

### PART III

#### CZECHOSLOVAK EDUCATION AND THE SCHOOL SYSTEM

by D. CAPKOVA and F. SINGULE (Prague)

The present Czechoslovak education system is developing in a society that is being built up on socialist principles. It can be briefly characterized as a constant search for content and form, methods and approaches to the educational process, an endeavour to improve the preparation given to young people and also to adults for life and for creative work.

Our cultural tradition includes living sources which have become relevant in solving many educational problems of further development. First of all we had John Huss's and the Hussites' search for truth and justice, the conviction of the equal rights of all men, the idea of the democratization of education and culture. This was developed in the activity of the Unity of the Czech Brethren and chiefly by Comenius. His were the ideas concerning a democratic approach towards education for all men without exception, concerning the organization of knowledge and principles of the curriculum; his was the emphasis on the social function of education and science. His universalism included both the organization of the curriculum and at the same time the profound development of the personality of pupils and of all men in constant relationship to the whole world with the highest purpose of achieving international understanding and peace. Because of the very unfavourable social and cultural development of our countries after 1620 these principles expressed by Comenius could not even begin to be realized in his native country. In the 19th century, however, they began to be remembered during the course of our National Revival and later on in the period of our first Czechoslovak Republic (i.e. in the inter-war period). They have again been revived from the end of the second world war to the present day. The ideas of Comenius, who lived and worked in many European countries, returned to his native country also through the mediation of many foreign thinkers who had been his followers. They influenced our development towards the end of the 18th and in the course of the 19th centuries. The tradition of Comenius was preserved by our people during the time of oppression until the National Revival.

The introduction of six year compulsory elementary education in 1774 in the countries of the Austrian empire and the reforms of secondary schools and universities were connected with tendencies towards germanization. However, the endeavour of Slovak and Czech educationists brought significant theoretical proposals written in Czech (1786) in which Comenius's ideas were developed. Examples were Daniel Lehocky, in his book on the education of children of lower classes up to the age of 15 including vocational education, and Samuel Tesodik, in his conception of the education of adults. In the first half of the 19th century a remarkable educational plan was drawn up by Benjamin Cervenak, analogous to the conception of Comenius's *Pampaedia*,

but unfortunately it was not completed or carried out (1844). These authors consciously continued the tradition of Comenius, as did the founder of the first kindergarten in Prague, J. V. Svoboda, or Jan Kollar, K. S. Amerling and his co-operators. Kollar proposed a system of education (goals, content and methods) and schools, including the pre-school age and the education of parents, with an emphasis on everything that makes men really human. Amerling, who understood school policy of that time as a consequence of the sterile absolutism of the government, prepared revolutionary proposals for a reorganisation of national Czech education and a new curriculum with the goal of developing qualities of humanity and aiming also at social education and practical contributions to industry, science and art, and morality.

One hundred years ago, in 1869, eight year compulsory education, i.e. school attendance, was introduced.

The development of research into the works of Comenius in the second half of the 19th century strengthened an interest in his educational ideas, especially among other teachers. The full practical realization of even basic principles of general education, of the school system which would include also pre-school age children and adult education still had to wait.

The foundation of the Czechoslovak Republic in 1918 brought about a significant quantitative development of the educational process in all grades and types of schools—nursery, primary and secondary schools, vocational and technical schools, and universities. But on the whole, the school system was dualistic. For instance, basic education was different in content and aims not only in the higher grade, but also in the lower elementary schools. Elementary education was sometimes modified according to size of schools, and social, geographical and local conditions. The teaching programmes were sometimes different for town schools, schools in villages, boys and girls. In some small villages there were one or two-room primary schools with individual departments as forms. In some small villages some children after having finished the 5th year of their attendance, continued attendance for 3 years more. The dualism was recognizable in the fact that, besides the eight or seven year grammar schools with the possibility of attendance being based on selection according to the results of an eleven-plus examination, there were 4 year senior primary schools (town schools) which pupils could continue at 4 year commercial, agricultural, industrial or vocational schools. The grammar school lasting 8 years prepared for the university. The Czech eight-year grammar schools were considered to be among the best European secondary schools. About 40% of the pupils of these schools were girls.

The gradual development of education during the time of our first Republic (1918-1938) was brought to a halt by the German occupation.

After the liberation in 1945 fundamental changes were established. Through the Education Acts of 1948, 1953 and in 1960 a unified school system was introduced.

The Education Act of 1948 introduced many changes, especially in basic education and brought about its democratization and unification by introducing the unified basic nine-year school for all children of the 6 to 15 age group. This type of school contained two stages: the junior one corresponding to the old primary (elementary) school for children of the 6 to 11 age group and the senior stage for children of the 11 to 15 age group. This was to be a unified comprehensive school for all children. The aim of teaching was to develop modern methods of education according to the abilities of all pupils in order to prepare them for secondary and higher education. Individual abilities and interests of pupils were to be developed in various extra-curricular activities in optional subjects and groups of interests. The plans and curricula were adjusted to the needs of life of a society beginning to be organized on socialist foundations. Problems of education in the wake of the scientific-technical revolution were also to be solved.

Plans for unified secondary schools had already been prepared by some Czechoslovak educationists before the second world war, some of them appealing to the ideas of J. A. Comenius. Before the second world war there were discussions concerning plans to reform the secondary schools. After 1948 when the Communist party became the decisive political force in Czechoslovakia it took over also responsibility for school policy and for the introduction of education at the secondary level for children up to the age of 18. The positive result was a quantitative one.

However, by the Education Act of 1953, the general secondary school was shortened to 3 years only; it was connected with the basic eight-year school in the general eleven-year school. Through this School Act of 1953 the scheme of the Soviet school was introduced. The aim was to democratize secondary schooling. However, the reform act was passed without previous discussions with Czechoslovak teachers, educationists and parents. The adjustment of our school system to the reforms in other socialist countries was carried out without enough regard to our national and cultural educational and democratic tradition, and instead of an improvement it brought about a levelling-down of the standards of the secondary school. The total length of education up to the end of attendance at the secondary school was shortened from 13 to 11 years. The curriculum was restricted, especially that part of it devoted to the academic programme (classical and foreign languages, history, philosophy, theory of literature, geometry etc.). Dogmatic application of Marxist ideology on educational theory and practice in all types of schools had further negative consequences. The negative results of this Education Act of 1953 were criticized by parents, teachers and universities who had to accept insufficiently prepared students (the Maturity Examination Certificate at the general eleven-year school enabled the pupils to enter the university). The experience showed that it is not possible to transfer foreign models uncritically. One of the most difficult problems after 1953 was the low level of the graduates of the eleven-year secondary schools and the great number of them. It happened

that only half of them could be admitted to the university. The effort to abolish failing at all types of schools meant, of course, that the teacher who devoted his attention especially to the backward pupils could not give enough time to the gifted ones and, since during the fifties special interest groups and working groups were also restricted, gifted children were not given enough possibilities to develop their abilities and to be well prepared for higher education. These troubles were similar to those of other socialist countries. The Soviet Union tried to solve these problems by the school reform of the year 1958. Its principles were introduced to the other socialist countries. General polytechnical education was introduced to the curricula as a preliminary preparation of young people for work, practical activity and possible future jobs. The principles of connecting school and life, education and production, work as an important factor in the education process, were elaborated theoretically and applied in practice in all types of schools.

In Czechoslovakia wide public discussions demanded in agreement with our tradition in education a prolongation of compulsory and secondary education. That is why the basic nine-year school and the general twelve-year school were then introduced. As a response to the pressure for polytechnization of schools, about 22% of the educational process was devoted to practical work in workshops, farms, factories, etc. The Education Act of 1960 speaks about the schools of the first cycle, i.e. the basic nine-year school, and the schools of the second cycle which are of 4 kinds : general secondary schools, vocational and secondary vocational schools, apprentice training centres and apprentice schools. Pre-school education precedes the basic nine-year school, the university continues the education after secondary education. The principles of polytechnization in education helped towards the more all round development of the personality of the pupil, but could not solve the question of preparation and qualification for vocational training of those pupils from the twelve-year secondary school who could not be accepted by the university. On the other hand, more time devoted to manual work in the curriculum of the general secondary school brought about a further restriction of the academic course. The criticism came to be concentrated on the inner structure of the secondary school.

A new attempt to reform the educational system in Czechoslovakia started in 1964/65. These reforms were based on a more profound analysis of the present state of education with regard to the needs of Czechoslovak industry and culture, to our cultural educational tradition and based on a thorough comparison with education in foreign countries. The results of such analysis have engendered widespread discussion. The most important characteristics of the new proposals for further reforms are as follows.

Based on the socialist principles of the unified school system attention has begun to be paid to problems which were previously not admitted to discussion — the problem of inner differentiation concentrated on the question of

children requiring special care, i.e. not only backward children but also specially gifted children. With this problem in mind, pupils of the last grades of the basic nine-year school have been tested experimentally in a greater number of schools (by means of modern diagnostic methods). To enable continual development of gifted children and to assure in this way a higher level of students entering the universities the necessity of improving academic courses at the secondary school has been considered but the general basic idea of the comprehensive secondary school for the majority of pupils who will not continue their study at the university has not been abolished. It was necessary to consider the curriculum of the comprehensive secondary school lest it should be too difficult for the majority of pupils and, on the other hand, better prepare gifted pupils for the university. This was the task of further proposed reforms of the year 1968. According to them the teaching in the higher grades (8-9 or 7-9) of the basic nine-year school was to be differentiated in several streams with optional subjects. This is being tried now as is differentiation in two streams — natural sciences and arts in the general secondary school with additional optional subjects.

Since 1965 more modern methods of learning, including modern aids to teaching, developing the activity and creative powers of the pupils, have been introduced. It has been proposed that the secondary school course should last for four years. New experimental types of secondary schools have been introduced. New flexible curricula have been proposed and they have been experimentally examined at some secondary schools.

Since 1965 more attention has been given to the problems of curricula at various types of schools in order to harmonize the humanities and natural sciences, to co-ordinate aims, contents and methods of education with the development of the child, to solve the questions of basic education, the curricula of secondary education, to examine relations between pre-school education, basic school education, secondary education and the universities, to give more regard to relations between education and social life. Growing attention is paid to the problems of interdisciplinary correlations. Growing interest is shown in studying and viewing education as a whole life process and part of the universal education of man ; the all round, many sided development of man does not only mean preparing him for solving the conflicting situations of his individual life but also helping to develop his whole personality through creative work and helping him to form proper relations with the whole of the world, especially with human society.

The aim of our present system of education is to open schools to all levels of society by a wide democratization in education, and to open free education to all age levels.

Children up to the age of six receive pre-school education in nurseries and nursery schools. Included in the pre-school education are also seasonal or permanent child care centres, organised in villages during the harvest or permanently in areas where there is an insufficient number of children to

warrant the establishment of a regular nursery school. They have an educational as well as a social function. They help families in caring for children and enable mothers to take an active part in public and social life. About 44% of the employed persons in Czechoslovakia are women. They are employed in the health services and in the field of education especially in nurseries and nursery schools. Medical and hygienic rules limit the sort of employment which may be held by women to 65% of all vocations. None are employed where difficult physical work is required. The time-table of the nurseries and nursery schools is regulated by the needs of employed mothers. Besides day care nurseries and nursery schools there are weekly and permanent nurseries with uninterrupted care for children of mothers who have shift work. Nurseries and nursery schools co-operate with parents to secure the healthy physical and mental development of children (they come under the care of Ministry of Health). The number of children in nurseries vary from 15 to 20 or 25. Children are cared for by nurses trained in secondary vocational schools, by guardians and a doctor who regularly follows the children's health and development, prescribes a daily schedule for individual age groups, etc. Nurses keep regular progress records of hygiene, speech, mental development and the independence of individual children.

The programmes of children's activities in the nursery schools are concentrated on the development of physical, sensory, intellectual, character and aesthetic abilities by means of play activities. One of the educational aims is also to prepare children for school education. District institutes for teacher training organise a number of courses in order to improve the specialist level of heads and teachers. Proposals for the obligatory attendance of children of 5 years at a nursery school have not yet been incorporated into an Education Act. The growth of pre-school education in our country may be seen from the following numbers. After the first world war there were 1,403 nursery schools with 56,037 children (1919). Before the second world war 1,753 institutions for pre-school education had 100,461 children. In 1968 8,812 institutions for pre-school education staffed by 25,988 teachers and 1,201 guardians cared for 378,360 children.

Compulsory basic education for all children of the 6 to 15 age group is offered by basic nine-year schools. Where there are unfavourable conditions for opening all nine grades incomplete nine-year schools are established and the children finishing the last, usually the fifth, grade of these schools may continue in another nine-year school with all grades. An important part of the basic nine-year schools are the after-school centres for children attending grades 1-5 and school clubs for the pupils of the 6-9 grade group. Here, whilst their parents are at work, children may take part in hobby circles or do their exercises or use their free time (under guidance and care) in sports, dancing, singing, music, films, theatre, performances, etc. In 1968 2,109,183 pupils attended 10,966 basic nine-year schools and were taught by 97,505 teachers.

The external organisation of these schools was based on the Education Act of 1960. However, further research and experiments have solved many problems. The proposals for further reforms in 1965 tended to a conception of concrete social relations. Problems which were particularly pressing were the structure of the curriculum in the basic nine-year school, modernisation of the content, the problems of modern ways of teaching and using proper methods, the relations between both main grades of this school and possibilities of inner differentiation in the higher grades to solve the problem of the levelling down of education. Experiments at more than 400 schools have hitherto shown that the differentiation introduced in the 9th form comes too late and that the introduction of more optional subjects in the 6th grade has offered wider possibilities to the pupils (biology, physics, chemistry), or another living language (English, French, German), choral-singing, sport, cooking, sewing, etc. However, in some places there are not enough teachers, for instance, for teaching more foreign languages. There has also been a need for an increase in the number of schools for specially gifted children, music, art, painting, etc. (The study of foreign languages has become very popular, so that, for example, between 1965-1968 the number increased from 170,749 to 187,195. The most widely-studied optional language now is German with 157,720 students, then English with 10,283 students, last French with 9,192.) These statistics also reflect the lack of teachers of English and French in the nine-year schools. On the whole after the Education Act of 1960 the curricular programmes of the nine-year school included the following subjects : the mother tongue, literature Russian, social relations, history, geography, mathematics, citizenship, physics, chemistry, natural science, physical education, arts, drawing, writing, music, handicraft : i.e., language subjects 35.9%, social studies 11.3%, mathematics and science 27.5%, health, physical education and arts 17.4% handicraft 7.6%, the rest being subjects of special interest.

Young people who have finished the basic nine-year school and enter apprentice training centres, organised on work premises, receive secondary education and acquire qualifications for a trade. Apprentice schools offer only basic secondary education and theoretical knowledge. The number of these schools has increased lately, so that 942 schools of this type are attended by 350,128 apprentices. These schools offer training in 288 apprentice trades, by means of specialist courses of two, three year or four years. Three year courses are the most common and make up 68.75% of apprentice education. Three groups may be differentiated in range and content : (1) trades with the emphasis on manual and professional abilities like forging or hand weaving. (2) The large group of professions like locksmiths, ceramics, turners. (3) The group where emphasis is laid on expert knowledge, for example future chemists in industry, laboratory technicians, refrigerator mechanics, elevator fitters.

The most complete study lasts five years and includes three years in an apprentice training centre followed by a two year secondary school course for

employed persons. This type of study is on a level with secondary vocational education. The School-Leaving Certificate at the end of this study entitles its possessor to apply for university education. Of 3,876 pupils at 96 schools with such organised courses of study 1,389 pupils continued to the end of the fifth grade.

Changes in content are introduced according to the needs of industry and the technical development of production. It has been found that the general education of apprentices gives a wider range for qualified workers and should be given more time.

Older employed persons attend schools for 2 or 3 year courses. Secondary vocational schools offer young workers with nine-year basic education a further four year course leading to complete secondary specialist education as well as offering general education, providing proficiency for administrative and other posts in the national economy and culture and preparing for university entrance. School leavers of general secondary schools and secondary schools for employed persons are provided with an opportunity to take a shortened course of general vocational education. Vocational education has shown rapid quantitative development, particularly in Slovakia.

School leavers of the general secondary school may gain vocational education in technical subjects and technical knowledge in a two year course. Education reforms have introduced new subjects, e.g. philosophy and social science. Study in secondary vocational schools terminates in a School Leaving Certificate. In technical schools the examination for such a certificate includes a special thesis on technical subjects.

School-leavers of the nine-year basic school may continue general and polytechnic education in general secondary schools (in 347 schools of this type there are about 31,665 pupils). There are two kinds of general secondary schools: comprehensive schools and technical schools. The latter consist of 4 years' study, the former of 3 years but with the prospect of also becoming a four year course. Technical schools have not undergone so many reforms while the general secondary schools have always been the focus of reforms.

The double aim of the general secondary schools — to prepare for higher education (about 35% of their students) and for practical work in life, and in the vocations, has led to continual consideration and experiment to solve the harmonisation of these two aspects and to assure the many sided development of the pupils at the same time. Preliminary results have been that two branches have been introduced — arts and natural sciences. Also new subjects have been introduced, particularly those which had been neglected during the fifties (psychology, logic, philosophy, Latin). The curriculum includes languages, the mother tongue and literature, Russian and another living language, psychology and logic, philosophy, history, mathematics, natural science geography, physics, chemistry, biology, aesthetics, physical culture, the basics of production. Optional subjects are: in the arts branch, another living language, art, descriptive geometry; in the natural science branch,



Latin, art, technical drawing. The endeavour to make preparation for the universities more effective brought about another problem — the over-burdening of pupils which endangered the children's harmonious development, especially their mental health. The division of the curriculum into two streams opened up a possibility of two year courses at technical schools for the school leavers to complete their preparation for a vocation. The introduction of pupil guidance, helping the pupils to choose a vocation, or type of university study, or one of the branches of the curriculum etc., was most important in attempting to solve the crisis of the general secondary school.

University students also increased in number. 35 universities with 98 faculties had 134,000 students in 1967, (in Slovakia there are 12 universities). The universities are divided into three basic types : humanities (including economics), technical universities (including colleges of agriculture and forestry) and the fine art faculties. The admission of students to universities is based on the results of their entrance examinations and a complex assessment of the applicants' abilities for university study. Entering students sit for two or three examinations. The university courses are administered by a committee of university teachers : the courses are divided into years and semesters. Selective subjects can be chosen in higher classes enabling individual specialization.

A new University Act was passed in 1966. In 1967/68 a four year programme was started in the pedagogic faculties, intended for teachers for the nine-year basic school. Special attention is given there to pedagogy, psychology, teaching methods, special subjects as well as the history of education.

Czechoslovakia offers possibilities of study for employed persons in all types of schools. Most of them study in secondary schools for employed persons offering secondary vocational education. As many employed persons have now already gained the necessary qualifications, the number of studying employed adult persons has decreased. There is also a form of correspondence university study — directed and completed through regular consultations, or external degree study which follows individual plans chosen by the students.

Employed people have other possibilities for further education at work technical schools and work institutes. Work technical schools offer secondary vocational or complete secondary vocational education and special knowledge in the requisite specialized field. Work institutes offer courses of at least two years leading to higher vocational education in certain specialized fields for those employees who have had secondary education or secondary vocational education and are experienced practitioners.

Special attention in our socialist country has continually been paid to young people requiring special care, for instance, to those with psychic disturbances, physical defects, or those placed in health institutions. They can receive primary and secondary education to perform socially useful work and to improve the state of their health. Consideration of the education they particularly need, is concentrated especially on the problem of human relations and methods of psychological understanding.

Our education system is supplemented by out-of-school facilities which serve to develop the personal abilities and talents of youth in art, music, literary and dramatic spheres and dancing. The people's schools of art, attached to local authorities ensure this, particularly for talented young people but also for adults. 378 schools of this type educate 152,217 students. Similarly the people's schools of languages offer to young people or adults the chance to study various foreign languages. The greatest interest is in the study of English, followed by German, then French, and rather less often Spanish and other European and Oriental languages. The demand is greater than established schools can satisfy. Children from three to fifteen whose parents cannot, or will not, take care of them are educated in children's homes. Those children who attend secondary school or a type of vocational school far from their home live in homes for youth. University students live in hostels. The problem with children from children's homes is one of possible psychological deprivation. That is why special attention has been paid to them by psychologists and physicians.

More attention given to the harmonisation of the relations between the individual and society, the endeavour to combine aspects of the development of personality with democratization and the needs of socialist society mark a new developing period in our socialist education. Research institutes help to solve problems and to assure a theoretical basis for development.