followed the content outlines in their "thematic plans" – their own timelines and lists of specific content topics. Teachers were typically required to produce their thematic plans at the start of a new academic year and turn them to the school principals. The thematic plans had to be based on the national curriculum and they provided concrete information on units and topics teachers planned to cover as well as a time frame for the academic year. Principals wanted to see the thematic plans for several reasons. For example, as some of the principals explained, if the Inspection pays a visit, the Inspectors might ask to see the "thematic plans". Also, these documents allowed the principals and other teachers to keep track of the content in case substitute teaching was needed. Finally, the thematic plans helped principals and head of the departments to monitor that teachers were covering the material as required by the national curriculum.

The plans presented some benefits to teachers as well. As one language and literature teacher described it:

I draft a thematic plan based on the national curriculum, just for myself although the principal now also wants to see it. And I use it all the time to check if I am

behind, what I should be doing etc. I mark authors who I consider the main ones - those I have to cover, and then I also list others in case I have some time left.

Some teachers used the content outlines as an orientation guide or "a springboard" that helped them to plan what to teach. But there were also teachers who altogether ignored the content outlines. The following interview excerpt illustrates that point:

I: How do you make decisions about the content you will teach?

T: It depends. In the lower grades of the multi-year high school, I do not tolerate much the content outlines that we have. In our school we have a considerably large latitude in terms of what to teach or what books to use and I take advantage of it...I purposefully decided to take on the first year students of the multi-year high school...Teachers generally want the freshmen of the upper level but I wanted the early grades because I wanted to have the time [eight years of multi-year high school] to work with them on things that you don't have time for later, e.g. fairy tales, fables, crime fiction...So I created my own program and I confess, I don't have a clue what's in the content outlines. Only when we get to 9<sup>th</sup> grade, I teach according to the textbook because it provides an abbreviated version of the literary history. I do it in case some of the students decided to continue in another school [instead of the academic upper-secondary level] so that they have what is expected of them, i.e. some knowledge of the literary history.

This excerpt exemplifies several things. First, it shows that this teacher was able to exercise a significant degree of autonomy because his school allowed it. The autonomy or a lack of it was thus not necessarily a function of the national policy but of the school where the teacher worked. There may be principals who require that their

teachers strictly adhere to the national content outlines but in all the schools that I visited, this did not seem to be the case. The principals respected their teachers' professionalism and did not try to interfere with the content teachers covered, trusting that they appropriately responded to the national curriculum and the state requirements.

The second interesting thing to note about the quote is the sense of accountability that the teacher expressed when talking about keeping students on a par with their peers in other schools. This was not connected to the content outlines and state's control over curriculum but to the students and their future prospects. Without strictly following the prescribed content, the teacher had a sense of the content mastery expected of a ninth grader in primary school or its equivalent in a multi-year high school to pass entrance examinations for secondary education. It was the responsibility for students' success at entrance examinations that made the teacher cover what is typically covered in the 9<sup>th</sup> grade, not his sense of obligation to follow the national curriculum. I observed the same expression of accountability for students' preparedness for the next level of education among other teachers whom I interviewed. As a history teacher in one of the non-pilot schools said:

I have to respect that I teach a particular subject and be accountable to that matter. I personally would never choose a topic [within the subject] that I am very interested in and forgot or skipped over other things because of that. If I wanted to, I could though... a teacher should prepare students for the next level of education...and that's a question of content. A teacher in primary school tries to prepare her students for entrance exams to secondary school; at secondary school

for entrance exams to the university and one has to reflect what the universities require...

Despite the fact that there are no standardized entrance examinations, there is a notion of what may be titled 'official knowledge', which implies knowledge encapsulated in textbooks that often exceeds the national content outlines. Teachers do their best to ensure that their students obtain this official knowledge to enhance their chances of passing entrance examinations and successfully move from one level of education to the next. Content selection is thus a continuous attempt to strike a balance. In the words of a social science teacher:

I constantly move among three requirements – to make it [the instruction] attractive, that is my personal requirement; then to prepare them for the entrance examinations, and then to prepare them for life somehow. And these are often in tension...For example, Durkheim's sociology, [the definition of] mechanical and organic solidarity – I teach them such notions...it's a classic [at university entrance exams] in colleges where they teach some social sciences...but what it really is, why they should know such things or why it would be beneficial for them to know these things, there is really no way to justify that to the students. And I teach it because I tell them "if you encountered these expressions" [at the university entrance examinations]...

Entrance examinations are constraining because of their high stakes but also because academic high schools informally compare themselves on the numbers of successful university applicants even when such numbers are misleading. Universities differ greatly in their openness – e.g. some technical universities accept most applicants, in some cases

even without entrance examinations, while other universities keep most applicants out. Under these circumstances, 90% success rate from one high school where students applied mainly for technical universities does not compare to 90% success rate of applicants from another high school who were accepted to universities that have more restricted access. Nevertheless, high schools continue to bypass the qualitative difference and advertise themselves on the number of successful university applicants.

Czech teachers' personal sense of responsibility to provide students with the 'official knowledge' and their professional accountability exemplified in the interview excerpt may also be accountable to other circumstances. For example, it is fairly common for teachers in Czech schools to stay with the same cohort of students from the freshman until the senior year. Thus, a teacher is likely to be the only person who imparts subject-specific knowledge to his/her students during the students' high school experience and there is a chance that this teacher may be informally judged by colleagues and parents for what his/her students know.

The previous paragraphs suggested that despite highly prescriptive national content outlines, teachers exercise a degree of autonomy and personal judgment in curricular decisions. The paragraphs also showed that teachers have a personal sense of accountability to their students. Given that teachers' decisions about curriculum are not simply a function of the national policy but other external and internal factors, it seems overly optimistic to think that if the national policy further loosens up and teachers' autonomy is officially augmented even more, it will produce fundamental changes when other issues such as the undercurrent power of entrance examinations as yet another



control mechanisms have not been addressed. But that is not to suggest that the policy will have no effect.

#### Ownership and empowerment: Is change likely to ensue?

Analysis of interviews with teachers from both non-pilot and pilot schools reveals three types of attitudes towards the curricular reform. Some teachers did not perceive existing content outlines as problematic and so they did not see a strong need for a fundamental change in curricular policy. Then there were teachers who felt that a change was needed but did not think that their curriculum writing could initiate it, especially when they considered the pressure of entrance examinations. And the third category included teachers who wanted to take the opportunity they saw in the reform, and re-conceptualize the traditional content and teaching methods. In the absence of strong incentives, the desire for change seemed to derive primarily from teachers' internal impulses. However, it is important to note that teachers from pilot schools who participated in their school curriculum writing were also motivated by a modest monthly remuneration from the Institute for Research in Education.

Teachers in pilot schools who were engaged in the curriculum writing reported a sense of ownership they felt in shaping their school's instruction and organization of content. The interviews contained expressions such as: "I certainly cannot say that we are burning to do something new but I think that everybody has been realizing that it's not in vain, that what we will create is what we will have." Another teacher commented: "In the process, we were not sure we were really getting it...but the truth is that we were able to adjust the content to us...and it will be good because we will be able to shuffle things around..." Apparently, these teachers did not consider the task of developing their

school-based curriculum futile. The survey data further support this claim with nearly 86% of respondents indicating that the reform and the Frameworks made them think about their teaching, and 69% agreeing with the statement that the reform is offering them an opportunity to participate in shaping education in their school.

**Table 5 – Teachers' perceptions of the new Frameworks and teaching**

<i>The frameworks make me think more about how I teach</i>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
1.3	6.4	6.4	17.9	53.8	14.1

(%)

**Table 6 – Teachers' perceptions of the new Frameworks and school decision-making**

<i>The frameworks give me an opportunity to co-create our school</i>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
2.6	20.8	7.8	19.5	35.1	14.3

(%)

While there was a sense of ownership among those who participated, it did not necessarily mean that teachers felt empowered to institute significant changes when compared to the old curriculum. Teachers generally agreed that the old curriculum was covering excessive amounts of information, which should be trimmed. Teacher survey responses showed that 68% of teachers agreed that content should be reduced; 67% of teachers agreed that they teach a lot of things that are disconnected from reality.

**Table 7 - Teachers' perceptions of content's relevance**

<b>We teach a lot of things that are disconnected from reality</b>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
2.6	23.1	7.7	19.2	30.8	16.7

(%)

**Table 8 - Teachers' perceptions of the amount of content**

<i>It is necessary to reduce the content</i>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
2.6	20.5	9.0	17.9	30.8	19.2

(%)

Helena, a history teacher, commented on the old curriculum:

The content outlines are so overloaded with information that I can't stop and have to cram it into the students. For example, I wish I could have them look up information about a historical figure on their own and then connect it with other things they know but I have absolutely no time to do that because it would hold us back and we would slip off. So I simply come, give them a lecture, they write it down because that's the fastest way. But the effect is that they only learn it for a test and then forget about it. And I am really annoyed with how ineffective our lessons are but I have no extra time.

Teachers clearly regarded the existing national curriculum overly demanding. In contrast to the current highly prescriptive curriculum, the content in the Frameworks has been formulated in more general terms -- e.g. Ancient Greece as opposed to a detailed list of all topics that fall under Ancient Greece. Such organization promises reductions but to some teachers, that did not represent a significant change. Helena felt a bit disappointed with the Frameworks:

I was excited when I heard that there would be a reform but when I saw the Frameworks, the only new thing was how things were phrased. As for the content, it was just as overloaded...whether I look at it from left or right. I was shocked. I took the Frameworks and compared them to the content outlines and I thought to myself: where is the change? ... I thought that they wanted to reduce the large

quantities and teach what they call competencies...Great thing. But because they were not able to reduce the content, the effect will be the same...

Despite some skepticism, she worked hard to change things as much as she could.

Although she downplayed the change she tried to enact, she was making deliberate choices that did not seem as arbitrary as she portrayed them:

I could only do marginal changes and shuffle things around. I tried to chop off as much as I could. For example, we always had to cover Greece and Rome in great detail. But now I will only focus on explaining republic, kingdom, first democracy etc. and I won't pay so much attention to the exact sequences of emperors. These were the facts that I cut off in order to emphasize some general principles of how things work... I tried to choose the bigger things, for example, I will focus on Enlightenment and Modern times in greater depth e.g. on only one country...

Similarly, Helena's colleague Katka felt that in writing the school curriculum, the content for her subject remained more or less unchanged:

We did not really omit anything because we could not figure out what. We wrote the school curriculum in general terms. For example romanticism...we were considering whether to include in brackets some names of authors, the most important representatives, which would mean that everybody would have to cover them...And then it turned out... and it's probably my fault, that I was not able to select which ones to put there so I did not list any....It is perhaps all too open, which sort of encourages to again cover everything in its entirety.

Teachers in the other two pilot schools also spoke of small content reductions, but in some cases they also mentioned introducing new topics that had not been present in the previous curriculum. They typically managed to reduce the content by shifting some of its portions to other subjects where the content may have already been taught or that represented a better fit. Pavel, a social science teacher said: "We reduced one thing and I am glad it worked out that way – we moved the unit of European Union to geography".

Teachers tried to reduce the excessive content and enact changes as their capacity and common sense allowed. The main characteristics of their work with content as they saw it was not necessarily a significant reduction but shuffling things around and redistributing units and topics across years and across different subjects. This was done to release some pressure from teaching too much information and to gain time to work with the existing content more effectively, i.e. work into more depth with content that the teachers deemed key and spend less time on information they considered trivial.

The Frameworks prescribe minimum time allocations for each larger content area but decisions on instructional time allocations for individual subjects rest with schools. So besides moving things around and suppressing trivial information, teachers also had to engage in negotiations across subjects about allocations of instructional time. For example, the Frameworks introduced some changes in 'Czech language and literature' – specifically they introduced text analysis and interpretation, and communication -- new themes not addressed in the old curriculum. In two of the three pilot schools, Czech language and literature teachers were able to gain an extra hour of instructional time per week in two years on the grounds that they needed more time to address these new themes. But increasing hours for some subjects meant losing them in others, and the three

pilot schools slightly differed in the organization of instructional time they settled on. Still, in the end, the curricula of the three schools shared more similarities than differences. The schools organized their subjects in the same fashion (not a significant change from the past) and the differences were for example in the number of electives they offered, time allocations granted to individual subjects (e.g. one schools would have 4 hours of instructional time per week for Czech language and literature while the other would have 3), and in ways they shifted parts of the content between the subjects.

Overall, the three pilot high schools included in this study appeared to be fine-tuning existing practices rather than re-inventing them and fundamentally altering them. While this may not hold to the reform's rhetoric of radical change and overhaul of instruction in Czech schools, it suggests an incremental change that may turn in significant in the future. The interviewed teachers were largely more skeptical though; they felt that the reform was giving them some space to better adjust the curriculum to their needs but they did not necessarily see that the reform was giving them many opportunities to depart from the past and provide clues to how to do things differently.

#### Key competencies

The big idea in the Frameworks expected to stimulate change in teachers' instructional practices is the Frameworks' orientation on new educational goals - the 'key competencies'. This orientation assumes that a particular process will unfold in teachers' thinking and curriculum writing, ultimately leading teachers to reconsider what they teach and how, and where the content leads their students. The following lines quote a high-ranking ministerial administrator who described the type of thinking policy makers hope the reform will spark in teachers:

I tell teachers: "When you begin writing your school's content outline, first ask yourselves what you envision it means e.g. for a 9<sup>th</sup> grader to know history... So the student needs to have some understanding of history -- does it mean that he or she needs to learn about the King Přemysl I, Přemysl II, the Golden Bull Seal of Sicily? Why?" The purpose of teachers' development of the school curriculum is to ask these fundamental questions. So far, it has always been decided for them when someone wrote in the prescribed curriculum that they needed to teach Přemysl I, Přemysl II and the Golden Bull Seal of Sicily...

The envisioned shift is significant and radical. Traditional content outlines reinforced a content-driven educational model leading to students' mastery of knowledge as a given truth. The reform assumes that key competencies will steer teachers to change the traditional way of thinking – that they will notice the competencies and use them to backward map towards content, which will be secondary and instrumental to a new kind of knowledge rather than a goal in itself. Interviews with teachers suggest that the reform has not necessarily worked that way, although admittedly the implementation at the time of data collection was in early stages. As Jaroslav, a curriculum coordinator who oversaw teachers' curriculum writing in his school put it:

It is a long-term process and I am afraid that it can be completed without the change of mindset. School curriculum can be produced but the moment that comes – when I start thinking about things, considering if what I have been doing so far makes sense, if it really leads towards students' being able to do what I want them to be able to do, that moment can be completely missed.

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which teachers experienced the moment when they would question their own practice or if they missed it. But from their descriptions of how they approached the curriculum writing, it appears that the competencies were sometimes pushed to the background and content continued to drive the curriculum. Understandably, teachers did not discard their previous knowledge and practices, and channeled their experience with the new policy through the lens of their existing practice. Key competencies were noted but more as rhetoric than a guide to a different approach to teaching. In conversations with the teachers, the term key competencies was mentioned only when we spoke on the general level. When it came down to descriptions about how they approached the task, key competencies disappeared from the conversations and were replaced by 'attainment standards'. It was perhaps because key competencies were stated in somewhat general, and to many, also 'foreign' terms. The level of generality did not reach the individual content areas because key competencies were only mentioned at the beginning of the Frameworks and they were not linked to concrete areas for which individual teachers were writing the curriculum. The policy document failed to articulate the links between key competencies and the content and used 'attainment standards' instead as a proxy for the key competencies.

With the key competencies not being easy to grasp, teachers understandably continued to structure their thinking about the new curriculum in terms of the old content. In most teachers' accounts on how they approached the curriculum writing, they reported that the process began with the content outlined in the Frameworks, not with the competencies or the attainment standards. For example, Monika, a Czech language and literature teacher described how she took scissors to cut the old content outlines and then



matched the old content with the new attainment standards. Katka, another Czech language and literature teacher from a different school also took content as the backbone of the curriculum, adding the attainment standards to it. She described her work on the curriculum in the following way:

The most challenging part was probably dividing the content into years...I don't know if it's good but we were able to ground it in new textbooks. Then we had to come up with attainment standards, what the student gets out of the content, what h/she learns.

Although teachers largely worked their way from existing content to the new attainment standards, there were also several teachers who reported adopting a reversed approach, i.e. the approach that the high ranking ministerial administrator quoted earlier saw as the goal. For instance David, a social science teacher, did not see the key competencies and attainment standards as an additional layer to be attached to the content, but as a guide towards a different concept of teaching that will use the content to build new skills. In his words:

The difference is that so far, the content has been key – to teach them [the students] something, so that they leave with some knowledge. Now, the most important thing for us will be to ensure that they can use it, or let's say develop some attitudes, or some abilities and skills. So that will be more important for us than the content itself.

David continued to describe how he worked on the curriculum writing:

I started from the attainment standards defined in the Frameworks and the task was to come up with ideas how to reach each with concrete activities, what to put

there, what I should require from the students to do, perform, show. So it was a lot about thinking, coming up with ideas where I could draw on what I know is typically taught.

Clearly, the new Frameworks defined the content even though in less prescriptive and specific terms than before, and teachers who had been used to a content-driven curriculum found little in the new policy that would allow them to significantly depart from the content-driven model. The rhetoric of the new Frameworks emphasized key competencies but with the key competencies being loosely defined and the content being set, it was understandable that teachers largely started building on familiar grounds and the key competencies tended to trail behind as a supplement to the content.

#### Seeing the old in the new

When it came to defining what key competencies actually mean, teachers were not always voicing the same views as policy makers who saw key competencies as one of the main novelties of the reform that will change instructional practices. A fairly frequent opinion was that although the term 'key competencies' was a novelty, the concept itself was not new. The term itself made many teachers uncomfortable but in construing its meaning, they often concluded that the competencies were not significantly different from what was familiar to them from the past. A fairly common view was that the new language was used to disguise the old and make it look fancy, i.e. that the reform was "discovering the discovered". In the words of one school principal:

It's really important to explain the term *kompetence*, its history, so that people at schools realize that it is no scarecrow, that it is de facto nothing new, that it is

something that has always been done here and it has just been named in line with European, perhaps world norms.

The 'key competencies' and 'attainment standards' were expected to lead teachers to new instructional practices grounded in activities that would actively engage students and allow them to learn by doing rather than only passively building knowledge. However, teachers reported that the expectations of new teaching practices were not embedded in the reform, only implied by it and therefore the idea can be easily missed. In David's account:

Methods and teaching forms – that's really not part of it [the reform]. We can't put it in the school curriculum because if we did, then we would be forcing everybody to use the same practices and since we do not agree on such things, it cannot be embedded in any document. So it's more or less just up to me.

Similarly, Helena, to her dismay, felt that instructional practices were marginally addressed by the policy and as such stood at the periphery of her colleagues' attention. In her own words:

So we reworked the school curriculum but no one really sees it connected to teaching methods...The teaching methods part is not there at all, which is completely wrong because then it will really be only formal...When I ask colleagues about methods, they say 'Methods? What do you mean?'...When I thought about how it is going to change, I think that without changing methods, nothing will change. And the methods, that's solely up to me what I am going to do and it will not be reflected anywhere, no one will ask me for it or evaluate if I do this or that...

Key competencies thus fell largely short of impelling teachers to pay attention to teaching methods. Although in the new school curricula, teachers had to produce brief lists (perhaps a few bullet points) outlining practices -- so called 'educational strategies' -- they would utilize in instruction, they were not asked to go into details. These strategies were the bridges between content and competencies but since the requirement was to list them for the subject as a whole, not for individual themes or topics and not for individual attainment standards, the descriptions were vague. It is premature to speculate about the degree to which teachers may be led by the reform to learn about non-traditional teaching methods that the reform is proclaimed to stimulate, and how they may be inclined to use them because during the time of the interviews, teachers were only writing their school curricula. In David's words: "it is still in the stage of ideas." The interview data suggest that teachers anticipated some change in their teaching methods but overall, they tended to view the reform as reaffirmation of their existing practices. As Marek, a history teacher put it:

When you work with the competencies, no one is trying to use competencies or activities that have not already been used here. So usually, someone is responsible for competencies in a particular subject, takes the competencies and says 'I develop this competency this way...' It's always pulled from things that we have been doing. So it's more about trying to find out what we have been doing and showing it to others...for me, the benefit is then that I realize what I have been doing or what I have not been doing but it's definitely not something completely new.

The survey data also showed that teachers were less inclined to perceive the reform an effort to significantly change things and instead view it as a way to explicitly describe the work they had been accustomed to doing. 58% teachers agreed with the statement that the reform was an effort to capture things that are commonly being done and the same proportion of teachers did not view the reform as significantly changing existing conceptions of education and educational goals.

**Table 9 - Teachers' perceptions of the novelty of the reform**

<i>The reform represents an effort to capture what is commonly done</i>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
2.7	29.7	9.5	18.9	32.4	6.8

(%)

**Table 10 - Teachers' perceptions about the concept of the reform**

<i>The reform is significantly changing the existing conception of education and educational goals</i>					
Strongly disagree	Disagree	Not sure, probably not	Not sure, probably yes	Agree	Strongly agree
2.6	42.1	13.2	11.8	27.6	2.6

(%)

There are several ways to interpret teachers' tendency to view key competencies as a familiar practice and the reform as a whole as a reinstatement of existing practices. Implementation studies drawing on cognitive psychology (e.g. Spillane et al, 2002; Spillane, 2004) show that people tend to notice things that look familiar and ignore new aspects of reforms as they reinterpret new ideas to fit their existing cognitive frames. It is likely that teachers' notion of the reform as "discovering the discovered" was a product of such sense-making processes. There is also a possibility that some of the surveyed teachers had already been engaged in instructional practices that the reform tried to stimulate. The schools entered the pilot project voluntarily, motivated by various reasons – some of the pilot schools (but not all) were non-traditional, already trying to do

different things.

From the pilot schools included in this study, one counted among the more progressive schools in the region with a reputation of a reform-minded school where many innovative projects had been initiated. Teachers and principals in the other two pilot schools described their schools as traditional. The other two schools entered the pilot as a result of their principals' decision. One of the principals wished to see some change taking place in his school and felt that an outside force may be more effective in exerting that change. This view may appear puzzling to U.S. researchers who often see effective change as coming from the inside. But in the context of Czech education where for years, teachers and schools have been accustomed to follow state guidance and discourage from exerting own initiative, this view makes sense. The second school's principal explained that she did not like to see her teachers complain about the existing content outlines so she decided that subscribing her school to the pilot would challenge the teachers who would find out by their own experience that curriculum design, negotiations about time allocations, and selection of content is a difficult but perhaps a worthwhile task.

In the context of the three different schools, similar statements may then be interpreted in different ways. Pavel, a social science teacher from the more progressive high school, said:

We have already been doing things that are included in the reform. For example, we have paid attention to working with texts, or at least I have personally been doing it so for us it's more... that we further wrap around what we have been doing e.g. by adding an extra hour of instructional time here and there so that we

can do it even better.

Given the reform-oriented nature of his school, it is quite possible that in this school the reform implementation enabled teachers to institutionalize their existing practices. On the other hand, when teachers in the other two more traditional schools expressed the notion of the reform as a reaffirmation of their existing practices, it could be argued that they were not seeing the new aspects of the reform because they were focused on the familiar that "breeds attention" (Spillane, 2004, p.76).

#### The rules of the reform

The conceptual shift in teachers' thinking about content and in developing new instructional practices that the reform assumed would happen was further obscured by the formal and structural requirements imposed on the development of school curriculum. Teachers were maneuvering the curriculum writing within delineated boundaries. The document they produced had to meet a number of requirements in terms of structure, content, and form. Each school had to describe its characteristics, equipment, staffing, admission process, organization of high school exit examinations and other things, including a self-evaluation report. The document also had to show how 'cross-cutting' themes had been diffused across the curriculum, and list 'educational strategies' that would lead to the development of the five key competencies. All of these components constituted the more general, introductory part of the school curriculum, which typically fell to the hands of school coordinators and the 4-5-member school leadership teams.

The main portion of individual teachers' work consisted in writing curricula for their subjects. In each school, roughly 12-15 teachers were involved in the curriculum writing, with each subject being represented by one teacher. The teachers had to provide

general description of their subject and include 'educational strategies' that they will use to teach the subject. The general descriptions were typically followed with a table showing the organization of content, attainment standards, and cross-curricular themes in three or four columns. Teachers reported spending countless hours on the job. They were doing the work on top of their regular teaching loads, which meant that many of their weekends and evenings were sacrificed for the school curriculum writing. The Institute collected teachers' drafts of the curricula at various stages of work and the employees of the Institute commented on them before sending them back to the schools. Teachers understood that they had to follow a certain structure but at times, they were frustrated because they did not feel the rules were clear from the onset and they changed on several occasions. Katka's quote exemplifies views that other teachers also voiced:

Formal things that kept changing, that bothered me... We put the content into tables, first they told us what these tables would look like, then it changed and it changed twice or three times so whoever was giving us the task did not have things clear. And only when we finished something, they commented on it and gave us instructions and we had to change it all. Had they given it to us beforehand, we could have saved a lot of time.

Furthermore, teachers felt that some of the rules were too artificial and constraining.

For example, Monika, a Czech language and literature teacher commented:

The cross-cutting themes particularly bother me. It bothers me that something that I think I do automatically, suddenly I have to emphasize that I do it...that I have to write in the curriculum that I am covering this topic and next to it write that it develops fundamental skills for cultural understanding...I feel more constrained



than by the existing content outlines.

Similarly, Helena also viewed the requirement to identify a cross-cutting theme and match it with a topic as somewhat arbitrary. She also further talked about other requirements for the structure and form of the curriculum that bothered her:

For example when I cover the Hussites, I am supposed to mention something about patriotism...but a teacher is usually an educated person...and knows to mention such things without having them written down next to a specific topic...It was almost funny, and it bothered us quite a bit, how they were insisting on the form. The lady [at the Institute] who read through my piece on history, well I assume she must have been a historian but she did not write a single comment on the history content...she checked if I had the cross-cutting themes in the right places and things like that, the formal aspect. Or they corrected my verbs a lot.

In efforts to steer teachers towards writing procedural attainment standards, the Institute gradually developed a list of verbs that teachers were asked to avoid. Several teachers spoke about that. Katka's quote exemplifies that:

Often, it was about verbs used in the attainment standards, because they did not want to see passive verbs...I felt that later they did not really look at what was written but how things were written. For example, in one of the drafts that I sent to Prague for evaluation, I completely skipped literature for the 3<sup>rd</sup> year students. The entire content was missing but they saw that I used the verb "know" and "can image" and were vehemently against these two verbs but no one noticed that the literature content was missing.

The Institute's insistence on form and its lenience about content were somewhat understandable. As the Institute's representatives explained, they wanted to make sure that the 16 pilot school curricula could serve as an example for other schools so every word was considered. But at the same time, they did not want to limit teachers' creativity in assembling the curricula and outlining the content so they focused primarily on surface characteristics of the documents the schools had submitted.

### Capacity and support

In writing the school curricula, teachers relied primarily on their common sense, their knowledge and experiences. In some of the pilot schools, teachers could count on some support from their colleagues and leaders; in others they were on their own. In the more progressive school, the interviewed teachers described their work on the school curricula as a collaborative, team effort and they expressed greater levels of satisfaction with the final product. In contrast to that, teachers in one of the more traditional schools expressed largely disappointment, even disillusionment with their work, perhaps connected to the fact that they felt unsupported and isolated in their work. But more importantly, where there was little information and experience sharing, it was apparent that the needed capacity to initiate changes was limited. Helena criticized herself for not being able to significantly change what she felt needed to change: "We spent an enormous time with it and the effect, I would say, is not really there... It's content outlines, just like they were before, only now they are in a table." She continued: "Perhaps, I am not creative enough, I don't know but I could not come up with anything new. Maybe it is because I have taught history for x years this way so it may have

prevented me from looking at it from a new angle. Again, I could not think of anything but chronological history. And I feel so disappointed with that".

Helena's quote illustrates how a desire to change things met with the reality of limited capacity. Most of the interviewed teachers had limited exposure to alternative education models that would allow them to confront their existing practices with different ones. They were fishing for ideas wherever they could and their access to information was highly variable. The Institute for Research in Education worked closely with schools to ensure that teachers understood the requirements of the mandate but deep conceptual, subject specific conversations did not appear to be on the agenda. There was an implicit expectation that the guidelines were in the Frameworks and teachers' job was to find their own way of executing them.

The Institute tried to help its pilot schools as much as it could but its capacities were also limited. With a handful of employees, the Institute faced constraints in terms of staff, but also funds, and to some degree also expertise. The reform concepts were novel for everyone -- the Institute's employees were trying to learn the reform as much as the teachers while simultaneously teaching it. The Institute organized a series of meetings to help school coordinators and teachers construe meanings of the reform. According to teachers' reports, these meetings were helpful and provided some space for discussions but overall, there was little time to delve deep into key competencies, educational strategies and concepts that were underlying traditional assumptions about teaching and learning in terms of concrete subjects.

Pavel, a social science teacher, described his impression of the entire pilot and school curriculum writing with the expression "sewn with a hot needle". In Czech, this

refers to instances where things are rushed. In a similar vein, other teachers commented that the two or three subject specific one-day meetings that took place in Prague during the year of the curriculum writing were helpful but insufficient. They allowed them to make sense of some of the terminology and develop a better understanding of the requirements of the mandate of school curriculum production. But they only scratched the surface of the possibilities that the reform could offer. In Helena's account of the meeting in which she participated:

It was not a wasted day. They said what the goal of the meeting was, what they wanted to show, distributed some materials and presented information on a data projector -- that was all good. But there was little space for discussion or for communication from us in their direction. It was more like they quickly needed to explain something, what we needed to do, so we listened, then there would be 30 minutes for questions and that was it. So my overall feeling was a lack of time. It was all rushed.

The Institute developed a closed web portal that facilitated dissemination of information and information exchange among the pilot schools. Teachers praised the portal as a good resource and a bank of materials that had been distributed in the meetings. The Institute had hoped that the portal would also facilitate exchange of experiences and information sharing between pilot schools' teachers but teachers reported that this happened only to a limited degree. "The discussions weren't as lively as they could have been", perhaps because teachers were overwhelmed with the many competing demands they had to meet, and they had little time to do more.

## Professional development

Teachers generally expressed a sense of skepticism towards professional development, and in several cases gave up on professional development altogether. For example, Pavel did not try to participate in any professional development activities because his past experiences had been disappointing and discouraging: "I have experienced several such trainings and perhaps one out of five was worthwhile, the rest was a waste of time". Similarly Monika commented: "Last year, I attended a series of lectures on literature...I learned some 10% new things, the rest I had already known". Professional development was rarely a source of ideas and inspiration for teachers. When I asked David, Monika's colleague, where he was getting new ideas, he responded: "By thinking". Teachers generally criticized professional development for being focused on content knowledge, which tends to be the arena where Czech teachers need least help. Professional development embedded in concrete curriculum that would offer practical advice seemed to be less common. In the words of one of the teachers:

I feel that there is a great deficiency in that when there is a teacher training, it tends to be in content...What is absolutely missing are some demonstration lessons. It would be great if there were programs where they could present some ideas in a demonstration lesson.

Similarly, another teacher from a different school said:

For example, if they sent us a videotape with a demonstration lesson, then we could analyze it, talk about what we like, what one could do etc. That would be useful...If they could give us some ideas. But that's absolutely missing here. At

the trainings, it's pure theory. But at least in foreign languages there are workshops...

Clearly, there is a need for professional development that would introduce teachers to new ideas and alternative ways of teaching their specific subject matter. Some non-profit educational associations provide that kind of professional development but the reform as a whole, and certainly the pilot, has not been supported with a systematic and coherent set of learning opportunities embedded in concrete curricular areas and geared towards providing teachers with conceptual help in instructional practices. In 2006-2007, shortly before the school curriculum writing mandate came into effect for primary schools, the state launched a national professional development project titled "Coordinator". This project was intended for representatives of primary schools who would assume the role of school coordinators, and guided them through the process of forming a curriculum writing team and developing school curricula. Without sufficient knowledge about the project, one can only speculate from the title of the project that it did not target subject-specific matters, and that teachers' need for practical content-based seminars and workshops connected to the reform ideas has not been systematically addressed.

Reflective feedback, learning the reform and learning from the reform

The Institute guided teachers' curriculum writing by providing them with feedback on individual sections of the curriculum they had written. However, as mentioned earlier, in teachers' accounts, the feedback pointed primarily to formal aspects of the curriculum, giving them few ideas on the substantive elements of the curriculum. Judging from a distance, both the Institute and the teachers were somewhat cautious and

uncertain about the degree of change that was expected. The Institute's approach was to interfere as little as possible so that teachers' creative potential would not be bound. But in the absence of alternative models of curriculum, teachers seemed at a loss. Part of the rationale of schools' curriculum writing was that teachers' engagement with curriculum writing would lead to teachers' self-reflection, which would serve as a starting point for change. While the overwhelming majority of teachers (85%) reported in the survey that the reform made them think more about their existing practices, they were lacking reference points that would allow them to confront their thoughts and compare their existing practices with an alternative.

Scholarly literature on restructuring speaks of the importance of initial dissonance as a trigger to change (Spillane et al., 2002). In order to change, people must first recognize their existing beliefs and practices as problematic through experiencing a sense of positive dissonance that would inspire them to explore in more depth another practice and learn from it. The implementation seemed to have fallen short on creating conditions and learning opportunities that would foster this positive sense of dissonance. In the absence of models and concrete examples of alternative approaches to curriculum and teaching, there were few opportunities for teachers to encounter something different and confront their practices with an alternative.

In cases where teachers did encounter a non-traditional practice, the opportunities to explore the practice in greater depth were sometimes missed. For example, at the conclusion of the curriculum writing in the end of the academic year, one of the pilot schools organized an all-staff meeting that started with a brief overview of the work teachers had done on the curriculum, and continued with a set of mini-workshops. The

whole staff was split into several groups that received a demonstration lesson where some of the teachers shared their non-traditional instructional practices. These included various kinds of activities such as word games or project-oriented lessons. However, the agenda of the meeting did not set aside any time for a discussion on the methods that teachers had witnessed in these mini-lessons. In the end of the last activity, everyone packed up and left, without a closure and an opportunity to discuss the benefits and potential use of the demonstrated activities.

At the same time, the experience with the curriculum writing allowed teachers to judge their existing learning opportunities and sparked their interest to learn more and in new ways. For example, several teachers expressed a need for learning opportunities that would include experience sharing and conversations with colleagues about teaching and learning. Such things perhaps happen informally in teachers' home rooms and in the halls but several interviewed teachers voiced a need for more structured opportunities to learn. Helena said: "I had hoped, but I know this is quite impossible, that let's say once a month we would get a day off and go to another school...I would go somewhere, sit down with the history teacher there and spend the day with him/her". In a somewhat similar vein, Jaroslav, a school curriculum coordinator, spoke about the need to bring teachers together and facilitate discussions about their practices:

It has become clear that we will need to have meetings and talk about how we teach, what we do, and remove the taboo of examining colleagues' work...so that we can say -- h/she makes some mistakes but it doesn't matter because I also make mistakes. To see how one's colleagues deal with mistakes can be interesting and people will shake off the fear of being uncovered for not being perfect...and



open up, less afraid to say 'I am not teaching this very well but this other thing I do well and I want to share it'.

Meetings of the kind that Helena and Jaroslav were envisioning for the future are not common in Czech schools. It does not mean that teachers do not talk about their practices with one another, but such talks are informal, taking place in teachers' homerooms or in the halls. What Helena and Jaroslav called for were more institutionalized experiences of sharing practices. Schools typically have regular staff meetings but these tend to be used to solve salient issues that arise and discuss upcoming events. Teachers within a department usually meet when they need to solve a problem or decide on textbooks. The culture of reflective practice and development of shared meanings through discussions about conceptual matters is new but as the quotes illustrate, people are beginning to discover it and recognize its value.

Aside from a growing awareness of a need to develop a reflective practice and learning communities, some teachers also learned that the reform itself and the Frameworks in particular need fundamental revisions. Martin, a history teacher, said:

I feel that the Frameworks need to be conceptually reworked. Not in the dimension of the school curriculum but in the dimension of the Frameworks. I did not realize this until I was fully absorbed in the curriculum writing. When I compared the Frameworks for history in primary education with the academic high schools, I realized that the attainment standards grow more demanding but there is nothing else. It does not really develop the students...the history should be completely redone so that it allows students to build on what they know from primary schools, but build on it differently. For example, let's not teach

emigration after the battle of the White Mountain but let's teach emigration as a process that has taken place since ancient times until today. This would be a fundamental and necessary change...and probably professional historians should take charge in determining the themes.

#### School curriculum writing – a whole school affair?

In each pilot school, the curriculum writing was divided among a team of 12-17 teachers so that each subject would have a representation. There was an expectation that each teacher would cooperate with colleagues from his/her department who would contribute with ideas, advice, and feedback. Largely, this type of cooperation did not occur. The curriculum development was a very time-consuming task and there was little to motivate other teachers to become engaged. Leading teachers were receiving a modest remuneration from funds that the Institute for Research in Education acquired from the European structural funds but other teachers had no incentives to participate.

Additionally, teachers in pilot schools did not unanimously support the reform efforts. The teaching staffs were somewhat divided on the issue of the curricular reform with some teachers welcoming it and others resisting it or ignoring it. Some of the teachers on the curriculum writing teams participated in the policy implementation because their colleagues would not and no one else was willing to take on the task. The one high school among the three that had a reputation of a progressive school was a slightly different case. It was the largest of the three pilot schools with close to 60 teachers (compared to 30-40 in an average-sized Czech academic high school) and thus had a large enough pool of candidates for the curriculum writing team. Curriculum writing then was distributed among people who wanted to be a part of the process. In

addition, the school principal was an avid supporter of the reform ideas and according to teachers, an effective communicator who regularly disseminated information and kept teachers in the know. Overall, there was a stronger sense of cooperation between the curriculum writing team members in this school than in the other two pilot schools. But teachers in this school pointed to another phenomenon – they saw a gulf opening between the teachers who were engaged in the curriculum writing and those who were not. The following quote illustrates the sense of division:

The curriculum writing team now knows a lot more than the rest of the teachers...And at the moment, it is divided... "thanks to" the team members. But I have to say that we are all really tired now at the end of the year because it was a tremendous amount of work, extra work that one could only do on the weekends or holidays. But it is also true that the other side did not show much interest to learn about what we have done. When we start teaching from the curriculum next year, things might change in that respect...people will have to be interested.

Teachers in the other two more traditional high schools differed in how they viewed collaboration within their school. In both cases, they expressed views that the reform at its existing stage was a matter of those who were directly engaged in it and the rest of the teaching staff was largely not involved. But different levels of support were apparent. In one of the two high schools, teachers felt isolated in their work and unsupported by the leaders. They reported that the school curriculum coordinator was too busy with other duties and did not communicate with the curriculum writing team effectively. Teachers would learn what needed to get done in the last minute and this, coupled with the lack of general support from the leadership annoyed them. There were

no regularly scheduled meetings that would bring the teachers together and facilitate information exchange between departments. Furthermore, the teachers who were in charge of the curriculum writing for their subject could not find much help from other colleagues who were either busy writing curriculum for another subject or who did not respond to calls for help and wished to stay uninvolved. One of the teachers in this school described her unsuccessful efforts to generate feedback from colleagues:

I don't think that other teachers in our school carefully read through the Frameworks and thought about them. I wanted them to help me with the verbs in the curriculum so I distributed my draft but my colleagues seemed to have been surprised at being asked to do something and did not respond so I had to do it on my own. I don't know if it is because I failed to properly explain to them what I needed or if it was simply easier for me not to bother and get it done by myself.

The situation in the other pilot school, which was comparable in size and conditions, was more optimistic. The curriculum coordinator was enthusiastic about the work and energized the team. Although this school was located in a small town, remote from larger cities where professional development activities were easily accessible, the school coordinator made the effort to participate in various workshops and seminars in the capital and brought back information and ideas to share with his colleagues. Still, the curriculum writing rested on individuals who were not receiving much help from their colleagues for similar reasons as in the other pilot school.

Overall, teachers in all three schools reported that the reform generated more talk and that it has pushed them to begin developing team-working skills. Efforts to reduce content and diffuse cross-cutting themes throughout the curriculum pushed teachers to

talk across subject boundaries to determine how they might divide the work. They were able to identify points where the same content was covered in different subjects, and subsequently determine how they might reduce duplication. For example, history, which is traditionally taught chronologically, begins with the evolution of man. As Helena was trying to find content areas that she could trim, she talked to her colleague who was writing curriculum for biology and they agreed to keep the topic primarily in biology:

We talked with my colleague who teaches biology and established that for example for the prehistoric times, I don't need to cover the individual stages of human evolution and culture associated with it because he can do that. I will provide him with some background information and he will tell his students where archeological sites can be found etc.

In addition to identifying overlaps and reshuffling content so that teachers would reduce duplication but also strengthen inter-subject connections and incorporate cross-cutting themes, teachers also negotiated about instructional time allocations. In all, the reform sparked discussions and facilitated communication among teachers that hadn't been previously present. Helena's comment echoes what other participants in this study said:

There have been conflicts and arguments but at least something is happening. People are talking. And it has also become clear who wants to do things differently, who doesn't...it changed the relationships a little bit and with some colleagues, it brought us more together. You realize that there are other people who are interested in teaching differently...

The reform as a whole was a positive experience for some and a mixed experience for others. Teachers unanimously agreed that curriculum writing was a tremendous amount of work and in spring 2006 many were relieved that it was finished but they also communicated a sense of accomplishment. At the same time, they acknowledged that the curriculum writing constituted only the first phase of the reform implementation. Many were wondering how their new school curriculum would work in practice the following year when they would begin using it with the first-year students. In the words of one of the teachers:

The reform is only being created. We have completed our school curriculum, which we will enact next year. And I think that it will take some time to achieve a more complete curriculum because we will first need to teach from it to learn what we can or cannot do.

Despite all the difficulties of the curriculum writing process, small incentives and scant opportunities to learn about alternative ways to approach content and instruction, teachers took the task of curriculum writing seriously and did a remarkable job. As Jaroslav, one of the school coordinators said:

When I looked at the school curriculum we wrote, I felt that many things could be done better but at the same time I was very proud of my colleagues and the work they did. The great amount of work is apparent in it. The overall impression is positive, the people are really very capable.

### Summary

The curricular reform is intended to improve quality of education in Czech schools but it is not clear what that means. Policy makers did not articulate desired or

intended outcomes and the reform's goals are thus implied by vague terms, leaving interpretation and meaning-making to schools and individual teachers. The reform is expected to spur change in three key areas: 1) increased school and teacher autonomy in curricular matters is expected to bring about change in content, allowing schools to adjust their curriculum to their local needs; 2) key competencies are expected to alter the existing content-driven educational model, change the way teachers think about their teaching and stimulate new teaching practices; 3) cross-curricular themes and emphasis on connections between subjects are expected to encourage teachers to cooperate more closely with one another.

By devolving a degree of curricular decision-making authority to schools, the state is sending a message that the problem of Czech education lies in school governance and the old highly prescriptive national curriculum with its detailed content outlines. Many teachers certainly consider the existing (old) curriculum problematic because it is overloaded with factual information and long lists of topics that realistically can hardly be covered in a given time frame. But at the same time, they exercise a degree of autonomy and determine how closely they will adhere to the national curriculum. Although by default, teaching and learning is controlled by the national curriculum, there are other control mechanisms in the system and they appear to exert even stronger influence on what gets taught, namely high stakes entrance examinations. Without addressing change in these surrogate mechanisms of control, the curricular reform is limited in the possibility of change it can generate. Evidence from pilot schools suggests that the new autonomy allowed teachers to fine-tune their practices, reshuffle content and adjust instructional time allocations for individual subjects but teachers largely reported

that they did not feel they could institute significant changes that would go beyond trimming the existing content and marginal adjustments. Traditional organization of subjects prevailed in all three pilot high schools and integrating content into new subjects or disappearance of content feared by the Association of History Teachers (ASUD) did not occur. In one of the three pilot schools, teachers created a new course integrating history and geography and offered it as an elective. Aside from this experiment, subjects stayed within their traditional boundaries.

Key competencies were expected to push teachers' thinking about teaching and learning in new directions but there was little evidence that this was occurring. Teachers tended to interpret key competencies as an old practice disguised in new words. Teachers' curriculum writing was guided by existing content and new attainment standards, which served as a proxy to the key competencies. But even as a proxy, there was not a clear connection between the attainment standards and the key competencies, and key competencies remained obfuscated in the reform. The expectation that focusing on key competencies or attainment standards will stimulate change in how teachers teach appears grossly overestimated – teachers reported that teaching practices and methods do not constitute a part of the reform. It is however pre-mature to pass any judgment on whether new curricula will have implications for teaching practices because at the time of the data collection, the reform's enactment was in the phase of curriculum writing.

The Frameworks' assumption that teachers will collaborate as they work to diffuse cross-curricular themes throughout the curricula and strengthen inter-subject connections seemed to hold. Teachers on the curriculum writing teams had to collaborate with one another, at least to some extent. In some cases, they reported more collaboration with



teachers across subjects than within subjects, where individuals wrote the curricula with little help from their colleagues except for the more progressive high school where teachers within the same departments gave each other advice and reviewed each other's work. The overall task did bring the members of the curriculum writing teams closer together, allowing them to learn more about their colleagues' work.

The dynamics of the curriculum writing differed from one school to another but according to teachers' reports, teachers who were not directly involved in the curriculum writing largely stayed out of the entire process. However, in all schools, the reform sparked discussions and teachers reported increased talk about the reform. This could be viewed as a positive development signaling that professional communities might begin to form. At the same time, increased teacher talk must be approached with caution and analyzed in terms of its quality rather than the degree to which it occurs. As scholars have pointed out (Fullan, 2001; Smylie & Evan, 2006), professional communities may be effective and their members may collaborate to make breakthroughs in teaching and learning but "when teachers collaborate to reinforce each others' bad or ineffective practices, they end up making matters worse" (Fullan, 2001, p.133).

On the whole, it was remarkable how much work teachers managed to accomplish under the given circumstances, with little capacity and limited support. The Institute for Research in Education provided guidance, which teachers valued and praised. At the same time, teachers' accounts suggested that the support was oriented towards the school successfully meeting the formal requirements of the reform and there were few opportunities for deeper conversations about concepts, actual practices and concrete classroom applications. Teachers were expected to construe meanings of these matters on

their own. According to a high ranking ministerial official, teachers should be able to work independently and figure things out by themselves. In his words:

I think that part of the professionalism of the teaching profession is that one continues to learn on an internal impulse, whether that means participating in workshops...in today's world of information, there are countless sources for self-improvement...and each of us does it in a way. A person who has a cabin and needs to build a wall, although not a laymen...well, many of us do it by searching for information and learning to do it somehow [on our own].

This quote exemplifies a cultural attitude that places high expectations on teachers as individuals who should pursue professional development for their own sake. Although one can perhaps learn to build a wall on his/her own, it is difficult to see a parallel between building a wall and developing a new teaching practice through curriculum writing. One could do the latter if there was a checklist of instructions and sequences to follow, but change in instructional practices is much more complex, particularly when there is a blurred vision of the end product. In an environment where expectations of outcomes have not been articulated beyond the requirement that schools produce their curricula according to given rules, no one quite knows what teachers need to learn. As the last quote suggested, the state official did not feel that the state should assume a responsibility to teach teachers how to do the reform. If that quote is taken as a cultural representation of the state's attitude towards implementation, then it is understandable why so far the reform has not been accompanied by any systematic teacher training that would touch upon conceptual rather than organizational issues.

On the more positive note, the pilot teachers involved in curriculum writing

largely viewed their experience as learning and personal growth. They felt that the reform had pushed them to think about content and their existing practices but in the absence of reference points that would allow them to confront their experiences with an alternative, their self-reflection did not necessarily lead to breakthrough realizations. As the quotes illustrated, some teachers may have realized that they wanted to do things differently but they did not necessarily know how.

The evidence of the enactment of the Frameworks in the three pilot schools presented here suggests that when teachers got engaged in the reform, they felt responsible to do the most they could with the limited capacities they had available, and they worked hard to accomplish the task. The reform carries with it the possibility to tap into teachers' potential but unless there is a coherent and focused guidance embedded in actual practices, teachers' energy and initial enthusiasm may be wasted on producing a document that may have weak links to practice.

## CHAPTER 7: INTERPRETING THE REFORM

### Localized perspective of the reform

This study has chronicled the evolution of a curricular reform in the Czech Republic, spanning the broader policy circles to classroom teachers who are trying to enact the policy in practice. The narrative demonstrates difficulties that a country transitioning from socialism to democracy encounters on its journey to move its education system from a state-controlled model to one where schools and individual teachers have significant decision making authority, and where authority-oriented teaching styles are gradually converted into more student-centered approaches. Through the account of events as they progressed, the narrative offers answers to one of the two overarching questions that this study began with: How has the reform evolved and unfolded the way it has? In connection to a conceptual framework introduced in Chapter One, individual chapters then addressed various aspects of the reform. The framework guided the study through the entire landscape of reform starting with a broader overview of the political, historical, and social context of Czech education (namely the context of Political Era and Education State) and then moving into the arena of the policy process (contexts of influence, text, and practice).

In capturing the trajectory of the curricular policy evolution and its early implementation, a number of new questions emerged. The ideas to reform the curriculum came shortly after the fall of the Communist regime in 1989 but they were ignored for the most part of 1990s. Why did it take so long for the reform to materialize? When the reform ideas resurfaced in the White Paper in 2001, why were they so quickly written

into a policy text that many consider a good starting point that still needs substantial clarifications and revisions? Why is the curriculum being decentralized when no one really opposed the role of the state as the key curriculum developer? Why is the policy text relying on the term "key competencies" when this term is foreign to Czech audiences and difficult to comprehend? To what extent does the reform represent a revolution in Czech schooling as many newspapers proclaimed?

Drawing on the early chapters of this study and on the exploration of the various contexts of policy, this chapter provides a partial explanation for these questions. It is possible to suggest that the curriculum reform took a long time to develop because there was no burning need in the Czech society to overhaul the education system in a manner that the reform advocates. When the new political era replaced the communist regime and the society began its transformation on all levels of socio-political life, education represented a staple of stability that many desired to preserve in the midst of all other changes that were sweeping over the society. The schooling system had been firmly in place for centuries, and results from international and comparative education studies suggested that as a whole it had worked relatively well. Naturally, in the aftermath of the events of 1989, many significant changes have occurred but they were primarily structural and largely did not concern the underlying concepts and premises on which the system was built. The culture of teaching and learning in Czech schools and the content-driven education model remained remarkably robust and well preserved.

Czech history has taught the society to leave matters of education to the state. As a result, Czechs do not tend to be very knowledgeable about education issues and education is not a hot topic in political debates with the exception of partial issues such as

the possibility of introducing tuition to public universities. Many Czechs are proud of the education system and do not see a need to change it radically. Educators typically acknowledge that Czech students are overloaded with unnecessary facts and knowledge of trivia at the expense of developing skills that they can apply in everyday life, and in that sense there is demand for change. The public may be willing to sacrifice some content but only a minority of reform-minded individuals advocate teaching practices different from the traditional algorithm of teaching that prevails in Czech schools and constitutes what Tyack (1995) has called 'the grammar of schooling'. It is quite common to hear Czechs say that school should continue to be an affair where students learn discipline and drill, and where too much democracy and fun – terms commonly associated with student-centered approaches to instruction -- might be threatening to the perceived quality of education.

Under these circumstances, the minority of researchers, reform-minded individuals, and associations who called for a radical change experienced great challenges in moving their ideas on the policy agenda. The various alternative education movements, groups, and individuals advocating for a change did not have sufficient political leverage to push reform proposals through, and the curricular reform had to wait until the political environment was more favorable to it. Chapter Four shifted gears from the broader contexts and in connection to the conceptual framework moved its attention to the policy itself and the process of how it emerged. It traced evolution of the reform in time, illustrating various political struggles that buried the idea of the curriculum reform under the proposal to reform high school exit examinations that reached the policy agenda in the mid 1990s. Times became more favorable to the curriculum reform again in

early 2000 when the proposal to reform curriculum re-emerged with the publication of the White Paper in 2001, gradually making its way to the new Education Act. In the first bill of the Act, the curricular reform occupied a marginal position and the high school exit examination reform took prominence. When the bill was not passed, a new window of opportunity opened for the reformers to expand the conceptual ideas of the curricular reform and include the reform principles in the subsequent draft of the bill, which was written into a law in 2004. As Kingdon wrote in his seminal work on agendas, alternatives and public policies (1995), windows of opportunities open for a short time and policy makers have to act fast. The window of opportunity for the curricular reform opened with the development of an overarching strategy for Czech education, and subsequently, with the drafts of the new education bill that preceded Czech Republic's integration into the EU. Reformers took only a couple of years to develop the new Frameworks that stand at the core of the reform, and perhaps that explains why the curricular reform as a whole appears underdeveloped and underspecified.

The descriptions of contexts of Political Eras and Education State provided a way into the study and clues that partially explain why different elements of the system have evolved in ways that may appear puzzling to an outsider. For example, the history helps to understand the peculiar situation of the current assessment system where there are at least two different points of assessment at the end of secondary education that do not line up to one another. The traditional high school exit examinations have over 150 years long history and the exams continue to be developed on the local level of individual school buildings. Universities, colleges, and even departments within them have also been accustomed to devising their own assessment mechanisms that translate into entrance

examinations. The virtually unrestricted academic freedom that universities gained after 1989 further reinforced the practice of developing tests and exams independently of what happens in secondary schools. In addition, a third assessment mechanism is currently being devised – standardized state high school exit examinations, which at the time of writing did not have a clear concept of what other mechanisms they would align to. The system is holding on to its traditions and at the same time it attempts to modernize. However, the new does not replace the old; instead they coexist.

The story of the curricular reform also illustrates the Czech struggle to break away from the past. This yearning is exemplified in the continuous efforts to decentralize education. The curricular reform follows administrative decentralization with a substantial devolution of powers in curriculum development to the lower levels. If Czech policy makers had been impelled to preserve historical continuity and work with existing institutional structures, they could have utilized established channels of influence, and taken advantage of the state's historical power to set the rules and teachers' traditional compliance to follow the regulations within the latitude of their personal autonomy. With such an approach, the solution to the problem of overloaded and content-driven education could have looked different. For example, it is possible to envision that the state would have devised a new national curriculum, which would reduce the unnecessary content and introduce competency / outcome standards. Teachers, who have been accustomed to following the national curriculum would likely adjust and would not feel threatened or burdened by the additional requirement to design their own school curriculum, which, to many, is a foreign idea for which they have been historically unprepared.

However, the alternative to continue with the traditional way of determining the



curriculum centrally but significantly changing its conception has not been sought as a solution. Why was that the case? There are some obvious answers to this question. Much of what followed after 1989 was a reaction to what had preceded it. The proposed practice, although still in place for the most of 1990s when the curriculum matters continued to be decided centrally, resembled too closely the solutions of the communist regime. In the light of the development of the new political era that began with the regime change in 1989, a more radical change was needed -- such that would dismantle the previous structures. Hence decentralization came naturally as the only conceivable answer. It stood for an effort to effectively restructure the governance in pursuit of greater effectiveness but more importantly, it also functioned as a political instrument and a means to democratizing a regime that for 40 years fell under the rule of a single Party system. Decentralization represented a natural pendulum swing across the post-communist world although it is somewhat ironic because in many other parts of the world, decentralization began to be viewed as a significant contributor to growing disparities and greater inequalities (Watson, 2000). Additionally, as Chapters Four and Five showed, decentralization as the key mechanism of the reform is also closely connected to the international political context where "it is a central plank of major international efforts at restructuring education in transitional, transformation, and restructuring societies" (Watson, 2000, p.48).

Decentralization of curriculum is a new element in Czech education, but the concept of 'key competencies' – a term not previously used in Czech education -- is an even greater novelty. It implies a radical revision of the existing content-driven education model that sharply diverges from the historical paradigm on which Czech education

rested. At the same time, as Chapter Five illustrated in its analysis of the policy as text that the reform (the Frameworks) combines these novelties with old notions of curriculum, namely in its approach to content, although it reduces and revises it in comparison to the old national curriculum. The language of the reform with 'key competencies' at the forefront carries strong traces of international influences while the content sections evoke an air of old familiarity. Localized, historically embedded interpretation falls short here and an additional perspective that transcends the local context and adopts a more holistic, global view is needed. Hence, in interpreting the meaning of the reform, issues of globalization, policy borrowing, and the Czech Republic's accession into the EU become pertinent.

#### A word on globalization

Globalization is a concept that current international and comparative research features prominently. Researchers speak of globalization as a "buzzword" (Hargreaves, 2005; Mebrahtu, Crossley, & Johnson, 2000) or even an epidemic (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Globalization encompasses economic and cultural pressures but it can be much larger than that. In Popkewitz's words, globalization is "an empty signifier whose spaces are filled continually with multiple and differentiated meanings" (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). Whether one thinks of globalization as an economic, political, social or other phenomenon that permeates boundaries of nation states, the idea is irresistible. It implies major change forces that have altered the role of nation states and affected national policy making (Olssen et al., 2004). But globalization also stands for readily available knowledge, information, and sources of inspiration that nations can turn to in search of new directions for their development. Some researchers see globalization as an extension

of world-system theory and continuation of old trends (Clayton, 2004; Olssen et al., 2004); others argue that globalization signals a new era that is breaking away from the past (Stromquist & Monkman, 2000). Above all, it is becoming clear that national entities are increasingly under pressure to look for educational models outside of their national boundaries. Consequently, policy ideas travel and get borrowed with more ease (Steiner-Khamsi, 2004), and imitation becomes an inherent part of the policy game, as neo-institutionalists have predicted.

Numerous studies in comparative education document the worldwide spread of similar ideas. The world culture theory makes an argument that schools around the world are converging towards a universal, global model of schooling (Boli & Ramirez, 1992; Kamens, Meyer, & Benavot, 1996; Ramirez & Boli, 1987). In the view of this theory, nation states strive to change their education systems according to a common set of ideals and principles driven by neo-liberal ideologies (Carnoy, 2000; Daun, 2002) which promote state withdrawal, privatization, and localization (Astiz, Wiseman, & Baker, 2002). There are observable trends in reforms that different countries adopt and these trends call for decentralization, school-based management, accountability, efficiency, and effectiveness among others (Daun, 2002). On the classroom level, there is evidence of increased interest in active learning and learner-centered pedagogy (McEneaney & Meyer, 2000; Meyer & Ramirez, 2000).

In the view of the world culture theory, nation states follow the trends as part of state-building processes and organic adjustments to new economic, social and political circumstances in a globalized world. The world culture theory is concerned primarily with the prominence of ideas that are exchanged, borrowed, and emulated. In contrast,

conflict theory focuses on the participants in the lending and borrowing of policies, and power issues that channel the flow of ideas. Conflict theory emphasizes that distribution of powers and political influence in the world is unequal and national appropriation of globally promoted ideas is less voluntary than the world culture theorists seem to suggest. Conflict theorists view the world polity as divided between the "core" that sets the standards and the "periphery" that follows. Nations that find themselves in the "core" entertain a position of power that allows them to determine the trends and steer educational policies in the weaker "peripheries" via aid agencies, international and transnational organizations, and donors such as the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund (Samoff, 1999; Torres, 2002).

The conflict theory and the world theory views are often regarded as dichotomies but they really complement one another. Each focuses on a different element of global spread of ideas and thus supplies an alternative read and theoretical conceptualization of the evolution of reform movements. Also, in practice, the two perspectives are difficult to separate from one another. Anderson-Levitt and Alimasi (2001) illustrated this in their study of reading instruction in Guinea that set out to explore the role that external (Western) and internal (non-Western) change forces played in the development of the new policy. The study concluded that policy and practice represented a complex blend of various forces and pressures with no clear boundaries between Western and non-Western ideas, and "inside" and "outside" perspectives and change agents.

Undeniably, international and transnational forces have become more prevalent in national policy making, even when the strength and nature of these forces is unclear. Education reforms largely seem to be moving in a common direction, although there are

some alternatives to the global model of schooling (e.g. Paulo Freire's model) and evidence that speaks against the notion of a single world model of schooling (Anderson-Levitt, 2003). Things that may look alike are dissimilar beneath the surface. National governments may adopt similar policies freely or via coercive pressures, but the way they conduct their education is likely to differ in important if subtle respects. Researchers note that despite the strong pressure of global forces and converging national policies, classrooms seem to remain untouched (Carnoy, 2000; McGinn, 1997), official policies differ from enacted policies, and the meanings of global schooling are localized (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Hargreaves, 2005; Mebrahtu et al., 2000).

### The Czech reform interpreted in global terms

#### *World culture theory view*

Applying the theories of globalization to the Czech case draws attention to currently popular trends. More specifically, it provides additional insights about the prominence of decentralization and the concept of 'key competencies' in the Czech curricular reform. Researchers have shown that the world “slouches” towards decentralization (Astiz et al., 2002; Baker & LeTendre, 2005; Daun, 2004) although previously highly decentralized countries such as the U.S. have been adopting measures that move them closer to the middle with a mix of centralized oversight and decentralized governance (Astiz, 2002). Decentralization in the Czech case has been an expression of democratization but also an example of the power of global trends. The rhetoric of Czech reforms operates with globalization as a strong argument for change. Important policy documents stated that if the Czech Republic intends to become a competitive member of

the globalized world, it must keep abreast with global trends and not fall behind (Czech Ministry of Education, 2001; Education Policy Association, 1999). From the perspective of world culture theorists, decentralization as the backbone of the Czech curricular reform echoes the argument that national policies around the globe converge towards a single model of education or at least apply similar principles of schooling and school governance.

### *Conflict theory view*

The perspective of conflict theory adds an additional layer of interpretation to the concept of key competencies embodied in the Czech curricular reform as it begs for exploration from the view of distribution of political powers and incentives that might have driven Czech policy makers' intentions with the reform. Chapters Four and Five delved into the context of the policy process sketched out in the conceptual framework, and analyzed change forces and influences that helped to shape the policy ideas and their articulation in the policy text -- the new curricular Frameworks. Global forces and transnational policy actors, namely the EU, appear to have exerted strong influence in the reform's gestation. As illustrated by teachers' reactions to the policy and their readings of the text, the key competencies represent a foreign element in Czech education that can be clearly linked to transnational trends.

The economic and social transition that unfolded after the defeat of communism in 1989 has categorized the Czech Republic among so called 'transitologies' (Cowen, 2000). The term refers to places of "more or less simultaneous collapse and reconstruction of (i) state apparatuses (ii) economic and social stratification systems and (iii) the central value system, especially the political value system to offer a new

definition of the future" (Cowen, 2000, p.84). Arguably, in the first half of 2000 when the curricular reform was formulated and written into a law, the Czech Republic still counted as a nation in transition although one could make a case that the process has evolved from transition into transformation, i.e. controlled and voluntary actions with some clarity of where the state is going with them (Mitter, 2003; Watson, 2000). Transitologies around the world have been involved in new state building, identity formation, and establishing of legitimacy. From their position of power and influence, the Czech Republic fell into the category of trend-followers rather than trendsetters. Under those circumstances, global and international influences were more irresistible in transitional democracies than they might have been elsewhere.

Additionally, the Czech Republic has historically held strong affinities towards Western European culture. Forty years of communist dictatorship politically moved Czechs from the Western democratic world to Eastern Europe. Since 1990s, Czechs have tried to "return to Europe" and become an integral part of the larger political economy of the European Union. The experience with the communist dictatorship left the nation humbled, with perceptions of backwardness in relation to the economically advanced West. Czech policy makers understandably turned to the West for inspiration and selectively ushered in principles recommended by the West.

Key competencies undoubtedly represent the new and foreign element of the reform. They were introduced in UNESCO and OECD documents, and later became a prominent characteristic of EU recommendations for the development of member states' education policies. Toward the end of 1990s, the EU had already begun to emerge as a powerful transnational actor that was increasingly putting emphasis on creating a

common European culture of education, with the aim to create Europe as the strongest knowledge-based economy. At the time of the formulation of the new curricular policy, the Czech Republic was a candidate for membership in the EU and so had strong incentives to show to the EU that it was abreast EU educational policies and progressively pursuing the most recent education trends, namely the key competencies. The Czechs translated the term literally even though for Czech audiences, as evidence in this study suggested, the term was difficult to grasp and comprehend. In connection to the conceptual framework, Chapter Six zeroed in on the arena of practice and examined teachers' interpretations of the policy and attitudes to it. While teachers and principals were largely bothered by the term 'key competencies', they were able to get accustomed to the new terminology but it was much less clear to them what practices it implied. In that sense, it is possible to speak of the key competencies as a language in search of a practice or what has become known as the "nominal" implementation of reform.

One might suggest that with the literal translation of the term but fuzzy notions of its meaning, Czech policy makers somewhat hastily appropriated the EU policy recommendations without taking time to properly define them. Brief review of the translation of key competencies in other EU states showed that some countries adopted the EU term 'competencies' but many adapted the terminology to their own languages. Perhaps, this was because in democracies that had more time to evolve and mature, the concept was not as foreign and had some set of ready-made referents. But it is also possible to speculate that the EU recommendations might have become more pronounced in the Czech Republic than in other European countries. In other words, while some other European countries might have adjusted the EU terms to their existing vocabulary and



systems, the Czech Republic appears to be trying to adjust its system, at least on the level of the political rhetoric, to the EU recommendations. The result is a rather curious mix of domestic and foreign, the old and the new.

*Global forces, local meanings*

Finally, focus on global forces and local meanings illuminates the gap that has emerged between the policy intentions and teachers' and principals' interpretation of the reform which was the focal point of exploration of the context of practice presented in Chapter Six. The policy appeased the reformers who had been calling for change since early 1990s; it has also showed international constituents that the Czech Republic was ready to be a member of the EU and to compete in the globalized world. The reform is an ambitious project combining various demands and creating an air of expectations of a large-scale, radical change. Admittedly still in early stages, the reform's implementation has however raised many eyebrows and suggested that things on the ground are likely to differ from the policy's promises. On the policy level, the reform appears modern and gratifies all calls for progress but on the ground level, it allows for non-reform and preservation of old practices.

From early on, critics have pointed to numerous inconsistencies that the curricular reform manifested. For example, Simonová and Straková (2005) analyzed the Frameworks for primary schools and identified several key issues, cautioning against risks that they present. They critiqued the conception and content of the Frameworks, which they saw as a good starting point in need of greater clarity of concepts that the document introduced. In particular they noted that the key competencies and attainment standards have not been sufficiently linked. They predicted that teachers are likely to

focus on attainment standards and content because the Frameworks do not provide any guidance on what teachers should do to develop key competencies in students. Among a number of other things, the researchers also criticized the state officials for underestimating the demands that the reform places on schools and teachers, and for failure to provide sufficient support (i.e. information campaign, professional development, funding, etc). The story of the reform narrated in this study affirmed that these concerns are justified and valid also for the curricular reform at the high school level.

Review of the experience of teachers interviewed in three pilot high schools showed that the language of the reform was problematic, and more than a search for a new practice, it stimulated slight modifications in existing content. One plausible explanation is that teachers did not see the reform as asking them to overturn their existing practices. Rather, they tended to perceive it as a mandate to engage in an additional practice of curriculum writing, which can be interpreted as an extension of their current work. At the time of the study, teachers were only in the phase of writing their school curriculum, not yet teaching it so one may only speculate what impact their new school curriculum might have on their instruction. Nevertheless, interpretation of teachers' initial reactions suggested that instructional practices (i.e. assessment practices, choice of textbooks, teaching methods, activities they devise for teaching specific content, etc.) were outside the scope of the reform requirements and therefore were not receiving much attention.

The reform embodied an underlying assumption that curriculum writing focused on key competencies will lead teachers to re-think their existing practices. But the notion

of key competencies was defined vaguely and it was too fuzzy to guide teachers' planning. Thus, teachers appeared to stay close to their current understandings of education as traditionally content-driven and focused on content requirements, which were also outlined in the new Frameworks. In most cases, teachers reported that while they addressed key competencies in the curriculum they produced, their thinking about instruction continued to be based primarily on the content they had previously taught. In that sense, they were molding the content to fit the key competencies rather than using the key competencies as a starting point and selecting content accordingly.

Teachers who saw the reform as an opportunity for change struggled to identify the kind of change they should strive for. With the reform being severely underspecified in terms of desired outcomes, they were left to discern its meaning on their own. The ministerial Institute for Research in Education, which teachers greatly appreciated, focused on instructions for writing the school curricula and fell short of beyond that. From teachers' and policy actors' reports, the reform architects were learning the reform as much as the teachers who were trying to implement it. That helps explain why pilot-school teachers felt that the directions they received from the Institute for Research in Education, although largely praised, were sometimes unclear, conflicting, and ever-changing. Through trial and error, the Institute and the pilot schools were construing the meaning of the reform on the go. This caused some level of frustration in teachers, who expressed a sense of things being rushed and underdeveloped.

Still, it was remarkable how hard the teachers who were engaged in the curriculum writing tried to fulfill the requirements of the reform under the existing conditions, especially when available resources and capacities were constrained. They

were struggling to juggle the competing demands of their teaching loads and the extra task of curriculum writing with limited opportunities to compare their existing notions and beliefs about teaching and learning with alternative models. On the whole, teachers reported very limited exposure to alternative ways of doing things. In the midst of the many demands the reform placed on them, they were expected to be innovative and creative but also follow specific rules in regard to content and form of the school curriculum they were developing. Teachers' efforts to follow the rules of the reform drained a great deal of their energy and time, leaving them narrow boundaries for innovation. In that light, it is understandable why some teachers described the results of their hard work as a mere conversion of the old curriculum into a new table.

While there is great room for skepticism, there is also space for optimism. Next to those who saw the reform as repetition of old history that has little new to offer, there were teachers who felt the reform was giving them an opportunity to explore new practices and search for new ways to conduct their teaching. The reform undoubtedly sparked new conversations in schools that had not previously existed. In some cases, teachers spoke of conflicts but also of finding alliances and like-minded colleagues. The collective nature of the school curriculum writing brought some teachers closer together, allowing them to develop personal connections and collaborate more closely with others. This can be seen as a step forward although it concerned only a minority of teachers in each school who were willing to participate in the process of curriculum development. Still, these teachers may have the potential to become change agents and spread their enthusiasm to others.

## Prospects for a large-scale change

On the policy level, the reform was proclaimed as a fundamental, sweeping change of Czech education. However, facts on the ground showed that the reform functioned as an invitation directed at a handful of reform-minded teachers who might be interested in doing something different on their own impetus, with few incentives for change. One can assume that if a significant change were to take place, it will likely happen in pilot schools, which were receiving guidance from the ministerial Institute for Research in Education and which were more inclined to change because their leaders wanted to see change or because they employed reform-minded teachers. But in the three pilot schools in this study, there was little evidence that would suggest that the reform would turn into a whole-school affair. Teachers were divided among those who, for various reasons, wanted to participate and those who wished to stay away. Those who did participate were mostly alone in writing the curriculum for their subjects but since their subject was only one part of the whole, they still had to communicate with other teachers to reduce duplication and address cross-curricular themes.

If we think in terms of scaling up the reform to other schools, expectations for change are even lower. The Institute does not have the capacity to provide the same kind of personal guidance to schools that it had provided to the pilot schools. Also, teachers in pilot schools were receiving modest financial rewards channeled through the Institute and to some that made a difference and motivated their involvement. The funds functioned as a minimal financial incentive but pilot-school teachers also knew that their school was modeling something new for other schools, and that also raised the stakes for them and pushed them to do the best they could. However, this will not be the case for other

teachers, who will not receive any financial or other benefits to respond to the demands of the reform.

On the whole, the narrative raises questions about the curricular reform as a solution to the problem of transmission teaching overloaded in content and relying on memorization of factual knowledge. If policy makers intend to initiate change in instructional practices, the curricular reform in its current form may not be the answer to the problem. It brings focus on curriculum development but instructional practices and teaching methods are barely scratched. Although content and instructional practices are or should be married concepts, the traditional emphasis on content over pedagogy in Czech schools allows instructional practices to be lost amid the process.

## **CHAPTER 8: RESEARCH-BASED INTERPRETATION OF THE REFORM**

### **Research perspectives on reform**

The previous chapter summarized the key points from the narrative and interpreted them in the light of history and globalization theories; this chapter will examine the evidence presented in the narrative through the lens of policy research studies. Implementation research has been primarily the domain of English speaking countries, and European scholars who are interested in policy implementation continue to rely on research articles that feature mainly in North American research journals although some work also originated in Europe and particularly in the UK (Schofield, 2008). As for the Czech Republic, education policy research has been a largely unexplored field. In the absence of a policy research tradition, Czech architects of the curricular reform designed implementation steps that primarily rest on local wisdom and experience, although the latter is limited as this sort of reform has not been tried out before. The goal of this chapter is to provide a brief overview of policy research relevant to the arenas addressed in this study and highlight findings from Western policy research that might provide additional insights into the story of the Czech curricular reform.

#### *Brief history of policy implementation research*

Over the past half a century, scholars reporting predominantly in the English-speaking world have produced a body of research that has generated many useful lessons on policy and policy implementation. Research on reforms was initially fueled by the puzzle of repeatedly failing reform efforts and schools' seeming immunity to change regardless how well crafted and well resourced reform policies may have been. The U.S.

in particular has witnessed numerous reforms that were carefully designed and backed by generous funding, and yet they failed to produce desired change. In the view of the early research, the process of policy design and implementation was linear, with policies delineating actions to be taken and subsequently implementers carrying those actions out (or not). In that vein, early policy studies approached policy analysis rationally, viewing it as an independent step separate from implementation, which was generally seen as the next stage that had little to do with the policy design. Respectively, policy analysts searched for flaws either in the policy itself or in the implementation, and they attributed policy failures to issues of poor policy design and management or to resistant implementers who were not willing to execute changes that they were asked to do. Nevertheless it was rather rare to see researchers make any attempts to merge the two arenas.

Since 1960s, and according to some accounts even earlier (Saetren, 2005), North American researchers began to challenge the rational notions that reforms failed due to ill-conceived administration of policy tasks, faulty design, or resistant implementers, and new theories of reform began to emerge. In 1973, Pressman and Wildavsky published "Implementation" - an influential study that stirred up the policy research scene when it laid down the concept of 'implementation' as a new way to conceptualize policy planning (Majone & Wildavsky, 1984). Mainly, it introduced the notion that policy implementation is not a discrete stage of the policy process that can be divorced from policy formulation, but a concept that is deeply intertwined with it. The study defied the linear notion of policy and implementation, and described it as a circular process that begins with policy but as the policy undergoes implementation, the implementation



process affects the original policy and reshapes it. Implementation alters outcomes and leads to re-designing of the original policy. Hence, implementation matters. If policies are to succeed in forging desired goals, policy makers need to consider implementation during the early planning stages as they begin to formulate policy. "To say that implementation should be part of design is to suggest that policy theory be formulated with a view toward its execution" (Majone & Wildavsky, 1984, p.148). This was a key idea and according to McLaughlin, it came as a surprise to policy makers and analysts who at the time had largely overlooked implementation issues (Milbrey Wallin McLaughlin, 1987).

Since Pressman and Wildavsky's study, many other studies have contributed to the advancement of policy research (Bowe, Ball, & Gold, 1992; D. K. Cohen & Hill, 2001; Elmore, 1982; Fullan, 2001; Honig, 2006; Lipsky, 1980; James G. March, 1981; McDonnell, 2004; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987; Spillane et al., 2002), and the field has significantly grown. The discovery of the 'implementation problem' has had various implications for policy makers. It suggested that policy makers think and plan beforehand, and engage in "reasoning through implementation problems *before policy* decisions are firmly made" (Elmore, 1983, p.343). Forward planning of educational change includes a policy design approach with an eye turned to what policy makers want to happen as much as "what cannot happen", i.e. identifying policy constraints that may prevent implementers' from doing what the policy is asking them to do (Majone, 1989; Majone & Wildavsky, 1984). In sum, researchers highlighted the need for policy makers to carefully map the practice field and consider what they learned about the delivery level at the onset of policy formulation.

Today we know considerably more about what works under given circumstances, what does not, and how we can enhance reform's chances to bring about desired change. We also know more about the various factors that affect change, and the complexities and nuances of change processes. Early implementation studies originated primarily in North America but over the years, their regional focus and authorship has broadened, mostly in favor of Europe (Saetren, 2005), although seminal studies in policy implementation are still few in Europe when compared to North America (Schofield, 2008). What follows is a review of key research findings organized into six so called 'propositions' derived from review of major and frequently cited studies. Other ways of "glossing" this literature undoubtedly exist, but the views listed here generally fall within mainstream conventional thinking and bear on the Czech story of reform.

*Proposition one: Clarity, specificity, and policy language matter in implementation*

How reform implementation unfolds depends on many conditions, one of which is the policy itself. Policies that precisely state their goals, purposes, and implementation strategies create less confusion than policies that are vague and ambiguous. However, in reality most policies do not meet such criteria and show ambiguities. Early policy research suggested that perhaps policy makers were not aware of producing vague policy messages and if they worked to increase clarity and consistency of policies they were designing, implementation would likely be more successful. The view was that if policies had "clear, salient, and realistic goals" (Rein, 1983, p.135; Sabatier & Mazmanian, 1980), their chances of achieving desired effects would be enhanced. While in some instances this may be possible, further research has shown that policies are often vague and

ambiguous not by mistake but by design (Baier, March, & Saetren, 1986) and several theories explain why.

Not all policies come into existence with the objective to generate change and for such policies, ambiguity is more important than clarity because it addresses broader audiences. History shows examples of policies with grand goals but few intentions to enact them in practice. Many such policies function symbolically. They are important in influencing people's perceptions and interpretations of current circumstances, and they create expectations of future welfare (Edelman, 1971). In that sense, they act as legitimizing strategies, justifying the workings of the government or the state and showing that these institutions have a purpose (Weiler, 1990b; Weiler & Miyake, 1989). Symbolic policies may also serve to reassure certain constituency groups that their interests are being taken into account and that they are protected, while signaling to others that their interests may be ignored or suppressed (Rein, 1983).

But even policies that target change and are not intended to serve primarily as political symbols often fail to meet the requirement of clarity and specificity. According to Baier et al. (1986), policies are ambiguous by design otherwise they would likely fail to be passed. They emerge out of a political process where many diverse stakeholders negotiate and bargain to reach a compromise (Bardach, 1977). Policies thus reflect work of multiple authors who represent a wide spectrum of views, beliefs and diverse, at time even contradictory, interests (Olssen et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 1997).

Policies matter not only in what they say but also in how they say it. Clarity and specificity are inextricably linked to language that serves as a medium in communicating policy ideas to their audiences. Researchers increasingly point out that policies need to be

viewed as discourses where text and language play an important role in framing policy interpretation (Ball, 1994; Fairclough, 2005; Hill, 2006; Olssen et al., 2004; Taylor et al., 1997). Different linguistic means determine how policies are going to be interpreted and received – for example a policy that draws on professional language that is distant from the language implementers commonly use increases "the opportunity for reinterpretations of policy" (Hill, 2006, p.81).

With ambiguity on many fronts, the complexity of policy implementation further increases. Policy makers may not be able to achieve greater clarity and specificity in the policy itself, but they can reduce ambiguity of policies in supporting documents and materials that form the basis of implementation strategy. As Elmore proposed (1983), policy makers can engage in "backwards mapping" (Elmore, 1983) – a process that leads them to think in terms of concrete actions that they would like to see at the delivery level and envision the problem from the point of view of the people at "the bottom" of the policy system who will implement the policy. Subsequently, they should design appropriate capacity building strategies that will help the implementers make sense of policy messages.

If we accept that ambiguity is part of policy, opportunity for policy clarification then lies in guidelines and guiding strategies that accompany policies. More recent research findings reaffirm that "innovations that are clear and specific in the guidance they provide for implementation and those that also provide technical assistance to support implementation, are the ones that end up being well implemented" (Rowan, Camburn, & Barnes, 2004, p.17). Supporting documents and guidelines should identify targets of change, describe what change would look like after successful implementation,

and also outline specific ideas about the people and the process that should bring about the change (Rowan et al., 2004). Policy language can be clarified if written words are accompanied with concrete, "real-world" examples with substantial explanations (Hill, 2006). Additional examples of clear and specific guidelines that can strengthen policy messages include vignettes, videotapes of model instructional practices, curriculum guides, and model lesson plans among many others. In addition, policy implementation strategies may also incorporate evaluation and ongoing monitoring of the reform efforts (Rowan et al., 2004, p.17).

The Czech curricular reform has been proclaimed as a radical change of the existing system. Schools are expected to change internally and adopt new ways of teaching that will activate students and equip them with dispositions and skills for life-long learning and application of knowledge in real life situations. These goals are grand and many would agree that they present a new vision for the direction of Czech education for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, there are also some problems with them. Namely, they lack the specificity and articulation of desired outcomes that help policies succeed. For reasons addressed in the theory, the desirable specificity of goals was perhaps not feasible – how could have policy makers otherwise reached consensus when both supporters and opponents of the existing system were involved in the decision? And so the solution was subtly political in that goals and purposes were sketched out without any concrete formulation of the expected outcomes. Consequently, pilot schools found themselves in the position of looking for their own definitions of outcomes in school curricula that they had to produce. The directions from the Institute for Research in Education primarily ensured that teachers knew what components needed to be included in the locally

produced curricula but conceptual issues were left largely unaddressed.

Another complication that became evident through mapping the case and that was discussed in Chapter Five was the policy language. Teachers found it highly administrative and to an extent, alienating. Particularly the term 'key competencies' was troubling. Although it was gradually finding its way into the common vocabulary of educators, the term was not domesticated enough and annoyed a number of the teachers interviewed in this study. There may have been good intentions behind the choice of terms -- as one teacher suggested, the new language was perhaps used to evoke the idea that teachers should be looking for new practices. But the reactions of teachers in this study showed that it did not quite work that way. Even when teachers gradually began to embrace the term, key competencies tended to be marginalized in the process of curriculum writing and did not drive the process as policy makers anticipated they would.

The narrative suggests that the findings that led North American researchers highlight the importance of clarity, specificity and policy language in policy implementation are applicable to the Czech case. They may impel Czech policy makers to pay attention to these areas and re-examine them. Elmor's proposal to backward map and first analyze what happens on the delivery level is particularly useful. This study offers a summary of responses from practice, and Czech policy makers might utilize the information presented here to tighten the policy and provide a better guidance to the teachers and principals who are trying to act on it. More specifically, it is evident from the case that teachers would appreciate concrete examples and supporting materials that would allow them to see what focus on key competencies would mean and how it might alter their practice. But perhaps even before creating such guiding and supporting

materials, policy makers might outline the reform's desired outcomes and examples of areas and practices the reform is trying to change. This could be done in cooperation with Czech School Inspection that currently develops criteria to monitor schools' compliance with the new mandate. In sum, the research proposition implies to take a step further and outline criteria that would indicate what might count as the reform's success.

*Proposition two: Choice of policy instruments helps determine policy effects*

Aside from content, goals, and language, policy also frames implementation through choice of implementing agencies (Clune, 1987) and policy instruments (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Policy by default selects implementing agencies (Clune, 1987). For instance, the Czech curricular reform is a mandate requesting schools to produce their curricula locally. As such, it designates schools as the key implementing agencies and the state, which initiated the mandate, as the leading force of the implementation. Automatically, that means that the Czech School Inspection will be involved as the body that has traditionally been in charge of schools' compliance with state regulations.

Policy literature describes mandates as one of several policy instruments used to achieve change. Other instruments include inducements, capacity building, system-change, and hortatory appeals (McDonnell, 2004; McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). Each policy instrument operates on different assumptions, and consequently produces different effects. For example, mandates assume that policy targets have the capacity to comply, and that compliance with a new rule will produce targeted change. Mandates thus have a comparative advantage to other instruments if "there is a clear standard and capacity to comply" (Clune, 1987, p.126). A frequent example of a mandate is a speed limit. To

comply with a speed limit, implementers do not need to develop any specific knowledge or skills; everyone understands what a speed limit means, thus there is no room for construing alternative meanings of the mandate.

Policies that target change in people's beliefs and attitudes are much more complex and unlikely to be achieved solely through mandates. As McLaughlin (1987) wrote, "policy at best can enable outcomes but it cannot mandate what matters" (McLaughlin, 1987, p.173). Relatively recently, scholars have begun paying more attention to policies as rhetorical practices that involve various tools of persuasion. "Policy, practice and research are not simply neutral statements of facts but are attempts to persuade in some shape or form" (Edwards et al., 2004, p.3). Some policies may immediately have the potential to strike a chord with implementers because they connect to implementers' values and beliefs. McDonnell (2004) refers to these policies as hortatory. Hortatory policies have a persuasive appeal that can be strong enough to carry an idea of change to the practice level. That is, if policies are advocating a change congruent with implementers' values and beliefs, implementers are more apt to respond to the policy demands. For policies that do not resonate with implementers' needs, beliefs, and values, the policies may need to employ stronger rhetorical tools. Mandates use the power of coercion to mobilize implementers into required actions but with policies that do not have a strong hortatory appeal, pressure is typically not sufficient to stimulate desired change and it needs to be balanced with sufficient support that would allow implementers to recognize the potential benefits of a new policy (McLaughlin, 1987).

In the Czech case, the policy implementation heavily rests on the mandate and offers only limited support for implementers' efforts to act on the policy. This is perhaps



because mandates have been a common instrument of control and the notion that a central power prescribes what should happen on the practice level has been deeply embedded in the nation's history. The system has institutionalized mechanisms of control, namely the Czech School Inspectorate that has traditionally monitored compliance. However, looking at the reform from a conceptual point of view, compliance with the policy appears to be a weak instrument of change as it does not secure any promise that change will ensue. Schools can write their local curricula without implementing any significant changes in instructional practices and without subjecting themselves to an 'internal school transformation'. The state has devised tools to help schools respond to the mandate as they produce their local curriculum, but building capacity to develop a school curriculum is not necessarily synonymous with building capacity to alter an existing practice. Although curriculum and instruction practices are married concepts, they do not imply that one is automatically going to be connected to the other. Schools may produce curricula that respond to all the requirements of the new Frameworks but it does not mean that teachers will re-conceptualize their instructional practices and teach towards the key competencies.

The deep change implied in the policy has limited hortatory appeal, which speaks to a small audience of school practitioners. As various surveys showed, the Czech society is largely satisfied with the education system and only a relatively small portion of the population sees a need for a fundamental change (Straková et al., 2006). In a survey conducted for this study, a slight majority of pilot-school teachers expressed a desire for change. However, teachers largely did not view the reform as a manifestation of a

fundamental change and tended to interpret the reform as a reaffirmation of existing practices.

In situations where hortatory appeals are not particularly strong, change is especially contingent upon a combination of other policy instruments including inducements (money), capacity building (enhancement of skill and competence), and system-change (re-distribution of authority) (McDonnell & Elmore, 1987). An element of system-change is present in the Czech case – schools have gained more authority to adjust the curriculum to their needs. But capacity to carry out the policy is lacking at all levels of the system. Teachers have been historically unprepared for the task of school curriculum development; funds for education are permanently constrained, teacher salaries remain low, and there are virtually no incentives that would motivate schools and individuals to effect change. The burdens, on the other hand, are quite apparent—curriculum development consumes extra time but there is no promise of a corresponding increase in teachers' low salaries or other benefits. Pilot-school teachers worked on their school curriculum on top of their regular teaching loads and they received a modest remuneration for their efforts that came from a grant. Nevertheless, that is not going to be the case for other schools when the mandate comes into effect and the reform is launched on full scale. An unsupported mandate that emphasizes local production of school curricula in response to new Frameworks thus gives few reasons for optimism that deep and fundamental change inside classrooms will ensue.

The research proposition brings attention to implementing agencies and alternative policy instruments that haven't been much explored in the Czech context, traditionally dominated by mandates. Thus the utility of this proposition lies in its

possibility to inspire policy makers with more alternatives for policy driven change and expand the scope of policy instruments that are currently being deployed.

*Proposition three: Changes in governance may not be sufficient to spur changes in instructional practices*

Nation states have attempted to fix and reform their education through changes in governance. Countries such as the U.S. where schooling has historically been a matter of local control are strengthening the influence of central powers as is evident in the adoption of the federal legislation No Child Left Behind. The movement towards stronger role of the federal government in U.S. education has occurred in response to a high level of decentralization, which is believed to be part of the problem (Cohen & Spillane, 1993). Scholars have argued that high levels of decentralization in decision-making authorities have led to fragmentation, duplication, and inefficiency of the system as a whole. But countries with historically strong central governance such as the Czech Republic are seeking solutions to their problems through decentralization. The traditionally strong central governance in the Czech Republic has been associated with bureaucratic administrative machinery, rigidity, and inefficiency. Change is expected to come with devolution of powers to the local units.

However, decentralization is a double-edged sword. On one hand, it safeguards democracy through distribution of powers among many stakeholders; on the other hand, the dispersed powers are difficult if not impossible to mobilize. The U.S. as an example of an extreme decentralization has demonstrated that in the absence of any central authority to guide and coordinate reform efforts, the system inclines to fragmentation and yields incoherent decisions (Cohen & Spillane, 1993). Decision-making happens on

many levels, which collide with one another and cause original reform intentions to gradually dissipate before they have a chance of reaching any target. Autonomous parts of the system do not know about one another; there is a high level of duplication; policies proliferate, and bureaucracy grows. In this sense, researchers have associated democracy with bureaucracy (Chubb & Moe, 1990), which is rather ironic considering that in the Czech case bureaucracy stands for the powerful central governance and its strong administrative tendencies. Apparently, both centralization and decentralization arguments have parallel justifications and similar rationales for moving in the opposite direction to where they stand.

Research is inconclusive as to whether centralized or decentralized governance is more effective in helping systems change. Decentralization has many faces and each may yield different outcomes but in general, a line of evidence suggests that decentralization falls short of forging fundamental changes in practice (Hannaway & Carnoy, 1993; Tyack & Cuban, 1995; Weiler, 1990a). Additionally, it carries with it an inherent risk of increasing disparities that can lead to greater social inequalities (Watson, 2000). In his study of decentralization, Weiler (1990) drew on comparisons of decentralization cases among different countries, and concluded that decentralization is primarily an exercise of political power (Weiler, 1990a). Through decentralization, states diffuse conflict and reinforce legitimacy of their institutions, showing that they address the criticisms of strong central governance. States can decentralize without losing their control – they may relax curriculum on one hand but by establishing evaluation systems, they re-gain their lost control. "Decentralization can and does contain and isolate the sources of conflict,

but it also tends to fragment reform movements and deprives the system as a whole of the full innovative thrust of proposals for reform and change" (Weiler, 1990a, p.69).

However, decentralization can be promising if it is supported by elements in the system that can awaken its potential. For example, school and teacher autonomy alone is unlikely to foster instructional improvement unless the school educators have a clear vision of the improvement they strive for and skills to achieve it (Hannaway & Carnoy, 1993). According to McGinn, decentralization reforms may have a chance to produce powerful effects if they meet at least two conditions: 1) there must be political support for the proposed changes; and 2) those involved in the reform must be capable of carrying them out (McGinn & Welsh, 1999, p.76).

In the Czech case, decentralization constitutes one of the main pillars of the curricular reform. The early chapters in this study explained why decentralization became a prominent mechanism of change. Clearly, in a system that had been too closely controlled by the central power, the turn to decentralization as a solution to perceived problems was an understandable pendulum swing. But it is questionable whether the 'mandated autonomy', which is what is essentially at the core of the reform, can initiate the deep and fundamental change and internal transformation of schools that has been proclaimed as a goal. When speaking about a fundamental, internal transformation of schools, media and policy makers tend to use attributes that include new teaching styles, different kind of relationship between teachers and students, less rigid teaching environments and more active engagement of students in instruction. This kind of change will require modifications in people's knowledge, beliefs, and values that lie at the core of teachers' instructional practices. Hence, the envisioned change can be seen as a matter of

"re-culturing" of the society that goes far beyond "restructuring", to use Michael Fullan's terms in connection to educational change (Fullan, 2001). However, the Czech curricular reform appears to be set on the assumption that restructuring will lead to re-culturing, and as scholarly literature suggests, that is unlikely.

The decentralization in the Czech case is somewhat paradoxical. With decentralization, policy makers are simultaneously trying to steer and control change but at the same time, they are hesitant to interfere much, leaving the change to teachers and their newly expanded autonomy. Policy makers practically handed down the reform to pilot-school teachers who were asked to devise their own answers to the problem of addressing key competencies while adhering to the formalistic rules that the production of local curricula demands. Involving teachers in the solution has some merit to it. After all who could better address the problem of content coverage and teaching than teachers? But the vagueness of the policy and the restraint of the policy architects to suggest where the change should be going in the name of respecting teachers' and schools' newly expanded autonomy complicated the job of the pilot schools. As a result, for some teachers, the mandated autonomy that the reform provided was highly problematic and rather than unleashing their creative potential, it presented an additional burden and unwarranted responsibility.

The research proposition in regard to decentralization builds an argument for sustained support. Decentralization was important in how Czech education unfolded over the past two decades since the country became a democracy but alone, it is not the answer to existing problems. However, if combined with capacity building and other support mechanisms and instruments of change, it may promise some yields.

*Proposition four: Reforms require attention to policy alignment and coherence*

Alongside the debate of the downsides of decentralization, U.S. researchers have been increasingly interested in systemic reform and policy coherence, which address some of the problems that decentralization presents. Systemic reform assumes that several policies in the system work together to enhance the likelihood that a reform generates desirable change. In other words, if there are more policies pointed toward the same goal, and if they are aligned, there is a better chance of achieving the goal (Clune, 1993). Indeed, empirical evidence from the systemic reform movement showed that centrally coordinated policies guided with a clear vision of change and supported with other instruments aligned to them can have powerful effects (Fuhrman, 1993; Newmann, Smith, Allenworth, & Bryk, 2001; Rowan et al., 2004).

Systemic reform emphasizes policy alignment with other practices, standards, and reforms that circulate in the system. It calls for coherence within the system as a whole, and within instructional practices inside of schools. In Clune's description (1993), systemic reform offers working models and specific guidance to implementers based on research findings of effective practices. Systemic reform demands that goals are established centrally and carried out through decentralized networks. It is coherent and sustainable over time and it is designed with built-in evaluation mechanisms that ensure on-going monitoring of inputs, outcomes, and process. At the school level, systemic reform displays characteristics of instructional coherence, i.e. curriculum, instruction, assessment and learning climate are all coordinated and aligned (Newmann et al., 2001, p.299).

In some ways, the systemic approach resonates with an ecological view of education that some researchers advocate (Sarason, 1996; Sirotnik, 1998; Zhao & Frank, 2003). Educational systems have been likened to eco-systems where different species interact and function together as a unit. Zhao et al. (2003) applied the ecological metaphor to examining implementation of technology in schools and took the view of technology innovations in education as invading species that enter an existing ecosystem. To survive, the invading species have to compete with existing species for resources and space. If they find their niche in the ecosystem, if the conditions of the existing ecosystem are favorable to them, if they don't have predators, and if they survive their competitors, they are likely to stay. In the same vein, if new reforms are addressing salient issues that beg for solutions, if they are not threatened by other reforms, and if their potential for survival is increased through other policies and instruments aligned to the same goal, their chances for implementation and sustainability are improved. The ecological approach suggests that there must be external and internal conditions that will favor a new reform; in addition to that, speaking metaphorically, the systemic view brings attention to the equally important intensity with which policies as invading species unify to attack the system.

Viewing the reform efforts in the Czech Republic from the perspective of systemic reform and coherence brings attention to the institutional and organizational environment in the Czech education system. It is easy to forget that policies co-exist with other policies, and that they mutually influence one another (Ball, 1994). In the Czech Republic, education is under the control of the Ministry of Education but the Ministry itself is a relatively large bureaucracy with a number of semi-independent institutes that



fall under its umbrella. Over the past decade, the institutes have grown and developed reforms and policies independently of one another. The result is that the Center for Reform of High School Exit Examinations (now called Center for Evaluation of Results in Education) began to re-conceptualize high school exit examinations and design new tests before the curricular reform got on the policy agenda. Early pilot tests conceptually followed the old content-based curriculum, thus reinforcing the already deeply engrained notion of content-driven educational model. In contrast to that, the curricular reform was devised as a challenge to the traditional model and its focus on knowledge as the ultimate goal of education. Clearly, the high school exit examination reform and the curricular reform were not aligned to one another and although the high school exit examination reform has been postponed until 2010, it is still not clear to what degree these two reform efforts will be coordinated as two sides of the same issue.

The curricular reform would undoubtedly be strengthened if the high school exit examination reform were clearly linked to it but interviewees in this study nearly unanimously expressed the view that the development of both reform ideas has been running separately from one another. Understandably, there are concerns that the anticipated state high school exit tests may contradict and undermine the curricular reform. If the high school exit tests are linked primarily to the content-driven education model, they may act as a competitor to the curricular reform rather than a mechanism that strengthens it and supports it. The ministerial Institutes in charge of the two reforms allegedly communicate with one another about the reforms, but the link between the two reforms has not been explicitly formed. Respectively, media treated the reforms as two independent and disconnected issues. It is also interesting to note that when the high

school exit examination reform was again postponed in summer 2007, the arguments for the postponement were built around the quality of the tests; concerns about alignment have not surfaced in any discussions reported in the media.

Beside the potential threat that the state high school exit tests pose to the curricular reform if they are not aligned to it, the curricular reform faces other predators in the system. Namely, the practices of secondary school and university entrance examinations. Traditionally placing value on factual knowledge, many of these entrance examinations have been reported to directly contradict the ideas in the curricular reform. At the same time, a shift in the previously unpredictable entrance examinations must be noted. More and more secondary and tertiary schools now turn to the professional testing organization Scio, which can be likened to the American ETS, to purchase tests from them. When the write up of this study was nearing an end, reports surfaced with the news that Scio has developed National Comparative Examinations, which are now earning some recognition among Czech universities. These examinations are general scholastic aptitude tests modeled on ETS tests and their purpose is to aid universities in their admission processes. In 2007, allegedly nine colleges decided to start taking the results of these tests into account and this year, the number increased to nearly fifty (Numerato, 2008; Scio, 1999). With almost fifty colleges in the country subscribing to the idea of utilizing the National Comparative Examinations' results in their 2008 admission procedures, a significant change in the current entrance examinations practices may occur in the foreseeable future. This shift suggests the possibility that the negative effects of entrance examination mechanisms on secondary school curricula might diminish in the future as the extreme demands on factual knowledge will be somewhat controlled

(assuming that the focus of the National Comparative Examinations is on verbal and analytical thinking skills).

*Proposition five: Reforms call for attention to teaching and learning up and down the system*

The research lessons presented so far discussed issues related to policy design, policy instruments, decentralization and systemic reform. But essentially, implementation rests with the delivery level -- with principals, teachers and parents who will translate it into practice and thus determine its meaning. "Their will to implement a policy, as well as their capacity to do so, determines the success of implementation" (McLaughlin, 2006, p.169). Early implementation research paid only marginal attention to the bottom of organizational hierarchies. It was assumed that policies were not working because implementers did not want to implement them or implemented them incorrectly. But over the years, researchers have shown that there is more at stake than implementers' will and compliance.

Lipsky's classic study (1980) illustrated how street-level bureaucrats --the people at the delivery level (e.g. teachers, principals, school administrators)-- do not always act on policy intentions because the constraints of their work conditions lead them to look for ways to minimize conflicts that new policies may present. Street-level bureaucrats chronically face insufficient resources, high demands, and unclear expectations. They exercise a level of discretion that allows them to shape policy and determine its outcomes in practice. To reconcile the various demands of their jobs, they tend to defend and preserve their established behavior patterns, and tweak new policy demands to fit them. Lipsky suggested that organizations might direct implementers to make decisions in line

with intended policy goals if they focus on enhancing implementers' capacity and if they create motivational systems based on incentives, rewards, and staff development which draws on constructive feedback and peer support.

Lipsky touched upon the concept of capacity at the delivery level, namely in terms of motivation and creation of work conditions that favor policy demands, and other researchers further developed it. Scholarly literature spans from economic and sociological studies that examine the importance of incentives, rewards, and external motivation, to studies that investigate the internal impulses and processes, which help practitioners to make sense of new policy demands. In 1983 Lipsky examined the challenges implementers face from the perspective of their organizational settings and job conditions; researchers in the 1990s focused on organizational structures, policy implementation support systems, and ways of teaching and learning policy (Barnes, 2002; Cohen, 1990; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Cohen & Spillane, 1993; Elmore, 1998; Evans, 1996; Fullan, 1994; Spillane & Jennings, 1997). Gradually, interest also increased in investigating how individuals cognitively process new information and make sense of policy demands (Coburn, 2006; Spillane, 2004; Spillane & Jennings, 1997; Spillane et al., 2002).

Cohen's case study of Mrs. Oublier (Cohen, 1990) showed that learning new policies requires attention to how policy makers teach new policies and what support mechanisms are in place. Cohen's Mrs. Oublier thought she had done all she could to learn about a new reform practice to teach mathematics. She carefully studied new mathematics frameworks, read books about new instructional practices implied by the frameworks, and participated in workshops. She proudly demonstrated her lessons to the

researcher as an example of her profound transformation. However, what the researcher saw was a policy enactment that had superficially resembled the practice advocated by the reform but at core was still traditional. The case exemplified how difficult it may be for an individual teacher to build capacity and knowledge in the absence of coherent support mechanisms.

In a later study, Cohen and Hill (2001) set out to examine learning opportunities that were offered to California teachers to help them change their instructional practices in line with reform aiming to change mathematics teaching. Their study showed that not all opportunities to learn were equal; some forms of teaching reform ideas were more successful than others in helping teachers build capacity and change. The researcher stressed the importance of coherence in reform implementation and stated: "Only teachers who learned from concrete, content-specific, and instructionally usable instruments of policy, and who spent at least a modest amount of time at it, reported the sorts of practice that we associated with significant departures from conventional math teaching" (Cohen & Hill, 2001, p.185). These findings are further supported by results from Rowan's empirical study (2004), which showed that teachers learn best when they receive instructional guidance that includes model lessons, curriculum guides, and lesson plans among other things.

Taking a cognitive psychology approach, other researchers wanted to know why implementers often seem to misunderstand, misinterpret, and misconceive policy ideas. Cognitive psychology mapped how human brain filters new information through existing knowledge, values, beliefs, and experiences. New meanings are construed in the light of old knowledge and existing frames of reference. This often means that when individuals

encounter new knowledge, they gravitate towards familiar ideas and information in the new knowledge that can be assimilated with old knowledge. This explains why implementers at times completely overlook new information, and see and adopt only superficial elements of new policies that appear familiar. In cases where the new knowledge significantly differs from an individual's existing knowledge and worldview, and nothing familiar grabs one's attention, new ideas may be completely ignored or rejected. New reform ideas may also be missed because implementers may lack the expertise that would allow them to notice and fully understand important underlying concepts of new ideas (Spillane, 2004; Spillane et al., 2002).

Undeniably, policies calling for a fundamental change place significant demands on implementers' learning, which also challenges the ways policies are taught. The necessary learning is unlikely to occur if teachers are left to study new practices from books and lectures only. "Policy messages are not inert, static ideas that are transmitted unaltered into local actors' minds to be accepted, rejected, or modified to fit local needs and conditions. Rather, the agents must first notice, then frame, interpret, and construct meaning for policy messages" (Spillane et al., 2002, p.392). For implementers to see a need for change and notice new ideas, they must first recognize that their existing practices may be problematic. This experience of dissonance will trigger a process of re-interpreting existing beliefs and subsequent learning of new ideas. Dissonance, or questioning of own practice is crucial if fundamental change is to ensue but conditions fostering such learning must be in place. Reformers cannot expect that these conditions will occur organically; successful reform implementation demands that reformers create

the necessary learning opportunities, and enable teachers to critically analyze their practices while exposing them to examples of new ones.

From a teaching and learning perspective, the Czech curricular reform came with minimal opportunities for teachers to learn it. Metaphorically speaking, the new reform is a new curriculum but because the architects of the reform were not quite proficient in it themselves and as they reported, they were also learning on the go, the reform lacked leaders who could model the process of change and teach it to others. Under those circumstances, the reform was handed down to pilot-school teachers to figure out. Additionally, the pilot-school teachers faced the task of re-interpreting the reform for others through experience sharing and contributions to a Handbook on school curriculum development. But handing down the responsibility for learning to the learners is quite problematic, especially when considering that the reform emerged in a system where decisions had traditionally been made at the top and where teachers had been trained to execute the will of the state, thus being historically unprepared to assume responsibilities of the sort that the reform demands.

Looking at the level of an individual, the cognitive view suggests that a first step to change is recognizing flaws with one's existing practice and developing a growing awareness of advantages that a new practice might bring. But the Czech curricular reform does not have any mechanisms in place that would show teachers what aspects of their practice may be viewed as problematic and where to focus change. Pilot-school teachers who were expected to model the reform for other schools received special guidance and attention from the Institute for Research in Education that will not be available to other schools. At the same time, those teachers' reports in regard to their opportunities to learn

suggested that teaching occurred in regard to the rules of the reform but instructional practices per se were not addressed. The change architects appeared to assume that teachers who were willing to participate in the curriculum writing were those who knew what they wanted to change and they would pursue their own professional development. Formally, the state did not endorse any instructional practices as exemplary and it did not embrace any particular professional development, aside from seminars the Institute organized to explain to pilot-school coordinators the fundamentals of the reform, the reform's requirements, and the steps to writing the school curricula.

The proposition emphasizing the teaching and learning aspects of new reforms suggests to policy makers that they consider developing a 'curriculum' of how the reform should be taught to the school practitioners. Such a curriculum would impel policy makers and implementing agencies to consider the learning goals, content, and practices through which the content could be effectively taught. At the time of the data collection, the reform was taught as if the primary goal for schools was to produce their curriculum, not to reconsider their practices and transform instruction. In line with that, the content of the teaching, according to teachers' reports, consisted of familiarizing teachers with the formal requirements and rules placed on the locally produced curricula. And as for practices, teachers had opportunities to attend several training sessions. As teachers reported, these sessions were intense and packed with information but there was little time to reflect and discuss concepts into depth. The depictions of these sessions echoed the traditional teaching practices in schools that focus on transmitting large amounts of information.



*Proposition six: Successful implementation utilizes the potential of social networks*

Teaching and learning has important cognitive aspects to it but it is essentially a social practice. As such, it has attracted attention of analysts who focused on examining communities of practice and social networks as new units of analysis and revealed strong influence of these various associations on implementers' work (Honig, 2006).

Communities and networks function as sites where learning unfolds through formal and informal social interactions. These interactions may lead to formation of shared meanings and repertoires of practice, and they can have a profound influence on individuals' beliefs, worldviews and interpretations of policy messages (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Coburn, 2006; Frank, Zhao, & Borman, 2004; Honig, 2006). Communities of practice and social networks thrive on social capital (trust, communication channels among individuals within a social group, common norms, local expertise) (Smylie, 2006, p.192) which itself has become a focal point of investigation for some researchers (Frank et al., 2004; Smylie & Evan, 2006).

For example, Frank et al. (2004) studied the role of social capital in diffusing implementation of computer technology in schools. The results of their study showed that teachers' informal access to expertise (those in school who knew how to handle technology) and perceived social pressure as manifestation of social capital were statistically significant. Access to expertise and perceived social pressure were thus important forces in implementation of technology that helped teachers adopt a practice they were initially reluctant to use. The research pointed to the influence of talk, help and social pressure in policy implementation, and formulated an argument for creating

conditions in schools that would foster teachers' interactions with one another in regard to policy demands.

Social capital can play a very powerful role in implementation but the concept must be approached with some caution. Strong social capital can help implementation but it can also impede it if the social capital is negative – e.g. teachers may develop a shared misunderstanding of a new innovation that can go counter the reform ideas (Smylie, 2006). The knowledge of the importance of social capital in implementation should lead policy makers and educational leaders to work towards building an infrastructure that will facilitate learning and diffusion of innovative practices. For example, policy makers should "recognize the existence and importance of networks of informal local communities" (Coburn & Stein, 2006, p.42) and build on these communities and social networks rather than work parallel to them or even in opposition to them. School leaders could strategically diffuse knowledge and information through teachers who have expertise and are likely to receive attention of others; they could also allocate a time for teachers to interact and share experience with one another around policy goals (Frank, 2004).

In the Czech Republic, there are several communities of practice and social networks operating on the national level that have become known as powerful change agents. After the fall of the communist regime, some schools adopted alternative approaches to the content-driven education, typically promoted by grassroots movements and various non-profit groups and educational associations. Over the years, these movements have built social networks and helped individual teachers effect change in their classrooms. For example, in the case of the early childhood program Step-by-Step

initiated by the Soros Foundation, change has occurred nation-wide and Step-by-Step schools that offer a non-traditional curriculum can be found in every corner of the country. The state institutions have tolerated the various grassroots organizations that help to promote new ideas in Czech education but have utilized them minimally. The state had had a long monopoly in education and, according to reports of some of the people interviewed in this study, the administration has acted ambivalently towards the independent associations and organizations that exist.

Policy makers reported that they occasionally consulted with individuals from the different networks but in the view of representatives of these networks, they have not tapped into the full potential of these networks, largely leaving them out of the formal channel of implementation strategies. The various organizations and networks have found their own means to contribute to the reform implementation, for example by organizing round table discussions, workshops, and seminars on salient issues in education, and various other events. However, operating in their own circles of influence, activities of these networks tend to reach only a limited number of people who already constitute a part of the established networks and the leverage to reach broader audiences is limited.

The concept of communities of practice is known in the academic community in the Czech Republic but it is relatively new and school leaders have only begun to discover it. In two of the pilot schools involved in this study, school leaders made attempts to create some basic opportunities for social interactions and information sharing among teachers who participated in the curriculum development, or at least for those who were part of the small curriculum coordination team. Teachers in the third pilot school complained that information sharing was largely not happening and when it

did occur, it was restricted to e-mail communication. Formal opportunities to share experience and interact with other teachers involved in curriculum writing were not in place.

The research proposition suggests that mobilizing social networks pays off. In light of this proposition, policy makers and implementers might be impelled to set up basic institutional structures that would facilitate formation of social networks. Such structures might include regular meetings, workshops and information sharing. Among the three pilot schools in this study, one already had such activities in place, another one completely lacked them, and the third one was somewhere in the middle, with the small team meeting regularly and planning to take the meetings to the next level where teachers would be sharing and demonstrating their best practices with one another.

#### Implementation and local wisdom

Clearly, the propositions presented in this chapter did not originate in the Czech context and one should not expect that Czech policy makers would discard cultural experiences and common approaches to policy for Western theories that have not been rooted in the Czech culture and that many Czech policy makers have not even heard about. At the same time, it may still be useful to bring these propositions to the attention to Czech policy makers and implementers as a fresh view that may validate some of the things that have been done as well as point to problem areas that may otherwise stay unnoticed and obscured in the process. While some of the points that were highlighted here may have been apparent from the narrative itself, others were not. The research propositions helped to explain aspects of the reform (e.g. the seeming vagueness of the reform and its goals or teachers' tendency to view the reform as something that they have

already seen) as well as to suggest possible directions for future, which will be discussed in more detail in the following chapter.

## **CHAPTER 9: CONCLUDING THOUGHTS**

This study mapped the emergence of a new curricular policy in the Czech Republic and its early implementation. Chapter One outlined the conceptual framework that helped to determine which areas needed to be examined to capture the reform process in its complexity and organize the writing so that the reader can easily follow the progression of events. The framework outlined four key contexts in the policy analysis: Political Space, Political Era, Education State, and the Policy Process. The first three provided avenue into the macro-level structures of historical and political influences on policy making. Focus on the Policy Process then led to the details of how the curricular reform emerged, how it was translated into policy documents and how practitioners in schools read these documents and made sense of the reform. With its overarching focus, the conceptual framework enabled to overstep the divide between the macro and the micro levels, and unify all the contexts as part of one whole.

This dissertation was conceived as a narrative of the unfolding story of the curricular reform. Individual chapters focused on different aspects of the story, starting with the broadest view of the context in which the reform emerged and ending with school practitioners' responses to the reform in Chapter Six. Chapter Seven highlighted the key findings from the narrative and explained the case from the point of view of its macro-level characteristics, noticing how on the macro-level, large-scale, historical, and local forces and trends shaped the reform. Chapter Eight then presented six propositions from research studies on the policy process and implementation, and added insights that provided further explanations for some of the events that occurred in the case. The

theories introduced in Chapter Eight primarily originated in the English-speaking world and some might take issues about their utility in the Czech context. But given that the Czech Republic does not have a tradition of policy and implementation research and does not offer its own policy research studies through which the case may be viewed and interpreted, the propositions offer themselves as a useful alternative that might benefit the case. While it may validate some of the processes that occur, it also points to issues that tend to be overlooked in the midst of the many layers on which the curricular reform operates. As such, the propositions help to outline areas that may be worthwhile to examine more closely in future studies on Czech education.

This chapter sets out to bring the two perspectives from Chapter Seven and Chapter Eight together and present a set of policy recommendations that bear on the case and that may guide policy makers in their continued efforts to steer the reform's implementation.

#### Combining the narrative and policy research perspectives

The current situation in Czech education and some of the steps in the reform process may appear perplexing to foreign audiences but the history and politics, as discussed in Chapter Seven, provides a partial explanation of the situation. The education system has deep roots and traditions and does not easily let go of institutionalized practices, which explains why parts of the system, regardless of their low utility today, continue to survive. For example, when OECD experts reviewed Czech education in 1996, they described the practice of high school exit examinations as a waste of time, and energy for school principals and teachers who are responsible for developing these exams in their schools (OECD, 1996). Because these exams are developed locally, they have no

comparative value. Furthermore, they are not linked to post-secondary education in any way so they are burdensome to high school seniors who still need to take a different set of examinations for entry into higher education. In sum, the exams are neither formative nor diagnostic but they continue to survive in the system. However, it is important to note that these exams have more than 150-year-old history. They represent "the grammar" of upper-secondary schooling and are believed to safeguard a certain standard of schools that are subject to them. An outsider might be puzzled by the continuing practice but an insider cannot imagine the education system without these exams. No reform that would propose to abolish them would have a chance of being passed and so alternatives have been sought and materialized in the proposed reform to add a standardized national test to the locally developed high school exit examinations. In this way, the culture of the exams will be preserved but new trends also introduced and incorporated in the system. The result will be a hybrid model that both, keeps the traditions while answering to new demands. Such co-existence of the old and the new is not uncommon in transition system.

Other examples that are likely to puzzle an outsider and that can be justified within the cultural context of Czech education include implementation steps taken in the enactment of the curricular reform. The entire concept of 'mandated autonomy' may raise some eyebrows. Schools and teachers are being told to develop their local curricula when they had been historically unprepared for such a role. The mandate is being introduced through what research might qualify as a rational-structural approach (Evans, 1996). This approach assumes that change is linear and can be achieved via a succession of top-down steps that are well managed. In the rational-structural implementation strategy, Czech policy leaders focused on disseminating the reform ideas through the top-down



hierarchical lineage of the school structure. The pilot in high schools was orchestrated and managed by the Institute for Research in Education, which developed the new Frameworks, recruited pilot schools, facilitated meetings for pilot-school curriculum coordinators, and collected schools' drafts of the curricula according to set time-lines. The Institute instructed pilot schools to designate a school curriculum coordinator, typically the principal or the assistant principal, who managed and oversaw curriculum writing within the school. The general expectation was that change would trickle down from the Institute, to the school coordinators, to teachers, who, driven by the new curricular Frameworks, would produce curricula that would challenge the traditional content-driven model of education and create space for innovation and new instructional practices. The rational strategy assumed that learning would happen along the way, almost organically, as part of teachers' curriculum writing process. The pilot was used to test the Frameworks prior to approving their final version and generate tips for a Handbook on school curriculum writing. Now, as the reform is being launched in all primary schools in the country, the state continues to provide training to school coordinators who together with the Handbook were the main resources for local curriculum development.

The research propositions presented in Chapter Eight suggested that although the rational approach has some merit, it is shortsighted in overlooking many realities of how change occurs as influenced by politics, human behavior, and features of local environment(s). Knowledge about reforms generated from research studies and scholarly literature has profound implications for policy and policy implementation, and it broadens the perspective of implementation from a top-down approach to one that also

increasingly focuses on the people at the delivery level including support mechanisms, and capacity building. Attempts to apply linear rationality to policy planning lead "an organization to concentrate on first-order changes, on means rather than ends, on how to do things rather than on why to do things" (Evans, 1996, p.14). The narrative of the curricular reform showed that this statement also applies to the Czech context.

The implementation of the curricular reform focused on the development of school curricula as the end product. Taken together with the top-down instructions to schools on how to write the school curricula, the goal to fundamentally change what happens inside classrooms became obscured and lost in the process. The facts on the ground, although admittedly still rather premature, suggested that under the nascent implementation strategy, the anticipated 'internal transformation' of schools is unlikely to happen. Teachers tended to view the reform as a reaffirmation of existing practices, with only a minority of individuals in proportion to all pilot school teachers trying to find ways to effect deep change. These teachers were practically left alone to figure out what change might look like, and without the needed support, capacity, and resources to initiate desired change. In some cases, they were overwhelmed with the task and in the absence of alternative models, they were unable to create a different version of education. Although it is widely recognized that implementers' capacity is a crucial condition of successful implementation, in the Czech case, it was apparent that capacity was lacking at all levels of the system and the state at the time of the study did not have any clear strategy to build it at the ground level.

Taken together, the narrative documented the trials and errors committed along the way of the policy formulation and early implementation, situating them in the

historical and political context of Czech education. The propositions from research showed that some of the errors were predictable from prior studies, while other steps (e.g. the gradual realization that reflection, demonstration lessons and information sharing will be necessary within schools) were validated. Some of the issues that were observable in the reform and its early implementation could have been settled by conceptual analysis, even without viewing the case through the lens of existing empirical research. Several Czech critics of the reform implementation carried out such analyses and pointed to some of the reform's weak points. For example, Simonova and Strakova (2005) argued that the concept of key competencies was underdeveloped and insufficiently connected to attainment standards outlined in the Frameworks. Hence, the expectation that teachers' actions would be guided by key competencies was unrealistic. Interviews with pilot-school teachers affirmed that this concern was justified. Critics of the reform implementation called for an extensive teacher training and information campaign that would explain the concepts and persuade the audiences about the desirability of change. The need for these implementation strategies stemmed directly from the process and did not need to be validated through research studies. However, the scholarly literature reviewed in Chapter Eight offered a more comprehensive and nuanced view of system mechanisms that can lead to the design of a more concrete and fruitful implementation strategy.

In sum, bringing together the narrative and the research perspective leads to several areas that Czech policy leaders might want to address. The narrative documented how the Czech leaders placed emphasis on the hierarchical lines of school management and expected that policy ideas will trickle down to school practice. The review of

research on reforms affirmed that it matters how implementation is conceived and that alternatives to the strictly rational-linear model exist, offering a better chance of realizing policy ideas in practice. The research propositions that are most pertinent to this case suggest that policy leaders focus particularly on systemic reform and capacity building, and combine the top-down approach to teaching the reform with lateral dissemination of information and mobilization of teachers' capacity at the bottom of the policy hierarchy.

The thrust of contemporary research on instructional policy implementation places great emphasis on practices implied by the policy, coherence, and how implementers learn new policy (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Cohen & Hill, 2001; Honig, 2006; Rowan et al., 2004; Spillane, 2002). The reform's success is conditioned by teachers' will to enact changes, their knowledge and capacity to implement changes, and their sense-making of the policy demands. Teacher training and professional development stressed by Czech researchers are undoubtedly crucial to the policy success but they constitute only two examples of capacity building that should occur on a broader level to form the backbone of the implementation strategy. Also, it is imperative for the policy leaders to carefully think through the types of learning that teachers need to experience to enact desirable changes. Research findings showed that it matters what kind of teacher training and professional development is provided because different types of training have different effects, with only some professional learning opportunities likely to stimulate change (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

Furthermore, the research propositions also suggest that policy makers adopt a peripheral vision and not lose track of the system as a whole. Again, this idea applies to the Czech context, which is scattered and torn between several poorly coordinated reform

efforts that have a potential of undermining one another. A coherent and systemic implementation strategy, tightening the conceptual ideas for change and aligning them to the same goals could be the answer, if done correctly. In all, the mapping of the current situation in the progression of the curricular reform in the Czech Republic and the research propositions as additional insights to implementation yield the following recommendations.

- *Describe desired policy outcomes, present a vision of change, and devise an implementation strategy*

When asked about intended policy change and outcomes, interviewees frequently responded that the grand goal of the reform is increased school and teacher autonomy. But this response was short of a description of what the autonomy should do as if the autonomy was the ultimate goal. This exemplifies how underspecified and blurry the vision of change is. Hand in hand with the vague notion of the outcomes of the curricular reform goes the lack of a coherent implementation strategy. Policies intending to promote change must address the kind of change that is desirable and policy makers must share their vision of change with implementers, who will otherwise not know where they need to focus their attention. The recommendation to specify policy outcomes is also connected to the policy language. As was evident from the case, teachers struggled with the concept of key competencies and the policy text did not offer many clues that would help them decipher the meaning of key competencies and the application of the concept in practice. Part of presenting a vision of change would then also mean specifying what is meant by key competencies and providing concrete examples of how key competencies

can be realized in practice. These would include supporting materials such as lesson plans, vignettes, and concrete model practices that would help teachers enact the reform.

The specification of desired outcomes and targets of change would provide the foundations for the development of a coherent implementation strategy. At the moment, there are some elements of a strategy in place but they are fragmented and unfocused. It is evident from scholarly literature that implementation matters and hence, it deserves concentrated attention of policy leaders, who should understand the constraints and opportunities that the reform presents and build on the resources that might enable positive outcomes (Elmore, 1983; Majone & Wildavsky, 1984). For the Czech curricular reform, the first step would involve identifying the constraints (e.g. finding out where teachers lack capacity and what barriers to change they face) and opportunities. Then, appropriate strategies could be devised, drawing on available resources. As part of the overall strategy, it would also be imperative to develop monitoring and evaluating systems that would provide information about the ongoing implementation and create feedback loops up and down the system.

- *Provide incentives and mobilize teachers' will to meaningfully fulfill the mandate*

In the current situation, it is hard to understand why any teacher might want to invest a significant amount of time and energy into changing his/her existing practices when there are virtually no rewards and overt benefits for doing so. Incentives were neglected when they are now widely recognized to be crucial. Teacher salaries are not going to increase, there is no career ladder policy that would promise a promotion or other advantages, and there are no mechanisms that would lower teachers' typical

workload to balance out the time a teacher spends on developing a plan for change and writing the school curriculum. Change is thus in the hands of a small minority teachers who feel frustrated by the existing system and have a personal, intrinsic interest to overhaul their instructional practices and effect change in their schools. Debates about an establishment of a career ladder policy for teachers are ongoing but so far fruitless, although the current Education Minister has proposed to address the issue and develop a system of differential teacher salaries that would allow principals to reward their best teachers in more meaningful ways than the current system enables. The curricular reform can serve as a strong argument to design a promotional system for teachers and it opens a window of opportunity for such a system to be introduced. With an incentive system in place, the state's mandate would gain a new meaning and teachers would have the motivation to fulfill the mandate substantially rather than only formally. Although career ladders represent only one example of incentives that could mobilize teachers for change, this perspective underscores that there are ways to enable change rather than assume that it will happen along the way.

- *Build teachers' capacity to enact desired change*

When teachers are ready and willing to meaningfully participate in the reform, they need to develop an understanding of the scope of the change they are asked to enact and construct the knowledge that will help them alter their practices. The Czech Ministry of Education has placed elements of capacity building in the system but there is a great need for more. For example, the Ministry has set up a web portal with a help and information center, and space for practitioners to share ideas and experiences with school curriculum writing and new practices. The National Institute for Further Education as one

of the organizations under the umbrella of the Ministry of Education has launched professional development courses for school coordinators and teachers to help them learn about the reform and devise strategies for their school curriculum development. However, what seemed to be lacking was a coordinated effort to explain to practitioners why the reform is needed, and help them make sense of their existing practices and understand how these are or are not linked to the demands of the reform. Research studies have shown that effective professional development is rooted in concrete examples, subject-specific school curricula, and sufficient time that practitioners spend in training (Cohen & Ball, 2001; Rowan et al., 2004). Research has also stressed the importance of constructive feedback and ongoing monitoring of the change processes (Lipsky, 1980; Rowan et al., 2004). These elements have been neglected in the reform and policy leaders should look for ways to include them in the implementation strategy.

Furthermore, capacity building should not only concern school practitioners but it should also extend to universities and teacher preparation programs. Again, pieces of such capacity building have developed – some universities have taken an initiative and begun addressing curriculum development and the reform in their teacher preparation programs. But largely, they acted upon their own impulse. The universities have not been incorporated in the formal channels of reform implementation. Instead, they appeared to be bypassed under the guise that they have unrestricted autonomy and the state cannot interfere with it. In many advanced countries, universities have been the centers of innovation and advancement. Czech universities, which are fully dependent on the state budget, constantly wrestle with a lack of funds and resources, and many do not quite function as centers of progress. But there is a level of expertise and potential capacity that



might be captured and systematically used in the reform process. For example, education professors, many of whom have been exposed to various models and theories of education could help formulate the vision of instructional practices that the reform implicitly advocates. Bringing universities in would also ensure that teacher education programs are redesigned in concert with the ideals of the reform.

- *Work towards systemic reform*

Throughout the narrative and the lessons from previous research, it became more apparent how scattered and fragmented the reform efforts are. Research findings highlighted the potential of systemic reform approaches that recognize the holistic nature of systems where individual parts are interconnected and affect one another. Piecemeal efforts are likely to disappoint but elements of reform that are aligned to one another and accompanied by supporting guidelines promise strength that has a great potential to usher in desired change. Previous recommendations already alluded to the need to decrease the fragmentation of the reform and develop a coherent implementation strategy. Such a strategy would not only bring together all the pieces of the reform that are currently scattered, it would also ensure that these pieces are linked to one another and aligned. For example, the standards outlined in the Frameworks, professional development, proposals for change in teacher preparation programs and evaluation criteria developed by the Czech School Inspectorate would all focus on the same target of change in instructional practices and behavior that would be specified as desirable outcomes of the reform. Aligning the elements of the curricular reform implies that the Ministry of Education steps above its administrative role and continues moving in the direction of becoming a truly coordinating and capacity building body, ensuring that information channels are

open in all directions and that all Institutes of the Ministry are working towards the same goal.

A coherent and aligned implementation strategy constitutes only one part of the systemic approach. Systemic approach highlights the workings of all elements and mechanisms of a system as a whole and in that view, the reform architects would need to look beyond the curricular reform and pay attention to other reforms and mechanisms in the system that compete with the curricular reform or might affect it in some ways. In the Czech case, specifically the assessment system should receive attention when the curricular reform is concerned. For example, in completing academic high school and moving to post-secondary education, students currently face two assessment systems that are not linked to one another in any way. Students must first pass locally developed high school exit examinations to prove that they deserve a high school diploma. Entrance to a university is conditioned by a different set of examinations that have been typically developed by individual universities and even departments within universities. As discussed at length in Chapters Three and Eight, the university entrance examinations are highly variable and do not adhere to any specific standards. The reform of high school exit examinations that has been under development since late 1990s assumes a national high school exit examination that will be added to the current school-based exit examinations. Thus, there will be three assessment systems in place that will not necessarily be connected. In addition, the new national high school exit examination is being developed separately from the curricular reform. The new model of the planned national high school exit examinations that will be launched in 2010 does not mention the

curricular reform and it is not clear if key competencies and standards from the new Frameworks are in any ways reflected in the tests that are being developed.

Interviewees expressed concerns that state high school exit examinations, at least as they had been developed until the time of the data collection, may undermine the curricular reform. Taking a systemic view and recognizing the potential threat of high school exit examinations if they are not linked to the curricular reform is crucial to secure conditions that might stimulate change. Moreover, exit examinations conceptualized to assess key competencies will reinforce the message of change that the curricular reform attempts to convey. High school exit examinations have high stakes and thus could function as an important leverage in the educational transformation, if used as a supporting mechanism of the curricular reform and not as a competing factor.

Additionally, it is also imperative that policy leaders pay attention to the university entrance examinations. These examinations have a gate-keeping function and as they determine individuals' fate, there are high stakes attached to them. The narrative discussed the seeming irrationality of the university entrance examinations as an assessment mechanism that is not part of any coherent system, yet it profoundly affects what teachers teach at secondary schools and what type of knowledge becomes valued. If universities continue to stress factual knowledge, it will be difficult for the curricular reform with its focus on key competencies to resolve an emerging ambiguity over what knowledge is important. As discussed in Chapter Eight, universities are beginning to use professionally developed tests similar to the American SAT, which signals an important change in the system that could result in more objective and perhaps fairer admission practices. But policy leaders could help to shape the change and start a conversation with

universities and the testing agency to help steer the admission processes so that the assessments are linked to what happens in secondary schools.

- *Draw on existing social networks and information channels*

Finally, policy leaders should also reach out to existing social networks and information channels and draw on the capacity and resources that they offer. They might combine a top-down approach to policy implementation with lateral distribution of knowledge and expertise among schools and facilitate such exchange. Clearly, the state's capacities to effect and enact change are short-circuited and constrained, and the breadth and scope of the entire transformation needs to draw on all expertise that is available. A great deal of expertise and capacity is concentrated in non-profit organizations and educational associations in the Czech Republic that have extensive networks and capacity to introduce innovation and change to schools. The state has largely by-passed them in the reform efforts although many found their own way to engage in the reform implementation because the reform represents the ideals congruent with their own. Research highlighted the tremendous potential that such networks have in promoting, stimulating, and sustaining change (Coburn & Stein, 2006; Frank et al., 2004; Smylie & Evan, 2006). Incorporating these networks into official implementation strategy and the formal delivery system would allow the state to reach out to important organizational connections that have been typically marginalized. The Ministry could endorse some of the programs and practices that existing social networks promote and support lateral distribution of knowledge and information from school to school. EU structural funds that will be available to the Czech Republic could fund and support the work of endorsed networks and organizations. In the U.S., so called "non system actors" have received

renewed attention, and these could be better mobilized in the Czech case (e.g. Coburn, 2006).

### Concluding remarks

This study has mapped and chronicled a process of policy formulation and implementation in a country that has undergone extraordinary change since 1990. Perhaps it asks too much that a nation ruled for years by a totalitarian regime that praised uniformity, discipline, and obedience should burst into immediate bloom with the removal of the constraints. Learning to use freedom takes time, not least the time it takes to recover from a smothering bureaucracy that drains autonomy, creativity, and forward thinking. Developments described here may be perfectly understandable in this light, even as they may provoke certain frustrations among critics who would like to see the reform directed in ways that would offer more room for optimism for real change. The spirit of this study, in any case, was to capture the reform in its complexity and gauge first reactions to the reform among the people at the delivery level so that policy makers can make more informed decisions as they continue to steer the reform. The findings of this study also highlighted the need to systematically monitor and evaluate the implementation process and start building a theoretical base of policy research studies that might be tailored specifically to the Czech context.

The case as a whole lends itself to an easy criticism. Outsiders may be inclined to view the Czech reform as an act of political symbolism rather than an effort to fundamentally change what happens inside of schools in the Czech Republic. The reform has conformed to expectations about democracy and reality in European education at the threshold of 21st century, and satisfied political expectations that the Czech Republic

takes steps in par with its Western European counterparts and that it follows EU trends, to which it had subscribed. The reform itself has been designed to offer an opportunity for change to those who may feel intrinsically motivated to strive at an alternative model of education but for most schools and teachers who do not have the energy, motivation, and resources to aspire for change, it allows for non-change. It has all the attributes of a real change even if it is not intended to overhaul the existing system. In that sense it can be interpreted as political theatre and symbolism.

However, when considering the administrative governance history of the Czech state with its roots in the bureaucratic machinery of the Habsburg empire, the progression of events and the actions of the state make sense, and the doubts about the authenticity of the reform recede. In the light of the history where the steering of large-scale reforms has traditionally rested with state mandates and the state could rely on compliance, the reformers' efforts to engage the bottom, however inconsistent, fragmented and unsupported they may be, represent a step forward. Moreover, examining the individual parts of the system, including the Institute for Research in Education, one finds excitement about the work that has been done and even when the pieces do not fit together quite yet, there are many individuals who work hard and truly believe that the reform will begin making a positive difference in students' and teachers' school experience. Hence, classifying the reform as a mere act of political symbolism would be unfair to those who have contributed to the reform and to those school practitioners who have been trying to mobilize their colleagues to action as a result of the space that the reform has opened up. Inexperience and a degree of naiveté rather than spin-doctoring

and political symbolism are more likely at the root of what appears as heedless and uncoordinated transformation of Czech education.

In the broader view of international research, this study contributed to studies on educational change in post-communist nations. Most of the extant studies remain on the macro-level only and describe overall trends and processes of educational transformation in post-communist regions in their attempts to better respond to new societal and political arrangements that came in the aftermath of the revolutionary upheavals of 1989-1991. Many of these studies generated frameworks to analyze educational change (McLeish & Phillips, 1998) and models of change as those documented in Mitter's paper on transformation in Central and Eastern Europe (Mitter, 2003). However, there has been little written on what these policies mean for people inside schools and classrooms. This study attempted to bridge the gap and connect the macro-level perspective of change with the micro-level view, and match the global perspective of the reform with its local realities.

The present study also serves as an early attempt to document educational policy development in a country where such research is scarce. Critiques of the reform efforts that originated under authorship of Czech researchers exist but they are theoretical and largely fail to provide empirical evidence for analyses they present. The findings offered here can thus provide avenue to further development of the policy studies field that is only beginning to emerge in the Czech Republic, and serve as a basis for future research. Admittedly, the curricular reform was still in its early stages at the time of the data collection and it would be premature to pass conclusive judgments. But this study can serve as a springboard for other studies that should follow. The investigation here was

broad and as such offers numerous directions for future research. Within the realm of studying educational change, it would certainly be worthwhile to continue following the sample of high schools that participated in this study and examine what happened with teachers' instructional practices when they started teaching from their new curriculum. This study spanned across subjects but future studies could focus more narrowly on individual subject areas and investigate into greater depth the challenges and opportunities that the reform presents to teachers teaching these subjects. The terrain of educational reform and change in the Czech Republic is unexplored and new research questions can be generated for virtually each area that is pertinent to educational change, from individual teachers' sense-making to school leaderships' affect on change, effects of social networks, policy and organizational change at the state institutions, the role of language in implementation and countless others. This study has drawn on research produced largely in the English-speaking world and while the assumption was made here that the research can be applied to the Czech case, future studies should test this assumption and develop alternative theoretical models that would stem directly from the Czech experience.



## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Study approach

The research question seeks an explanation to the puzzle of why the reform and its implementation have evolved in ways that appear somewhat irrational and illogical. The answer has been sought in processes of how the policy came to be and how the policy ideas have been circulated and appropriated by those who are implementing them. The study thus utilized primarily qualitative, interpretive inquiry. This approach is particularly fit because it provides flexibility in exploring the process as it has unfolded in a given context. It also assumes that individuals will have multiple interpretations of the phenomenon, depending on their experiences, values, beliefs, knowledge, and other factors. As a whole, the study falls into the category of trajectory studies, which follow a policy through its gestation and evolution, capturing the political processes that prepare the conditions for policy inception to text production, and following implementation of the policy into practice (Maguire & Ball, 1994; Taylor et al., 1997).

This dissertation is primarily about the policy – it scrutinizes ideas embedded in it and assumptions that underlie it. But it is also a study about the responses that the policy generated from school practitioners. Understanding how the policy evolved and why it came to look the way it does demanded examining a variety of data sources and talking to people across different levels. Besides the policy text and other relevant documents, the study also needed to include some measures of people's perceptions and understandings of the reform. Altogether, I collected three kinds of data: interviews, documents including newspaper articles written about the curricular reform, and teacher surveys.

## *Interviews*

Fifty semi-structured interviews were conducted in three points in time between 2004 and spring 2006 (see Table A.1.). The interviews were structured loosely, following an interview protocol with open-ended questions that were inviting interviewees to talk about what they deemed important. Interviews were conducted in Czech, my native language, and their length varied from about 30 to 90 minutes. Interviewees included educational stakeholders at multiple levels of the system, with the first round of interviews focusing primarily on the macro level while in the second and third round, most interviewees were school practitioners.

Table A.1. Interviews

	Summer 2004	October 2005	June 2006	<b>Total interviews</b>
<b>Interviews with:</b>				
<i>Policy actors</i> (officials from the Ministry, university professors, representatives from educational associations, educational entrepreneurs)	15	2	1	<b>18</b>
<i>Principals</i> (non-pilot schools)	3	2		<b>5</b>
<i>Teachers</i> (non-pilot schools)	1	7		<b>8</b>
<i>Principals</i> (pilot schools)		2	3	<b>5</b>
<i>Teachers</i> (pilot schools)		7	8	<b>15</b>
	19	20	12	<b>51</b>

### *The first round of interviews*

The first round of interviews took place during summer 2004 when the new education bill (and the curricular reform) was awaiting approval from the Senate after it was passed by the Parliament. Altogether, during this phase of data collection I interviewed 19 people, including officials from the Ministry of Education and its affiliated Institutes, university professors, representatives from educational associations, educational researchers and entrepreneurs, and a small sample of school principals and teachers. Interviewees were selected purposefully – I was interested in talking to people who participated in the policy development or were part of the networks that influenced the emergence of the policy. I also wanted to talk to educators who publicly voiced their opinions about the proposed reform in newspaper articles and other public texts. In addition, I wanted to gauge initial reactions of practitioners so I interviewed three school principals and one teacher. The purpose of the first round of interviews was to understand how interviewees perceived the conditions of Czech education, where they saw possibilities and constraints of the reform, how they interpreted the proposed policy, and where they thought the policy ideas had originated. A great deal of information from this round of interviews served as a basis for chapters 3, 4, and 5 about Czech education and policy gestation.

### *Second round of interviews*

The second round of interviews was conducted in fall 2005 – a year after the reform was instituted and at a point in time when a sample of high schools began piloting it. I was interested in exploring how school practitioners were making sense of the reform

and what changes the reform impelled them to do. The pilot of the Frameworks in academic high schools thus offered a unique opportunity to monitor how the implementation was beginning to unfold. In theory, primary schools and multi-year secondary schools should have been in the process of developing their school curricula at the time but that largely did not seem to be the case in 2005-2006 academic year. Pilot academic high schools were thus the only sites where the process could have been examined. The Ministry of Education, and more specifically the Institute for Research in Education that assumed a coordinating role of the pilot, invited academic high schools around the country to apply for participation in the pilot project. In the end, the Institute was able to locate one school to represent each of the fourteen regions in the country. In addition, the cities of Prague and Brno (the second largest city in the country and the capital of Moravia) each had two pilot schools.

My goal for the second round of data collection was to select two pilot high schools and two non-pilot high schools where I could interview teachers about their initial experiences with the curriculum writing. I wanted to select schools that would resemble most other academic high schools, i.e. I wanted to exclude schools that are known for their efforts to be non-traditional and different. However, there was little information about the individual pilot schools to help me make a purposeful choice so my final selection was partially random. Out of the total number of 16 pilot high schools in the country I excluded half, which appeared clearly different from the typical small town academic high schools because of their profile (e.g. academic high schools focused on sports, parochial schools) or because of their location (schools in the regional capitals). Then, I threw a dice and from the remaining schools on my list, I randomly picked four.

To further narrow down the selection, out of these four schools I chose two that were located in geographical locations promising easier access than the other two.

After identifying the two pilot schools, I then located two non-pilot schools, each in geographical proximity to the pilot schools. The purpose of choosing both pilot and non-pilot schools was to get a greater variety of standpoints and to record reactions of people who were immersed in the reform because they were implementing it as well as people who had not yet received much direct exposure to the reform. I also wanted to have an idea of how different or similar the pilot schools might have been in comparison to ordinary academic high schools, and that way get a sense of the bias of my sample of pilot schools.

In each school, I contacted the principal via e-mail and explained the purpose of the study while asking for permission to gain access to the school and to contact a handful of teachers who would represent diverse voices in regard to the reform. In efforts to keep the study somewhat focused on the same subject matter so that I could carry similar conversations across schools, I initially tried to contact Czech language and literature teachers because Czech language and literature is a core course and the reform implies significant changes in the traditional content of this subject -- namely it places emphasis on communication, and text analysis and interpretation -- areas not explicitly addressed in the old curriculum. But in each pilot school, typically only one teacher was responsible for curriculum writing per subject and because I wanted to have more than one view of the curriculum writing, in the end I talked to teachers of other subjects, mostly history and social studies (many of whom also teach Czech language and

literature but were engaged in curriculum writing only for one of their subjects). In sum, in each school I interviewed the principal and 3-4 teachers.

### *Third round of interviews*

The final round of interviews took place in June 2006 and focused on teachers' work with the school curriculum writing. Non-pilot schools were dropped from the study because they did not have any experiences with the reform, and one more pilot school was recruited in addition to the two from the previous round of data collection. The third school was selected because of geographical location – it was located between the two pilot schools from the previous round of data collection so it was accessible. It also turned out to be a slightly non-traditional school, which made the sample more diverse. At this point in time, I talked only to people who were directly involved in their school curriculum writing. In each school, I interviewed the teacher/ principal who was charged with leading the curriculum writing and 2-3 teachers, mostly the same interviewees from the previous round of interviews. I asked questions about the process of curriculum development, problems they encountered, changes in the new curriculum they wrote, and overall sense of satisfaction with the process and the reform. I also asked about their collaboration with others and their learning of the reform.

### *Interview questions*

Development of interview questions was connected to each phase of data collection. Analyzing the first round of interviews suggested topics for the next round and so on. The first phase of interviews was most open, with questions asking for general perceptions of Czech education and the fit of the newly proposed reform(s). With each round, the questions were becoming more focused. The third round of interviews

focused exclusively on pilot-school teachers and their experiences with the curriculum writing process. At the same time, some themes that surfaced in the early phases were explored throughout all phases of data collection. For example, the first round of interviews pointed to the lack of teacher professional development as an important constraint to change and the theme of teacher professional development and learning the reform was incorporated in all phases of the interviews to develop a better understanding of how teachers felt about their opportunities to learn new practices, new knowledge, and the reform. Questions were open-ended to give teachers an opportunity to talk about what was important to them. Samples of interview protocols follow in chronological order.

#### **Summer 2004**

Interview questions: Policy makers and macro-level players

- What do you see as advantages and disadvantages of the Czech education system?
- Where do you see a need for change?
- How do you think the curricular reform addresses the change?
- What in your opinion is the purpose of the curricular reform?
- Where did it come from?
- The new Education Act also introduces the high school exit examination reform. What is your opinion about that reform? (Probe: why is the reform being introduced; what problem is it intended to solve; what do you know about the reform)
- Where did that reform come from? (Probe: when you first heard about it, how it evolved over time)
- To what degree do you see the two reforms connected?
- How are the reforms coordinated? (Probe: who is in charge; who does what; how do the different institutes cooperate)
- How is information about the reforms disseminated?
- What potential problems do you foresee with the reforms' implementation?
- What will the reform's success look like?

#### **Fall 2005**

Interviews: School principals and teachers in pilot schools (interview topics and leading questions)

##### 1. Background information

- How long have you been teaching? How long have you been teaching at this school? Which subjects do you teach?

- What do you see as your main job as a teacher?
  - Can you describe your typical day? (Probe: Among what tasks do you divide your day? What takes most of your time?)
2. Content
- How do you choose what you are going to teach? (E.g. what was the last thing you have just taught and why?)
  - To what degree do you rely on existing content outlines? Do you have a copy available?
  - What textbooks do you use? Who selects them?
  - How much freedom do you feel you have in content selection?
  - To what degree do you expect that the content you currently teach will change?
3. Typical lesson
- Can you describe your typical lesson? What types of activities do you do with your students?
  - During the past year, did you do something that you had not done before in your instruction? What made you do that?
4. High school exit exams and assessment
- Have you seen the pilot exit tests? How have they affected your work?
  - Is there anything that you learned from these tests? (Probe: things about students, content)
  - How do you typically assess your students?
5. Curricular reform and frameworks
- How have you learned about the curricular reform? (Probe: from the principal? Seminars? Newspaper?)
  - How do you feel about your school participating in the pilot project?
  - What do you think the reform is trying to do? What is your opinion about that?
  - What kind of change do you think the reform encourages?
  - What is expected of you to do in response to the reform? How did you learn that?
  - Have you had a chance to read the new frameworks and specifically the section for your subject matter?
  - Which things stand out the most for you?
  - How are the Frameworks different from the existing curriculum? What is new in them?
6. Key competencies
- The frameworks focus on competencies. Have you heard about that? Why is that important?
  - What does this mean to you?
  - The frameworks emphasize 5 competencies. One of them is a competency to communicate. For example, students are expected to master the basic principles of rhetoric and be able to deliver presentations in a self-confident manner. What does this specific example mean for your teaching? (Is it new? Is it something you have been doing?)
  - (If you have been doing it) can you give me an example of how you teach towards this competency?



- (If you have not been doing it) what do you think is expected of you to do? Do you have a concrete idea/ example of how you could apply this idea in your classroom? What activities do you see yourself doing with your students in teaching towards this competency?
7. Policy alignment
- What kind of relationship do you see between the state exit exam reform and the curriculum reform? How do you think these two reforms may work together?
8. Teacher collaboration
- How do other teachers in your school respond to the reform?
  - To what extent do teachers work together on the curriculum writing?
  - Have you ever collaborated on something with another teacher? What was it? How did it work? What did you learn from that?
  - Have you ever had a chance to observe other teachers' teaching? When? What did you think?
9. Curriculum writing
- How do you go about writing the curriculum according to the Frameworks? Can you walk me through what you have done so far?
10. Opportunities to learn/ Professional development
- Over the past two years, have you had a chance to participate in any seminars or professional development activities? If so, which ones? What was the topic? What did you learn / did you find it helpful – if so, helpful for what?
  - Does your principal encourage you to participate in professional development? What motivates you to participate? Are there any other incentives besides your personal interest?
  - How do you learn about professional development opportunities? How hard/ easy is it to participate (e.g. Is it easily accessible? Is it in a different town? Is it on the weekend? Does your principal pay for these or do you have to pay?)
11. School leadership
- Has your principal or the assistant principal commented on the new frameworks? What did they say?
  - Have there been any meetings or seminars devoted to the reforms? (if so, what were they? Who organized them? Who spoke there/ was giving the information etc.)
  - How well do you feel informed in terms of what needs to be done and what specific tasks are expected of you?

## **Spring 2006**

Interviews: Curriculum coordinators

1. Evaluation the year of curriculum writing
- What would you say you are proud of in your school's curriculum writing?
  - Where did you encounter problems?
  - What is next? (Probe: What's going to happen with the curriculum now? How will you continue working with the Institute for Research in Education?)
2. Pilot
- How has the project worked in your school?

- What specific things in connection to the pilot and curriculum writing have you done in the past two months?
  - When was the work on the curriculum most intensive? What happened during that time?
  - I have meeting minutes from the last meeting of school curriculum coordinators. Could you walk me through the notes and tell me what happened?
  - Did you have any comments during the meeting? What were they?
  - Have you been in touch with the coordinators from other schools outside of these meetings?
  - When you have questions about what you need to do, who do you contact/call/talk to?
  - How do you disseminate information from the coordinators' meetings among your staff?
3. Collaboration in school
- What meetings in connection to the curriculum have taken place in this school during this year? (Formal? Informal?)
  - How do you feel about the work of the curriculum leadership team?
  - How often did the team meet?
  - Did anyone take notes during these meetings?
  - If you were to form the team again, would you have done anything differently?
  - What things worked very well?
  - What things disappointed you?
  - What have you learned from the whole experience?
4. Other teachers in school
- Who was responsible for distributing information to other teachers (i.e. teachers who were not on the curriculum writing team)?
  - How have other teachers in this school learned about the work of the curriculum writing team?
  - How has the curriculum writing affected relationships in this school?
5. School curriculum
- Can you walk me through the new curriculum that your team has written?
  - How is it different from what has been done in this school until now?
  - What has stayed the same? Why?
  - What changes do you introduce in your subject matter?
  - What do teachers in your school need to prepare for now?

### *Document review*

In addition to interviews, Policy documents and reports related to the curricular reform were collected (Table A.2.) and analyzed. The data also included newspaper articles that were searched online in three mainstream Czech daily newspapers: Lidové noviny (Lidovky.cz), Mladá Fronta DNES (idnes.cz), and Hospodářské noviny

(ihned.cz). Newspaper articles were searched because practitioners often mentioned daily newspapers as their key sources of information. I was interested to learn what messages the popular media has been sending to the public about the reform and how they have represented the reform. I searched all the three online versions of the newspapers published between January 2003 and June 2007. However, only a portion of all articles written on the topic was accessible -- one of the newspapers (Lidové noviny) did not allow a search prior to October 2005. I chose to begin in 2003, which was a year before the new Education Act was passed, to gauge how much the curriculum reform was discussed before it was written into the law. June 2007 was the time when I began writing up the document analysis.

Altogether, I identified 34 articles that directly pertained to the curricular reform. I first read the articles for the general tone about the reform – i.e. to see if they were negative, positive or neutral (informative) about the reform. On the second read, I paid closer attention to how they described the reform and its purposes, and the language they used. I also looked for what they said or what they failed to say about the three key points that the reform addresses: teacher autonomy, key competencies, and cross-curricular themes. For example, nearly all of the articles failed to mention the key competencies. Some have described various aspects of key competencies, for example that students should learn to search for information, but the term "kompetence" was largely ignored.

Table A.2. Key policy documents in chronological order

<p>Czech Ministry of Education. (1994). <i>Quality and Accountability</i>. Prague.          Education Policy Association. (1999). <i>Czech Education and Europe: Pre-Accession Strategy for Human Resource Development</i>. (No. Programme Phare, project No. CZ 9405-01-03-01). Prague: Education Policy Association.          Czech Ministry of Education. (2001). <i>The National Program of Development of Education in the Czech Republic (White Paper)</i>. Prague, Czech Republic: Institute for Information on Education.</p>
---

Eurydice. (2002). *Key competencies: A developing concept in general compulsory education*. Brussels, Belgium: Eurydice European Unit

Česká Republika [Czech Republic]. (2004). *Zákon o předškolním, základním, středním a vyšším odborném a jiném vzdělání - školský zákon (561/2004Sb.)* [Act on preschool, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education - the Education Act].

VÚP [Institute for Research in Education]. (2004). *Rámcový vzdělávací program pro gymnázia: pilotní verze [Curricular frameworks for academic high schools: pilot version]*. Praha: Výzkumný ústav pedagogický [Institute for Research in Education],.

### Surveys

The final round of data collection focused on pilot schools and included a survey in addition to the interviews. Interviewed teachers often reported that their colleagues knew little about the reform and that many were not interested in change. The purpose of the survey was to probe into attitudes and understandings of the reform among teachers beyond those who were interviewed, and triangulate the various sources of data. I also wanted to obtain more information about the conditions in pilot schools, teacher collaboration, and information flow.

The survey was distributed in five pilot schools, including the three that served as interview sites. The increased sample size was intended to generate sufficient number of responses to provide informative value and to validate the instrument. In total, I sent 198 surveys to five pilot schools. I received 89 surveys back, which amounted to 53% response rate (see Table A.3.). Out of these 89 responses, I excluded 10 from Pilot school 5 because they represented only 10% teachers from that school. The response rate in the remaining four schools was above 47% in each school. The overall return rate of 53% was rather low but the total number of 79 usable surveys was sufficient to pilot the

instrument, and to obtain information about the variability of views and teachers' attitudes to the reform.

**Table A.3. Teacher surveys in pilot schools**

	Surveys sent	Survey returned	Return rate
Pilot school 1	37	18	49%
Pilot school 2	35	25	71%
Pilot school 3	34	16	47%
Pilot school 4	42	20	47%
Pilot school 5	50	10	10%
<b>Total</b>	<b>198</b>	<b>89</b>	<b>53%</b>

The survey asked questions in five main domains: 1) context of teachers' work; 2) instruction; 3) reforms; 4) communication in school and information flow; and 4) demographic data. Most items asked respondents to express their degree of agreement/disagreement with given statements on 6-point Likert scale but the survey also included several open-ended questions. The survey contained a number of items (mostly concentrated in the "instruction" domain) that formed teacher efficacy scales and teaching philosophy scales but in the end, these scales were not used in the analysis of this study. Instead, they served to pilot the instrument for future use in case the study continues. These scales were adopted from other existing studies as shown in the survey sample that follows in Table A.4. Items concerning the reforms were specifically developed for this study.

Table A.4. Teacher survey

---

**CONTEXT OF TEACHERS' WORK**

---

1. To what extent do you agree with the following statements? (Scale 1-6)

- a. Czech society values teachers
  - b. I teach because I am not sure what else I could do
  - c. I am more or less content with the salary I have as a teacher
  - d. Perks such as long summer vacations balance out the relatively low teacher salaries
- 

2. To what extent do you agree with the following claim? (Scale 1-6)

Education in Czech academic high schools is good and does not need any fundamental changes.

If you think that changes should be introduced, what kind of changes would you like to see?

---

3. Which factors limit your work as a teacher? (Scale 1-4, adopted from 1998 TIMSS-R teacher questionnaire and modified)

- a. High number of students in class
  - b. Students who are not interested in learning
  - c. Students who are disruptive
  - d. Students with different abilities
  - e. University entrance examinations
  - f. School leadership
  - g. Textbooks
  - h. Lack of curricular materials
  - i. Administrative tasks
  - j. The established way how teachers teach in this school...
  - k. National curriculum (content outlines)
  - l. Expectations of parents
  - m. Inadequate school equipment
- 

4. For an average week, how many hours do you work beyond the "contractual" teacher work week in order to fulfill your teaching responsibilities? (adopted from Vannatta, R. A., & Fordham, N. (2004). Teacher dispositions as predictors of classroom technology use. *Journal of Research on Technology in Education*, 36(4), 253-271.)

- a. 0
- b. 1-3
- c. 4-8
- d. 9-12
- e. 12 or more

If you spend extra time, on what kind of activities do you spend that time?

---

**INSTRUCTION**

---

5. Teacher efficacy scales (9 items, scale 1-6) (in Vannatta, adopted from Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990)

---

6. Teacher philosophy (constructivist vs. traditional teaching philosophy; 5 pairs of items, scale 1-6) (in Vannatta, adopted from Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990)

---

7. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about instruction? (scale 1-6)
- a. Instruction should be based on problems that have clear and correct answers and on ideas that students can grasp quickly
  - b. I don't mind trying out new things even when I know that I will make mistakes
  - c. Students should respect the authority of the teacher
  - d. Students are ready for meaningful learning only after they master some basic knowledge
  - e. A quiet classroom is generally needed for effective instruction
  - f. Students should help establish criteria on which their work will be assessed.
  - g. I feel excited when I try new instructional methods
  - h. The instructional methods I currently implement need little revision
  - i. I don't mind making mistakes because I can learn from them.
  - j. Students are more active in instruction when they can move freely around the room
  - k. It's better when the teacher – not the students – decides what activities are to be done
  - l. I would participate in professional development even if I did not have any financial or other benefits from it.
  - m. Project learning often results in students learning mistakes/ wrong knowledge
  - n. How much students learn depends on how much background knowledge they have – that is why the teaching of facts is necessary
  - o. Homework assignments are good for having students answer questions from textbooks
  - p. When exploring new instructional methods, I try to find ones that require little change.

## **REFORMS**

---

8. What do you think about the content you currently teach and changes in content?
- a. Changes should be determined on the level of school, in cooperation with the school leaders and teachers.
  - b. Changes in content should be determined by individual teachers.
  - c. The content we currently cover needs to be revised because we teach many things disconnected from reality.
  - d. The content we currently cover needs to be revised because students are overloaded with unnecessary information
  - e. Changes in content should be determined on the national level, under the leadership of experts
  - f. I teach a lot of things, which students do not necessarily need to know.

---

9. What goals guide you in planning your lessons?  
I plan my lessons with the goal to...

---

10. Which five words come to mind when you hear the phrase "curricular reform"?

---

11. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about the curricular reform and the new Frameworks? (scale 1-6)
- a. The curricular reform motivates teachers to come up with new ideas and innovate

- b. The Frameworks contain many new ideas
- c. The curricular reform has little to do with my current work
- d. The curricular reform further constrains me in my work
- e. The Frameworks push me to think about how I teach
- f. The curricular reform is a political matter, which will have negligible effects on Czech education
- g. The curricular reform gives me the opportunity to co-create a school where I will enjoy teaching
- h. The curricular reform gives me more freedom in what I will teach
- i. The curricular reform is not going to impact how I teach
- j. The curricular reform will burden me with an extra load of work
- k. I expect that I will look for new instructional methods
- l. The curricular reform significantly changes the current conception and goals of education in secondary schools
- m. The curricular reform encourages close cooperation between teachers
- n. The curricular reform is an effort to capture and describe what has been commonly done
- o. I understand what the reform is trying to do and I welcome the efforts
- p. I have carefully read the Frameworks

---

12. What do you like about the new Frameworks and what bothers you about them?

I mainly appreciate....

I feel bothered by....

---

13. Are you a member of the curriculum writing team?

Yes/ no

---

14. What do you think about the anticipated state part of the exit examinations? Please, indicate the level to which you agree with the following statements. (scale 1-6)

- a. State examinations will help to improve the quality of Czech education
- b. It will be an unnecessary additional examination
- c. State exit examinations go against the curricular reform
- d. State exit examinations are necessary because they will replace university entrance exams
- e. State exit examinations will dictate what we will teach
- f. It's important that secondary school outputs could be compared across all schools in the country
- g. State exit exams do not make sense because they will compare things that are incomparable

---

**COMMUNICATION IN SCHOOL AND INFORMATION FLOW**

15. Who do you talk to about methods and content of instruction?

- a. colleague(s) from my homeroom
  - b. other colleagues in school, outside of my homeroom
  - c. colleagues from other schools
  - d. no one
-



16. Please, list initials of colleagues from your school who you go to for advice on content and methods of instruction. Check the box that reflects the frequency of these discussions. (item adopted from Ken Frank)

	Almost every day	At least once a week	At least once a month	At least once a semester	At least once a year
1.					
2.					
3.					
4.					
5.					

---

17. How many teachers in your school.... (none, a few, most, almost all, I don't know)

- a. plan lessons together
- b. learn from others by observing other teachers' lessons
- c. give advice and helps colleagues with methods
- d. teach non-traditionally
- e. agree on instructional practices
- f. want to try something new
- g. introduce new ideas and shares them with colleagues
- h. participate in professional development and teacher workshops at least twice a year
- i. actively seek new ideas
- j. actively participate in the school curriculum writing
- k. are against the curricular reform

---

18. Where do you primarily receive information about the Frameworks and the curricular reform?

---

19. To what extent do you agree with the following statements about your school leadership? (scale 1-6)

- a. Our school has a transparent system of rewards that motivates teachers to work harder
- b. Our school leaders regularly keep us informed
- c. Teachers participate in decision making in this school
- d. The school leaders create an environment for open communication
- e. Our school principal understands the problems we deal with on daily basis
- f. Communication in this school is very good
- g. Our school leaders provide maximum support to us
- h. I usually know where to find our principal
- i. Our principal is easily accessible and it is possible to talk to him/her any time
- j. Our school leaders encourage us to try out new things
- k. In this school, we work together to pursue common goals
- l. There is a lot of rivalry among teachers in this school
- m. Teachers in this school are not afraid to express their opinion
- n. In this school, teachers work on their own

---

20. How often do you use the internet?

daily	
-------	--

every other day	
at least once a week	
at least once a month	
several times a year	
almost never	

21. Where do you get access to the internet?

in our homeroom	
in the hall	
in the computer lab	
in an internet cafe	
at home	
nowhere	

22. How old are you?

Less than 25	
25-29	
30-39	
40-49	
50-59	
60 or more	

23. What is your gender?

Male	Female
------	--------

24. How many years of teaching experience will you have had by the end of this academic year?

0-5 years	
5-10 years	
10-15 years	
more than 15 years	

25. Which subjects do you teach? How many hours a week?

Subject	Hours per week

26. What is the highest level of education that you have attained?

High school with exit examination	
Bachelor's degree	

27. Where did you obtain your qualifications? Please, list the name of the institution, study program and the year when you completed your studies.

Institution	Majors	Year of completion

### *Data analysis*

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed using TAMS analyzer software -- an open source software designed for Apple Macintosh computers for management and analysis of qualitative data. TAMS analyzer allows to transcribe text and subsequently assign codes to selected portions of the text, form code sets, recode existing codes, search through the data, and retrieve coded information.

After each phase of interviews, I first read and reread every interview to get a feel of the whole. I briefly summarized each interview and then began coding and categorizing the data. I first applied open coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1998) and assigned descriptive labels to segments of the texts, thus breaking down the information into manageable units that could be contrasted with one another. The initial process of categorizing data generated 40-50 codes per each round of interviews, which I subsequently began reducing and collapsing into larger categories. Although the number of codes was a bit overwhelming, the open coding approach allowed for new labels and categories to emerge. For example, when asked about key competencies or policy constraints, teachers and principals often commented on the language of the Frameworks, which became an important theme in the study.

After the initial codes were assigned, I continued re-reading the data and began revising the codes. The nearly 50 codes that I started with were gradually reduced to 10-15 categories, some of which corresponded with the larger themes that guided the interview questions. Once I had established a way to organize the interview data, I moved to integrating the analysis with the analyses of documents and surveys, looking for points of convergence and divergence. In analyzing the survey data, I used SPSS to generate a

frequency table for each survey item and carefully read through responses on open-ended items, looking for overlaps with the interview data and for information that could provide additional insights to the interview data. For example, comments on language surfaced in the open-ended item asking respondents to list five words that they associated with the curricular reform, which reinforced the saliency of the language theme.

For the purposes of this study, the surveys were used mainly as a background for the interview data. This meant that only items that could have been linked to the interview data were used in the analysis, and items such as teacher efficacy scales and teaching philosophy were excluded. However, they served to validate the instrument for future use. On the whole, the descriptive statistics obtained from the survey data helped to paint a more complete picture of the attitudes of pilot-school teachers towards the reform, and their perceptions of it.

Following multiple reads of all data, I identified central categories that cut through all three data sets. Some of these categories appeared salient because they linked the data sets together; and some were salient because they offered interesting insights into the narrative of the gestation and implementation of the reform that were not immediately apparent. The categories included: language of the reform; the relationship between teacher autonomy and content; key competencies; crosscutting themes and teacher collaboration; and the role of feedback in curriculum writing. I recognize that these themes are broad and that each would likely deserve its own study but the purpose of this dissertation was to map the reform as a whole and prepare the ground for future research.

Appendix B: Examples of high school exit examination topics in history in 1980s and in

2003

<b>High school exit examination topics in history (1980s)</b>	
1)	a. Class and economic foundations of Renaissance culture abroad and at home, new perspective on life, new style of life. b. Beginnings of the workers' movement in Austria before World War I.
2)	a. Origins and evolution of utopian and scientific socialism, influence on the international workers' movement, contemporary significance of Marxist-Leninist ideology. b. The Internationals and the international workers' movement.
3)	a. World War I – causes, consequences, significance of VRSR (Great October Socialist Revolution), crisis of the capitalist system b. The battle of Czechs and Slovaks for independence – the contradictory positions of the bourgeois politicians and the workers' movement, the significance of VRSR for the origin of the Czechoslovak Republic.
4)	a. The first and second industrial revolutions – new class-divided society b. Main characteristics of imperialism – the highest stage of capitalism, territorial division of the world before World War I, colonialism.
5)	a. From the beginning of the workers' movement in Russia to the bourgeois democratic revolution of 1905/07, causes and consequences of its defeat. b. V.I.Lenin – the man and the work, his influence on the workers' movement in Russia and on the international workers' movement.
6)	a. Great October Socialist Revolution – historic watershed in the evolution of humanity, establishment of the dictatorship of the proletariat in Russia b. Battle for the political character of the First Republic – the origin of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia
7)	a. Original, class basis, and character of fascism in Italy and Germany, aggressive plans of the fascist states b. Czechoslovak Republic between the wars—battle of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia for the rights of workers in a period of economic crisis
8)	a. Building of socialism in Russia after the defeat of intervention and domestic counterrevolution b. Paris commune—first dictatorship of the proletariat, lessons for the international workers' movement
9)	a. The second phase of World War II—the Soviet Union's major share in the defeat of fascism, postwar arrangement of Europe, the origin of the worldwide socialist system b. Czechoslovak resistance during World War II—two centers of foreign resistance, domestic resistance under the leadership of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia, Slovak national uprising and the May Uprising in relation to the liberation of the Czechoslovak Republic.
10)	a. Betrayal by the Czechoslovak bourgeoisie and their allies—politics of the Western states and the position of the USSR. Munich, the complete destruction of the Czechoslovak Republic b. Beginnings of World War II – causes of its origin, character, evaluation of its status at the end of the first phase

11)	a. Causes of the transition from the primitive communal order to the slave order, significance of work for the physical and mental evolution of man, production and social relations, religious ideas, gradual and uneven evolution in the period of classless society b. Prehistoric settlement of our territory—main developmental stages, most significant cultures and archeological finds, economic and social changes, arrival of the Slavs
12)	a. Origin and building of the worldwide socialist system, Warsaw Pact, alliance with the Soviet Union b. Prehistoric settlement of our territory –main developmental stages, most significant cultures and archeological finds, economic and social changes, arrival of the Slavs
13)	a. Main characteristics and beginnings of the feudal order in Europe—origins of feudal diffusion, significance of Christian ideology and Church organization in the life of early feudal society b. First state formations on our territory—evolution, causes, and consequences of their downfall, relations with the Byzantine and East Frankish Empires
14)	a. Origins of the culture of antiquity—ancient methods of production, slaveholders' democracy, the contribution of ancient culture b. Historic evolution of Brno—center of the workers' movement in Moravia, oldest settlement, origin of the city, first manufactures, battles of the proletariat, Josef Hybeš, the newspaper <i>Rovnost</i> , liberation, the city under socialism
15)	a. Class character of the culture of early and developed feudalism in our country and abroad, influence of the Church on the creation of a world view and mass opinion b. The Czech state under the Luxembourgs
16)	a. Stabilization and expansion of feudal monarchies in the period of developed feudalism—England, France, Spain, Germany in the period of developed feudalism b. Origins and development of the Czech feudal state under the Premyslids
17)	a. Hussite revolutionary movement—program, supporters, significant centers, individuals, propagation abroad, causes of defeat b. Reformation in Europe—goals, representatives, consequences
18)	a. Growth of temporal powers of the Church, its ideological influence, battle over investiture b. Causes and aims of the Hussite revolutionary movement—social contradictions in the Czech lands, criticism of the Church and the social order, activities and significance of the speeches of Master Jan Hus.
19)	a. Culmination of the opposition of Czech towns and non-Catholic nobility to the violent Habsburg government and the consequences of the defeat for the Czech nation b. Causes, course, character of the Thirty Years' War and its influence on conditions in Europe
20)	a. Government of Jiří z Poděbrad—his peace project and its modern realization b. Establishment of the Habsburgs on the Czech throne, their attempted Catholicization, Germanization, and centralized, absolutist government
21)	a. Most significant bourgeois revolutions in Europe and their influence on the development of the capitalist order b. Origins, evolution, and role of towns from feudalism to the modern day
22)	a. Transition from guild small-scale production to capitalist large-scale production, causes of stagnation, transition periods, beginnings of factory production b. Economic and social changes during the enlightened absolutism of Maria Theresa and reform during the reign of Joseph II

23)	a. Building of socialism in Czechoslovakia after Victorious February, main tasks of socialist construction, 16th Congress of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia b. Second period of the general crisis of capitalism—contradictions in the postwar world, peace movements, military-political groupings, peaceful coexistence of the two world systems, Helsinki, Stockholm, Belgrade, peace proposals of the 26th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union
24)	a. Territorial evolution of the Czech state—use of maps from the oldest settlements up to the present day b. Class and economic foundations of the baroque abroad and at home, the baroque and the Catholic Counter-Reformation
25)	a. First bourgeois democratic revolution in France and its influence on political developments in Italy and Germany b. Constitutional battles of Czechs and Slovaks in the revolutionary year of 1848

### **High school exit examination topics in history (April 2003)**

1)	Evolution of human society in primeval times
2)	Ancient Middle Eastern states
3)	Ancient Greece
4)	Ancient Rome
5)	Cultural legacy of antiquity
6)	Beginnings of the Middle Ages in Europe
7)	Slavic affairs in early medieval Europe
8)	Europe from the 12 <sup>th</sup> to the 15 <sup>th</sup> century
9)	The Czech state during the reign of the last Premyslids and the Luxembourgs
10)	Position of the Church in the Middle Ages and the reform movement
11)	Europe and the world at the start of modern times
12)	Origin of the Habsburg confederation and its development to the middle of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century
13)	Development of Europe after the Thirty Years' War
14)	First great modern revolutions in Europe and America
15)	Survey of cultural development from the beginning of the Middle Ages to the 15 <sup>th</sup> century
16)	Survey of cultural development from the 15 <sup>th</sup> century to contemporary times
17)	The French Revolution and Napoleonic wars
18)	Europe in the first half of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century
19)	The revolutionary year 1848 in Europe
20)	Main outlines of development in Europe and the world in the second half of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century
21)	Developments in the Czech lands in the second half of the 19 <sup>th</sup> century
22)	World War I
23)	1919-1929 in Europe and the world
24)	Origin and development of Czechoslovakia to 1929
25)	Russian revolution, origin and development of the USSR to World War II
26)	Global economic crisis and the fight against fascism in the 1930s
27)	World War II
28)	Situation in the Czech lands during World War II
29)	Main outlines of development in the world after 1945
30)	Main outlines of development in the Czech lands after 1945

Appendix C: Instructional time allocations for four-year academic high schools

Effective as of October 1, 2006

Subject	Year				Total
	1st year	2nd year	3rd year	4th year	
Czech language and literature	3	3	3	3	12
Foreign language 1	3	3	3	3	12
Foreign language 2	3	3	3	3	12
Latin	P*	P	P	P	P
Social sciences	1	1	2	2	6
History	2	2	2	P	6
Geography	2	2	P	P	4
Mathematics	3	3	2	2	10
Descriptive geometry	P	P	P	P	P
Physics	2	2	2	P	6
Chemistry	2	2	2	P	6
Biology/Geology	2	2	2	P	6
Information technologies	2	P	P	P	2
Art education	2	2	P	P	4
Physical education	2	2	2	2	8
Elective 1	P	P	2	2	4
Elective 2	-	P	2	2	4
Elective 3	-	-	P	2	2
Elective 4	-	-	-	P	P
Total prescribed hours	29	27	27	21	104
Flexible hours	2 and 4	4 and 6	4 and 6	10 and 12	20 and 28
Total number of hours	31 and 33	31 and 33	31 and 33	31 and 33	124 and 132

\*P = principal's decision



## REFERENCES

- Anderson-Levitt, K. M. (Ed.). (2003). *Local meanings, global schooling: Anthropology and world culture today*. New York, N.Y.: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Anderson-Levitt, K. M., & Alimasi, N.-I. M. (2001). Are pedagogical ideals embraced or imposed? The case of reading instruction in the Republic of Guinea. In S. a. Levinson (Ed.), *Policy as practice: Toward a comparative sociocultural analysis of educational policy* (pp. 25-58). Westport, CN: Ablex publishing.
- Astiz, F. M., Wiseman, A. W., & Baker, D. P. (2002). Slouching towards decentralization: Consequences of globalization for curricular control in national education systems. *Comparative Education Review*, 46(1), 66-89.
- ASUD. (2003). Vyjádření ASUD k návrhu 1.verze RVP dějepisu gymnázií. [ASUD's commentary on the first version of Frameworks for academic high schools]. *Informační list č. 22: Únor 2004*(15-18).
- ASUD. (2004). Stanovisko ASUDu k části školského zákona (RVP) [ASUD's stand on the the section of Education Bill dealing with curricular frameworks]. Retrieved May 13, 2004, from <http://www.mujiweb.cz/www/ASUD/KRVP3.HTM>
- Baier, V. E., March, J. G., & Saetren, H. (1986). Implementation and ambiguity. *Scandinavian Journal of Management Studies*.
- Baker, D., & LeTendre, G. K. (2005). *National differences, global similarities: World culture and the future of schooling*. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford Social Sciences.
- Ball, S. J. (1994). *Education reform: A critical and post-structural approach*. Buckingham [England]; Philadelphia: Open University Press.
- Bardach, E. (1977). *The implementation game: What happens after a bill becomes a law*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Barnes, C. A. (2002). *Standards reform in high-poverty schools: Managing conflict and building capacity*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bártová, E. (2004). Šikmá věž v české PISE [The leaning tower in Czech PISA]. *Respekt*, p. 6.
- Blažková, J. (2004, 2. dubna 2004 [April 2, 2004]). Školy mají šanci učit zábavně a po svém [Schools have an opportunity to be more fun and to teach their own way]. *MF DNES*.
- Blažková, J. (2005, September 1, 2005). Školy se mění, na děti čekají novinky [Schools are changing, children will face novelties]. *MF Dnes*.

- Boli, J., & Ramirez, F. O. (1992). Compulsory schooling in the Western cultural context. In A. A. a. Kelly (Ed.), *Emergent issues in education* (pp. 25-38). Albany: SUNY.
- Botlík, O., & Souček, D. (2002). Results of education in Czech schools from the perspective of KALIBRO project. *Pedagogika*(2), 231-240.
- Bowe, R., Ball, S. J., & Gold, A. (1992). *Reforming education and changing schools: Case studies in policy sociology*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Carnoy, M. (2000). Globalization and educational reform. In N. P. Stromquist & K. Monkman (Eds.), *Globalization and education*. New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc.
- Čerych, L. (1999). General report on the symposium "Educational reforms in Central and Eastern Europe: Processes and outcomes". *European Education*, 31(2), 5-38.
- Čerych, L., Koucký, J., & Matějů, P. (1998). Školský systém a rozvoj vzdělání [School system and the development of education]. In J. Večerník (Ed.), *Zpráva o vývoji české společnosti: 1989-1998 [Report on the development of Czech society: 1989-1998]* (pp. 44-66). Praha: Academia.
- Chubb, J. E., & Moe, T. M. (1990). *Politics, markets and America's schools*. Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution.
- Clayton, T. (2004). "Competing conceptions of globalization" revisited: Relocating the tension between world-systems analysis and globalization analysis. *Comparative Education Review*, 48(3), 274-294.
- Clune, W. H. (1987). Institutional choice as a theoretical framework for research on educational policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 117-132.
- Clune, W. H. (1993). Systemic educational policy: A conceptual framework. In *Designing coherent education policy: Improving the system* (pp. 125-140). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Inc.
- Coburn, C., & Stein, M. K. (2006). Communities of practice theory and the role of teacher professional community in policy implementation. In M. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 25-46). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Coburn, C. E. (2006). Framing the problem of reading instruction: Using frame analysis to uncover the microprocesses of policy implementation. *American Educational Research Journal*, 43(3), 343-379.
- Cohen, D. K. (1990). A revolution in one classroom: The case of Mrs. Oublier. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(3), 311-329.

- Cohen, D. K., & Ball, D. L. (2001). Making change: Instruction and its improvement. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 83(1), 73-77.
- Cohen, D. K., & Hill, H. C. (2001). *Learning policy: When state education reform works*. Connecticut: Yale University Press, P.O. Box 209040, New Haven, CT 06520-9040.
- Cohen, D. K., & Spillane, J. P. (1993). Policy and practice: The relations between governance and instruction. In *Designing coherent education policy* (pp. 35-95). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2000). *Research methods in education* (5th ed.). London ; New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cowen, R. (2000). Comparing futures or comparing pasts? *Comparative Education*, 36(3), 333-342.
- ČTK. (2007). Senát hladce schválil odklad státních maturit [The Senate easily approved postponement of state exit exams]. *lidovky.cz* [online version of *Lidové noviny*] Retrieved July 18, 2007, from [http://www.lidovky.cz/senat-hladce-schvalil-odklad-statnich-maturit-fo8-/ln\\_domov.asp?c=A070718\\_135438\\_ln\\_domov\\_glu](http://www.lidovky.cz/senat-hladce-schvalil-odklad-statnich-maturit-fo8-/ln_domov.asp?c=A070718_135438_ln_domov_glu)
- Czech Ministry of Education. (1994). *Quality and Accountability*. Prague.
- Učební dokumenty pro gymnázia [Curriculum for academic high schools], (1999).
- Czech Ministry of Education. (2001). The National Program of Development of Education in the Czech Republic (White Paper). Prague, Czech Republic: Institute for Information on Education.
- Czech Ministry of Education. (2006). *Výroční zpráva o stavu vysokého školství za rok 2005*. [Annual report on the conditions of higher education in 2005]. Praha.
- Czech Republic. (2004). Vyhláška ze dne 29.prosince 2004 o organizaci školního roku, Sb. č.16/2005, Částka 4. [Decree from November 29, 2004 on organization of school year, Decree number 16/2005, Chapter 4].
- Czech School Inspection. (2004). *Výroční zpráva české školní inspekce za školní rok 2003/2004* [Annual report for the academic year 2003-2004]. Prague: česká školní inspekce.
- Czech School Inspection. (2003). *Výroční zpráva české školní inspekce za školní rok 2002/2003*. [Annual report of the Czech School Inspectorate for the 2002-2003 academic year]. Prague: Czech School Inspectorate.
- Czechoslovak Socialist Republic. (1984). Zákon o soustavě základních a středních škol (školský zákon) (29/1984Sb.) [School Act].

- Daun, H. (2002). *Educational restructuring in the context of globalization and national policy*. New York ; London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Daun, H. (2004). Privatisation, decentralisation and governance in education In the Czech Republic, England, France, Germany and Sweden. *International Review of Education/Internationale Zeitschrift für Erziehungswissenschaft/Revue internationale l'Éducation*, 50(3 - 4), 325-346.
- Edelman, M. (1971). *Politics as symbolic action: Mass arousal and quiescence*. Chicago: Markham Publishing Company.
- Education Policy Association. (1999). *Czech education and Europe: Pre-Accession strategy for human resource development*. (No. Programme Phare, project No. CZ 9405-01-03-01). Prague: Education Policy Association.
- Edwards, R., Nicoll, K., Solomon, N., & Usher, R. (2004). *Rhetoric and educational discourse: Persuasive texts?* London and New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Elmore, R. F. (1982). Backward mapping: Implementation research and policy decisions. In W. Williams (Ed.), *Studying implementation: Methodological and administrative issues*. Chatham: Chatham House Publishers.
- Elmore, R. F. (1983). Complexity and control: What legislators and administrators can do about implementing public policy? In L. Shulman & G. Sykes (Eds.), *Handbook of teaching and policy* (pp. 318-341). New York: Longman.
- Elmore, R. F. (1998). *School variation and systemic instructional improvement in community school district #2, New York City*: Consortium for Policy Research in Education, University of Pennsylvania.
- European Council. (2000). *Lisbon European Council: Presidency conclusions*. Lisbon: European Council.
- Eurydice. (2002). Key competencies. A developing concept in general compulsory education. Retrieved May, 2004, from <http://www.eurydice.org>
- Evans, R. (1996). *The human side of school change: reform, resistance, and the real-life problems of innovation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fairclough, N. (2005). Discourse analysis in organization studies: The case for critical realism. 26(6), 915(925).
- Frank, K. A., Zhao, Y., & Borman, K. (2004). Social capital and the diffusion of innovations within organizations: The case of computer technology in schools. *Sociology of Education*, 77(2), 148.
- Freeman, K. (1995). Equality of higher education in post-communist Hungary and Poland: Challenges and prospects. In J. E. Mauch & P. L. W. Sabloff (Eds.),

- Reform and Change in Higher Education. International Perspectives* (Vol. 2). New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- Fuhrman, S. (1993). *Designing coherent education policy: Improving the system* (1st ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Fullan, M. (1994). *Change forces: Probing the depths of educational reform*. Pennsylvania: Falmer Press, Taylor & Francis Inc., 1900 Frost Road, Suite 101, Bristol, PA 19007.
- Fullan, M. (2001). *The new meaning of educational change*. (Third ed.). New York: Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY 10027.
- Glenn, C. L. (1995). *Educational freedom in Eastern Europe*. Washington D.C.: CATO Institute.
- Hannaway, J., & Carnoy, M. (Eds.). (1993). *Decentralization and school improvement: Can we fulfill the promise?* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hargreaves, A. (2005). *Extending educational change*. Dordrecht ; New York: Springer.
- Havel, V. (1999). *Eseje a jiné texty z let 1970-1989. Dálkový výslech. [Essays and other texts from the years 1970-1989. Disturbing the peace.]* Praha: Torst.
- Hill, H. C. (2006). Language matters: How characteristics of language complicate policy implementation. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity* (pp. 65-82). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- Hodgson, A., & Spours, K. (2006). An analytical framework for policy engagement: The contested case of 14-19 reform in England. *Journal of Education Policy*, 21(6), 679-696.
- Honig, M. I. (2006). Complexity and policy implementation: Challenges and opportunities for the field. In M. I. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation*. Albany: Sunny Press.
- Hrubá, J. (2001/2002). Jak naši zákonodárci vařili dort [How our policy makers were cooking up a stew]. *Učitelství listy*(2), 2-3.
- Hrubá, J. (2004). Jak si stojí české školství v mezinárodním srovnání - a co s tím? [How do Czech schools hold up in international comparisons -- and what to do with it?] [Electronic Version]. *Učitelství listy* from <http://ucitelske-listy.ceskaskola.cz/Ucitelskelisty/Ar.asp?ARI=101907&CAI=2153>.
- iHned. (2006). Školy se připravují na reformu, která má odstranit 'biflování' [Schools are preparing for a reform, which should remove 'cramming'] [Electronic Version].

*iHned*. Retrieved June 7, 2007 from [http://ihned.cz/3-19124920-%8Akoly+se+p%F8ipravuj%ED+na+reformu-000000\\_d-4c](http://ihned.cz/3-19124920-%8Akoly+se+p%F8ipravuj%ED+na+reformu-000000_d-4c).

Ingrao, C. W. (1994). *The Habsburg monarchy: 1618-1815*. New York, USA: Cambridge University Press.

Institute for Information on Education (Ústav pro informace ve vzdělání). (2007). Slovník uživatele portálu [Dictionary for the web portal users]. Retrieved March 2, 2007, from [http://www.edu.cz/portal/page?\\_pageid=95,13016&\\_dad=portal&\\_schema=PORTAL&instance\\_id=1276](http://www.edu.cz/portal/page?_pageid=95,13016&_dad=portal&_schema=PORTAL&instance_id=1276)

Institute for Research in Education (VÚP). (2005). *Metodika ověřování školních vzdělávacích programů v základním vzdělávání na vybraných pilotních školách (červen 2002 - prosinec 2004). Závěrečná zpráva. [Testing school-based curricula in selected pilot schools (June 2002 - December 2004). Final report.]*. Praha: VÚP.

Kamens, D. H., Meyer, J. W., & Benavot, A. (1996). Worldwide patterns in academic secondary education curricula. *Comparative Education Review*, 40(2), 116-137.

Kotásek, J. (1992). On schools, education, and advancement in Czech lands. *European Education*, 36-57.

Koucký, J. (1996). Educational reforms in changing societies: Central Europe in the period of transition. *European Journal of Education*, 31(1), 7-24.

Kozma, T. (1998). New challenges of tertiary education in East-Central Europe. In E. e. Leitner (Ed.), *Educational Research and Higher Education Reform in Eastern and Central Europe* (Vol. 6, pp. 123-131). Frankfurt am Mein.

Kubálková, P. (2006). Ve školách vypukne velká revoluce [A great revolution will break out in schools] [Electronic Version]. *MF Dnes*, 29.12.2006 from [http://zpravy.idnes.cz/ve-skolach-vypukne-velka-revoluce-drt-/studium.asp?c=A061229\\_143515\\_studium\\_zra](http://zpravy.idnes.cz/ve-skolach-vypukne-velka-revoluce-drt-/studium.asp?c=A061229_143515_studium_zra).

Lawn, M., & Lingard, B. (2002). Constructing a European policy space in educational governance: The role of transnational policy actors. *European Educational Research Journal*, 1(2), 290-307.

Lidovky.cz. (2006). Víceletá gymnázia zeštíhlují [Multi-year secondary academic schools slim down] [Electronic Version]. *Lidové noviny - Brno*, January 9, 2006 from [http://lidovky.zpravy.cz/ln\\_noviny.asp?r=ln\\_noviny&c=A20060109\\_000080\\_ln\\_noviny\\_sko&klic=211082&mes=20060109](http://lidovky.zpravy.cz/ln_noviny.asp?r=ln_noviny&c=A20060109_000080_ln_noviny_sko&klic=211082&mes=20060109).

Lipsky, M. (1980). *Street-level bureaucracy: Dilemmas of the individual in public services*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

- Luke, A. Introduction: Theory and practice in critical discourse analysis. Retrieved June, 2007, from <http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/courses/ed253a/Luke/SAHA6.html>
- Machálková, J. (2006). Příští rok čeká školy revoluce [Schools are awaiting a revolution next year] [Electronic Version]. *Lidové noviny*, 23.11.2006. Retrieved June 14, 2007 from <http://www.lidovky.cz>.
- Maguire, M., & Ball, S. J. (1994). Researching politics and the politics of research: Recent qualitative studies in the UK. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 7(3), 269-285.
- Majone, G. (1989). *Evidence, argument & persuasion in the policy process*. New Haven: Yale University.
- Majone, G., & Wildavsky, A. (1984). Implementation as evolution. In J. L. Pressman & A. Wildavsky (Eds.), *Implementation* (3rd ed., pp. 163-180). Berkeley: University of California Press: Regents of the University of California.
- March, J. G. (1974). Leadership in an organized anarchy. In *Leadership and ambiguity*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- March, J. G. (1981). Footnotes to organizational change. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 26(4), 563-577.
- Matějů, P., & Straková, J. (2004). *Studium na vysoké škole 2004 [Studying at a university in 2004]*: Sociological Institute of Academy of Sciences in Czech Republic - Department of Social Stratification.
- Matějů, P., & Straková, J. (2005a). The role of the family and the school in the reproduction of educational inequalities in the post-Communist Czech Republic. *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 26(1), 17-40.
- Matějů, P., & Straková, J. (Eds.). (2005b). *Na cestě ka znalostní společnosti: Kde jsme? [On the way to the knowledge society: Where are we?]*. Praha: ISEA - Institute for social and economic analyses.
- Matusová, S. (1997/98). Democratic values as a challenge for education. *European Education*, 29(3), 65-76.
- Mauch, J. E., & Sabloff, P. L. W. (1995). *Reform and change in higher education. International perspectives*. (Vol. 2). New York & London: Garland Publishing, Inc.
- McDonnell, L. (2004). *Politics, persuasion, and educational testing*. Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press.
- McDonnell, L., & Elmore, R. F. (1987). Getting the job done: Alternative policy instruments. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 9(2), 133-152.

- McEneaney, E. H., & Meyer, J. W. (2000). The content of the curriculum: An institutionalist perspective. In M. T. Hallinan (Ed.), *Handbook of the sociology of education* (pp. xv, 588 p.). New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers.
- McGinn, N. (1997). The impact of globalization on national education systems. *Prospects*, 28(1), 41-54.
- McGinn, N., & Welsh, T. (1999). *Decentralization of education: why, when, what and how?* Paris: UNESCO.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (1987). Learning from experience: Lessons from policy implementation. *Educational evaluation and policy analysis*, 9(2), 171-178.
- McLaughlin, M. W. (2006). Implementation research in education: Lessons learned, lingering questions and new opportunities. In M. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- McLeish, E. A., & Phillips, D. (1998). *Processes of transition in education systems*. Wallingford: Symposium.
- McMullen, M. S. (2000). Higher education finance reform in the Czech Republic. *Educational Policy Analysis Archives*, 8(6), 16.
- Mebrahtu, T., Crossley, M., & Johnson, D. (2000). *Globalisation, educational transformation and societies in transition*. Oxford: Symposium Books.
- Meyer, J. W., & Ramirez, F. O. (2000). The world institutionalization of education. In J. Schriewer (Ed.), *Discourse formation in comparative education* (pp. x, 366 p.). New York: P. Lang.
- Mezera, A. (2001). Školský zákon na startu [Education Act at the starting line] [Electronic Version]. *Česká škola*. Retrieved May 2007 from <http://www.ceskaskola.cz/Ceskaskola/AR.asp?ARI=2576&CAI=2124>.
- Mitter, W. (2003). A decade of transformation: Educational policies in Central and Eastern Europe. *International Review of Education - Internationale Zeitschrift fur Erziehungswissenschaft*, 49(1-2), 75-96.
- Morkes, F. (2003). *Historický přehled postavení maturitní zkoušky a analýza jejich funkcí [Historical overview of high school exit examinations and an analysis of their functions]*. Prague: CERMAT.
- Morkes, F. (2004). Největší reforma školství v dějinách [The greatest school reform in history]. *Učitelské noviny*. Retrieved 33, from [http://www.ucitelskenoviny.cz/obsah\\_clanku.php?vydani=33&rok=04&odkaz=nejvetsi.htm](http://www.ucitelskenoviny.cz/obsah_clanku.php?vydani=33&rok=04&odkaz=nejvetsi.htm)



- National Institute for Vocational Education. Educational system in Czech Republic. Retrieved December 6, 2006, from [http://www.nuov.cz/index.php?page=educational\\_system\\_in\\_czech\\_republic&ll=en](http://www.nuov.cz/index.php?page=educational_system_in_czech_republic&ll=en)
- Newmann, F. M., Smith, B., Allenworth, E., & Bryk, A. S. (2001). Instructional program coherence: What it is and why it should guide school improvement policy. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 23*(4), 297-321.
- Numerato, M. (2008). Výsledky Národních srovnávacích zkoušek zohlední téměř 50 fakult [Nearly 50 universities will take into account results from the National comparative examinations]. [Electronic Version]. Retrieved February 10, 2008 from <https://www.scio.cz/media/NSZ5007.asp>.
- OECD. (1996). *Reviews of national policies for education - Czech Republic*. Paris: OECD.
- OECD. (2004). *Education at a glance*. Paris, France: OECD.
- OECD. (2006). Starting strong II: Early childhood education and care [Electronic Version].
- Olssen, M., Codd, J. A., & O'Neill, A.-M. (2004). *Education policy: Globalization, citizenship and democracy*. London ; Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage.
- Phillips, D. (2004). Toward a theory of policy attraction in education. In G. Steiner-Khamsi (Ed.), *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending* (pp. 235). New York and London: Teachers College Press, Columbia University.
- Piaget, J. (1999). *Jan Amos Comenius*: UNESCO: International Bureau of Education.
- Polyzoi, E., & Cerna, M. (2001a). A Dynamic model of forces affecting the implementation of educational change in the Czech Republic. *Comparative Education Review, 45*(1), 64-84.
- Polyzoi, E., & Cerna, M. (2001b). Focus on educational change and globalization: A dynamic model of forces affecting the implementation of educational change in the Czech Republic. *Comparative Education Review, 45*(1), 64-84.
- Průcha, J., & Walterová, E. (1992). Czechoslovak education within the broader social framework. *European Education*.
- Ramirez, F. O., & Boli, J. (1987). Global patterns of educational institutionalization. In G. M. e. a. Thomas (Ed.), *Institutional Structure: Constituting state, society, and the individual* (pp. 150-172). Newbury Park: Sage.
- Rein, M. (1983). *From policy to practice*. Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc.

- Roberts, A. (2005). *From good king Wenceslas to the good soldier Svejk*. Budapest, Hungary: Central European University Press.
- Roider, K. A. (Ed.). (1973). *Maria Theresa*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc.
- Rowan, B., Camburn, E., & Barnes, C. A. (2004). Benefiting from comprehensive school reform: A review of research on CSR implementation. In C. Cross (Ed.), *Putting the pieces together: Lessons from comprehensive school reform research* (pp. 1-52). Washington, D.C.: National Clearinghouse for Comprehensive School Reform.
- Rychen, D. S., & Salganik, L. H. (2001). *Defining and selecting key competencies*. Göttingen: Hogrefe & Huber Publishers.
- Sabatier, P., & Mazmanian, D. (1980). The implementation of public policy: A framework of analysis. *Policy Studies Journal*, 8(4), 538-560.
- Saetren, H. (2005). Facts and myths about research on public policy implementation: Out-of-fashion, allegedly dead, but still very much alive and relevant. *The Policy Studies Journal*, 33(4), 559-582.
- Samoff, J. (1999). Institutionalizing international influence. In E. Arnone and Torres (Ed.), *Comparative education* (pp. 51-90). Boulder: Rowman and Littlefield.
- Sarason, S. B. (1996). *Revisiting "The culture of the school and the problem of change"*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Schofield, J. (2008). Beyond delivery: Policy implementation as sense-making and settlement [Review of the book *Beyond delivery: Policy implementation as sense-making and settlement*]. *Public Administration*, 68(2), 591-618.
- Scio. (1999). Hodnocení kvality přijímacích zkoušek [Assessment of the quality of entrance examinations]. Retrieved December 8, 2003, from [http://www.scio.cz/tvorba\\_testu/hodnoceni\\_kvality/hodnoceni\\_kvality.htm](http://www.scio.cz/tvorba_testu/hodnoceni_kvality/hodnoceni_kvality.htm)
- Silova, I. (2004). Adopting the language of the new allies. In G. Steiner-Khamsi (Ed.), *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending* (pp. 75-87). New York, NY: Teachers College Press.
- Simonová, J., & Straková, J. (2005). *Vymezení hlavních problémů ohrožujících realizaci kurikulární reformy [Key issues threatening the implementation of curricular reform]*. Praha: SKAV.
- Sirotnik, K. (1998). Ecological images of change: Limits and possibilities. In A. Lieberman, D. Hopkins, A. Hargreaves & M. Fullan (Eds.), *International handbook of educational change* (pp. 181-198). Dordrecht ; Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

- Smylie, M. A., & Evan, A. E. (2006). Social capital and the problem of implementation. In M. Honig (Ed.), *New directions in education policy implementation: Confronting complexity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Spilková, V. (2004). RVP v kontextu vnitřní reformy české školy [Curricular frameworks in context of internal transformation of Czech schooling] [Electronic Version]. *Učitelství listy*, 15.4.2004 from <http://www.ucitelskelisty.cz/Ucitelskelisty/Ar.asp?ARI=101590&CAI=2147>.
- Spillane, J. P. (2002). Local theories of teacher change: The pedagogy of district policies and programs. *Teachers College Record*, 104(3), 377-420.
- Spillane, J. P. (2004). *Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Spillane, J. P., & Jennings, N. E. (1997). Aligned instructional policy and ambitious pedagogy: Exploring instructional reform from the classroom perspective. *Teachers College Record*, 98(3), 449-481.
- Spillane, J. P., Reiser, B. J., & Reimer, T. (2002). Policy implementation and cognition: Reframing and refocusing implementation research. *Review of Educational Research*, 72(3), 387-431.
- Steiner-Khamsi, G. (2004). *The global politics of educational borrowing and lending*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Straková, J. (2002). Mezinárodní výzkum PISA. Jaká je gramotnost českých patnáctiletých žáků? [International study PISA. How literate are Czech 15-year-olds?]. *Učitelství listy*, 39-42.
- Straková, J., Basl, J., & Veselý, A. (2006). *Základní a střední školství: Po větší změně není poptávka. [Basic and secondary education: A fundamental change is not in demand]*. Prague: Institute of Sociology of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Stromquist, N. P., & Monkman, K. (2000). *Globalization and education: Integration and contestation across cultures*. Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Taylor, S., Fazal, R., Lingard, B., & Henry, M. (1997). *Educational policy and the politics of change*. London ; New York: Routledge.
- Torres, C. A. (2002). Globalization, education, and citizenship: Solidarity versus markets? *American Educational Research Journal*, 39(2), 363-378.

- Tyack, D., & Cuban, L. (1995). *Tinkering toward utopia: A century of public school reform* (7th ed.). Cambridge, Massachusetts; London, England: Harvard University Press.
- U.S. Department of Education. (2003). *Teaching mathematics in seven countries: Results from the TIMSS 1999 video study* (No. NCES 2003-013 Revised). Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.
- Vlček, T., Růžička, D., & Zvěřina, P. Totalita: Pátek 17.listopadu 1989. Retrieved Jan 21, 2007, from [http://www.totalita.cz/1989/1989\\_1117\\_dem\\_03.php](http://www.totalita.cz/1989/1989_1117_dem_03.php)
- Watson, K. (2000). Globalization, educational reform and language policy in transitional societies. In T. Mebrahtu, M. Crossley & D. Johnson (Eds.), *Globalization, Educational Transformation and Societies in Transition* (pp. 41-68). Oxford, United Kingdom: Biddles Ltd.
- Weiler, H. N. (1990a). Comparative perspectives on educational decentralization: An exercise in contradiction? *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 12(4), 433-448.
- Weiler, H. N. (1990b). Curriculum reform and the legitimation of educational objectives: The Case of the Federal Republic of Germany. *Oxford Review of Education*, 16(1), 15-27.
- Weiler, H. N., & Miyake, E. (1989, March 27-31). *Reform and non-reform in education: The Political costs and benefits of reform policies in France and Japan*. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Francisco CA.
- Zhao, Y., & Frank, K. A. (2003). Factors affecting technology uses in schools: An ecological perspective. *American educational research journal*, 40(4), 807-840.
- Zíka, I. (2006). Kurzy o tvorbě školních vzdělávacích programů a RVP 1.: Projekt Koordinátor [Courses on development of school curricula: Project Coordinator] [Electronic Version]. *Česká škola*, 2.1.2006. Retrieved October 2, 2007 from <http://www.ceskaskola.cz/Ceskaskola/AR.asp?ARI=102556&CAI=2124>.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES



3 1293 03062 4286