

Is School Education Meaningful If It Does Not Lead Pupils to Seek Meaning?

Ludmila Muchová

What are we for in the world? That was the first catechism question, followed by a clear, succinct answer, when six year old children sat down for the first lesson of Catholic religion in the 1950s. At that time there were already very few such children and the number has not grown much. Religion has ceased to be an integral part of school life, whether in the form of a subject, or in the form of common rituals or a widely shared view of life. But does the challenge contained in the question somehow remain in the space of the Czech school? Is one of the tasks of the school to help children and young people search for an answer to the question, when they live their school and out-of-school lives in the midst of a society which is pluralist in values and worldviews and does not offer simple answers to complex questions? The challenge to search for the meaning of life, concealed in the question, is not a merely individual concern; we search for it in the community of close as well as more distant persons since childhood. How do contemporary children and young people search for what *really matters* in life and how does school help them in this?

This paper aims to contribute to reflection on the mutual relationship among the Czech schooling system, the contemporary society and searching for the meaning of life among children as well as among the people involved in Czech schools. On the one hand I wish to point out the difficulties of the contemporary curricular documents with respect to educational assistance to children on the path of searching for the meaning of life, on the other hand I want to show that in Czech educational context it is possible to rely on a clear notion of the content of the concept of meaning of life (for that I have chosen the psychotherapeutic school of logotherapy) and that there exist instruments of evaluation which can at the same time assist schools in focusing on this task. At first sight it may seem that there is not much space for deep-thinking analyses and looking for conclusions. The relationship between society and its schooling system is determined by a number of official documents, which repeatedly confirm that the school – besides other instruments – serves to stabilize the contemporary as well as future society. Czech society and Czech schooling are no exception. When we start from the characteristics of contemporary society, often called postmodern (or hypermodern, see e.g. G. Lipovetsky¹) or perceived as an outcome of modernity (e.g. A. Giddens²), we can identify two of its characteristic features: globalization and individualism.

Meaning of life as a value in postmodern society

Anthony Giddens defines five dimensions of globalization. It is first of all the world capitalist economy. According to him, division of the political and economic power in the individual states has enabled the global activities of supranational corporations, which from the position

1 Cf. Gilles LIPOVETSKY, *Hypermoderní doba: od prožitku k úzkosti*, Praha: Prostor, 2013.

2 Cf. Anthony GIDDENS, *Důsledky modernity*, Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství, 2003.

of economic power influence the politics of individual countries. The fact that they produce for profit drives the widening of their markets with goods and financial markets. At the same time they are also linked to global inequality with respect to people as the workforce. Individual states get richer or poorer in connection with the growth of economy and their significance in the world political order derives from their wealth. As a result of mutual coordination and interaction their individual sovereignty gets weaker, but their power – and thereby significance – increases. That is the second dimension of globalization. The third dimension – the global military order – carries the same contradictory tendencies. Military alliances of supranational character (e.g. NATO) limit the ability of member states to create their own external military strategies, but grant them a share of the alliance's power. A dramatic problem is the terrible destructive power of modern war technologies, maintained at high level not only by the economically developed countries of the world, but also by poor ones. Giddens believes that in this sense there is no "third world", only first world. The destructive potential of modern weapons has been shown by World War I and II and in the era of weapons of mass destruction holding these weapons has not only symbolic significance, but also a deterring function. The fourth dimension of globalization according to this author is international division of labour. The original interconnection of national economies with their own mineral resources and the qualification of the workforce with traditional types of industry were replaced after World War II by global division of labour. This has enabled production in traditionally poor countries offering very cheap workforce. Many economically strong countries have thus been in fact deindustrialized and at present find it difficult to organize their own economies. The development of industry and industrial technologies also affects other areas – e.g. agriculture contributes to the destruction of the environment, which poses a planetary threat to the globally interconnected world. Giddens calls the last, fifth dimension cultural globalization, enabled by the transformation of communication technologies. As a result, not only are people around the world systematically informed of events at the opposite poles of the Earth, but the institution of modernity spreads globally all over the world.³

It is not difficult to locate the Czech Republic within these dimensions. After 1989 it transferred speedily and on a voluntary basis from the military and political power grouping in the sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, on which the victorious powers agreed at the end of World War II, to the new political grouping of the European Union and the military grouping of NATO. Within the EU the Czech Republic follows economic growth as a highly important index of our significance on the global political scene. If the well-known dictum of Maria Theresa that school is a political issue holds, then it is no wonder that the European Union (and our country along with it) strives to increase its competitiveness in the worldwide labour market and thus increase its wealth, which retrospectively conditions technical, military and industrial progress. Without an educated and sufficiently flexible workforce this cannot be achieved. The workforce that will affect our chances in a future counted in decades is currently sitting in the school benches. It is therefore necessary to influence their learning in this direction.

With respect to considerations of the globalized world, the effort of politicians who determine the country's direction and have sufficient decision-making power to do it seems logical. But is all that also what the individual citizen wants? Does the contemporary human being need to be part of a powerful, significant and rich whole in order to be happy? The answer can be found in considerations starting from the individual and her significance within the contemporary society. In this context our society is labelled individualistic.

3 Cf. Anthony GIDDENS, *Důsledky modernity*, pp. 67–73.

According to the Slovak author O. Štefaňák individualism in the post-socialist countries of central Europe has specific features. After 1989 new subcultures arose, characterised by the trend of fast cultural separation, creation of own lifestyle, fashion, special value orientation and partnership (Štefaňák gives the example of youth). According to him this was a straight path to individualism, due to which every human being conceives herself as creator of her life and at the same time as consumer of her own project. As a result of mass access to higher forms of education the time of youth is prolonged. Young people feel a pressure to become creators of their identity. According to Štefaňák every human being is forced to form her life by her own autonomous and fully personal decisions. With much distrust she follows the great institutions from which people in earlier times accepted life values, norms and exemplars of behaviour as obligations, without wondering about their validity. The very autonomy in deciding has become a highly appreciated value, alongside values such as self-realization, creativity or faith in human progress. Participation in the life of great institutions is perceived as a voluntary obligation valid only for a certain time. Štefaňák underlines solitude, which may become part of the thus perceived task of gradual composition of own identity by the phenomenon of the so-called “scenes”, which are places of gathering where people come into mutual physical contact, but only for the purpose of reaching a particular goal, which does not require them to step out of anonymity. Emphasis on individuality leads some people to the idea of social equality. But rising on the social scale is not determined only by diligence, talent and the quality of autonomous decisions, but primarily by the economic and social family capital, i.e., the financial situation of parents and their contacts with a network of people holding certain functions. According to Štefaňák searching for freedom has both positive and negative features. By means of it young people protest against various kinds of violence or get involved in humanitarian or ecological campaigns. On the other hand they try to find orientation in a society which sociologists label “anomic”, i.e., a society without laws: Its goal are unclear, because earlier moral convictions fail, collective consciousness is weakened, the difference between the real means of individuals and the cultural and social offer of society becomes manifest. All this may lead people to lose their relationship to society. Due to division of labour relationships among people also disappear. Social control loses power. Štefaňák adds that Slovak society (and it seem to hold for Czech society as well) is characterised by an intensive social pressure to succeed, but less intensive pressure to use moral means to attain success. As a result, people make greater use of illegal means. The competitive environment, together with the disintegration of institutions which used to have a protective function with respect to individuals, thus causes the degradation of humanity and humaneness in society.⁴

Thus the value of human freedom realized in autonomous decision-making, from which the emphasis on individualism in contemporary society derives, manifests a certain ambiguity. It can lead to responsible criticism and protest against politicians and institutions if their decisions turn against the human being, but at the same time it can be a means on the path of attaining success without accepting moral obligations or respects. In fact we could have noticed that in the sociological reflection of globalization and its manifestations the moral dimension of the acting of politicians, entrepreneurs, economists and communication technologies providers was left aside. On the other hand, in the life of an individual who decides alone for the choice of her life goals and means of achieving them the moral dimension is central. How is this value linked to the meaning of human life?

4 Cf. Ondrej ŠTEFAŇÁK, *Religiozita mládeže na príklade spišskej diecézy*, Ružomberok: PF KU v Ružomberku, 2009, pp. 52–53. Štefaňák's analysis well corresponds to the most frequent characteristics of postmodernity, as described also by A. Giddens. Cf. Anthony GIDDENS, *Důsledky modernity*, pp. 133–134.

The work of the Austrian doctor and psychotherapist V. E. Frankl originated and matured in the era when the modern world was culminating, or rather disappearing – in the 1st half of the 20th century, especially during World War II, whose trauma he experienced as a Jewish prisoner in four concentration camps. It is no accident that his knowledge arose at the time of the arising postmodernity. It was a result of rigorous reflection on the causes of destructive power and murderous mechanisms, in the realization of which humans of the culminating modern age have taken part. But Frankl's answer does not come out depressive. Quite on the contrary. When following the fundamental question concerning human happiness, he answers – based on a number of empirical findings – that a human being has a natural need for happiness which is not derived from her own benefit or satisfaction, but quite on the contrary from the extent to which she strives for the good of something or someone other, beyond her own person. Thus according to him the feeling of satisfaction is experienced by a person who fulfils a task connected with working for other people or for the world, who meets other people or the world in a feeling of unique love or in an experience of beauty, and finally a person who responds to suffering and pain with an attitude of acceptance. Frankl summarizes the fulfilling of the values of love, goodness, beauty, forgiveness and others under the overall task of a human being: to fill her life with meaning. And precisely in this human principle of life his logotherapy finds the spiritual dimension of human existence.⁵ It is succinctly summarized by E. Lukas: "Humans are rational beings with a spiritual dimension and as such cannot just consume and enjoy themselves. That simply does not suffice to mental health and inner fulfilment."⁶

E. Lukas is a direct pupil of V. E. Frankl. For thirteen years she was directly involved in counselling. She also applied the ideas of logotherapy and existential analysis to the problem of educating children to meaning. Let us briefly summarize her logotherapeutic incentives for educating children and young people. E. Lukas shows how by her thinking, feeling and acting a human being always reaches beyond herself, how she reaches self-transcendence. She faces various options, of which she can realize but a few. Education should guide her to be able to choose the most meaningful ones – i.e., not those that lead only to satisfying her own pleasure or to following merely her own feelings or physical or emotional states, but those that lead to self-transcendence in work, love, to an encounter with beauty or to an accepting attitude to suffering. Lukas sees the threat to the human beings of the contemporary postmodern age posed by the surplus which allows people in the first world to mostly consume or passively enjoy themselves; extremely speaking – to sit with a full stomach and a rich bank account in a luxury home and have no wishes left, since all wishes can immediately be fulfilled by means of money.

According to Lukas, in order to develop a healthy relationship to values linked to filling life with meaning contemporary children and young people need the adult generation to help them see the world of their games and learning in meaningful contexts, they need to be aware of the value of the things around them, they need a task which is worth the effort in order to form a constructive intention. From mere consumption children are to be lead to focused activity, to which they can contribute with their ideas and work, and transform this activity into a creative process, creating something that lies beyond them. Logotherapy construes education as preparation for adulthood, when the educator generation will no longer be able to remove various crises and problems from the grown-up children. Education is preparation for life in

5 Frankl's whole work develops the three paths of a human being to filling her life with meaning described above. Let us mention e.g. Viktor Emanuel FRANKL, *Vůle ke smyslu: vybrané přednášky o logoterapii*, Brno: Cesta, 1997 or Viktor Emanuel FRANKL, *Lékařská péče o duši: základy logoterapie a existenciální analýzy*, Brno: Cesta, 2006. In Czech Christian context Frankl's ideas are developed especially by P. Tavel. Cf. e.g. Peter TAVEL, *Smysl života podle Viktora Emanuela Frankla: potřeba smyslu života, přínos Viktora E. Frankla k otázce smyslu života*, Praha: Triton, 2007.

6 Elisabeth LUKASOVÁ, *Logoterapie ve výchově*, Praha: Portál, 1997, p. 40.

the sense that it leads the growing-up generation to work and responsibility. Logotherapy does not reject orientation on performance in school education; however, it is subordinated to the goal of giving children as many chances as possible to fill their life with meaning by developing their talents in the highest measure in serving a good cause. The task of education is first of all to sustain the children's courage to live; in order to do that it is to protect them from excessive unhealthy influence and help them form their own lifestyle. The success of education is not concealed merely in the results of performance tests, but also in how children and young people learn to "grasp life" at school.⁷

We can see that in the reflections of logotherapists the unambiguous conclusion deriving from the political and economic interest of the society to be competitive in the world market, to secure as great prosperity for its citizens as possible and to subordinate the schooling system to this aim is countered by the finding that a rich person stuck in prosperity need not be satisfied, joyous and happy if she cannot grasp life in a way that enables her to reach transcendent values. A human being is not a mere consumer or passive participant of events taking place beyond her will, in her spiritual dimension she wants to co-create the world and the happy life of the people around her. Logotherapy puts it simply: To search for and to find life meaning. And it challenges educators to subordinate their educational efforts to this goal. How does the Czech schooling system respond to the fact that human joy, satisfaction and happiness are not linked only to success in the market of commodities and labour?

Neoliberal reforms of EU school systems and their economic background

According to the international comparative study of student skills PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) conducted in 2009, the performance of Czech pupils as compared to previous periods had got worse the most of all 65 examined countries, in reading, mathematical and science skills. According to the 2012 study these skills had improved slightly, though Czech pupils still remained rather average. The front places have in recent times been held by pupils from Asian countries: Shanghai, Singapore, Hong Kong. In both years most Czech pupils unanimously stated in the attached questionnaire that they do not like going to school, that they often get bored there, some would rather not go at all. Of OECD countries Czech pupils' assessment of school as friendly environment is the lowest. Their performance, on the other hand, compared to other developed countries of OECD is far more dependent on their family socioeconomic background.⁸ Such results are presented to the Czech public every three years, the ministers of education currently in office regularly comment on the bleak results, arguing with the low financial support of schooling which manifests itself especially in the low salaries of teachers and the poor state of their further education. The test results are also examined by the Czech School Inspection, whose task it is to propose changes in order for the performance of our pupils to improve in the future.

However, few notice what international organization it is that conducts the regular testing of knowledge skills of children in 65 countries of the world. The abbreviation OECD conceals the name "Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development". It was founded in 1961 to succeed the preceding organization, whose task was the economic renovation of the countries of Europe after World War II. It consists of the 34 economically most developed countries of

⁷ Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 56–112.

⁸ Cf. © Čeští žáci se v mezinárodním srovnání průzkumu PISA zlepšili (on-line), at <http://www.ceskenoviny.cz/zpravy/cesti-zaci-se-v-mezinarodnim-srovnani-pisa-zlepsili/1015298>, accessed May 16, 2014.

the world. Its prime activity is promoting market principles in various spheres of economic life. CR has been its member since 1995.⁹ If this organization is interested in the level of pupil and student education in different countries of the world, its view is definitely focused on the relationship between the level of education and the economic prosperity of countries which in globalized society come into sharp competition with respect to other countries and continents. As we have stated in the preceding chapter, globalization and neoliberal trends are what moves the contemporary postmodern society. The pressure for a higher level of knowledge which pupils can apply in practice therefore conceals questions connected with the optimization of human performance, and thereby increasing the quality of their offer on the ever more competitive labour market.

In fact, the history of the Czech *White Paper, National Programme of Education Development in the Czech Republic* shows that it is linked to similar goals with which the OECD monitors changes in the level of education in important countries of the world. The Czech white paper follows up on a EU document called *White Paper on Education and Training – Teaching and Learning – Towards a Learning Society*. In order to understand its significance we must return to its history. The European Union regularly publishes so-called green papers to serve the widest possible discussion of a certain area of political concern (e.g. care of the environment or the energy policy of the EU). White papers contain proposals for social activities in a certain sphere. Sometimes they follow up on green papers, but contain official proposals on certain political areas with the aim that EU countries develop these areas in a certain direction. The white paper concerning the education policy of EU countries was published in 1995. It followed up on a white paper published in 1993 called *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment*, which had stressed “non-material investments”, especially in education and research. “This investment in intelligence will play a substantial part in the development of employment, competitiveness and solidarity of our countries,” states the introduction.¹⁰ Evidently, the EU is concerned with the development of human cognitive abilities primarily for economic reasons. Other than economic goals are mentioned in other places (e.g. the value of transmitting the cultural heritage of Europe, emphasis on the development of pupils’ individual personality, protection of pupils from the information attacks of the mass media which harm human dignity). But generally speaking one can say that as a whole this effort is subordinated to the goal of increasing the competitiveness of the European Union in the world market.¹¹ In this sense it has been criticised by many western European teachers and labelled “neoliberal”, i.e., such that is concerned primarily with supporting the principles of free competition, where the state merely secures the conditions in which market mechanisms can develop.

Key competencies of the General Educational Programme for Primary Education as equipment for happy and successful life of citizen

Compared to earlier curricular documents the General Educational Programmes focus on the goals of school education from two points of view. One is the point of view of teachers. The programmes define areas to which the pedagogical effort of teachers and educators in individual schools is to be directed. According to the General Educational Programme for Primary Education (further GEP PE) primary education is to offer pupils a reliable foundation of gener-

9 Cf. © MINISTERSTVO ŠKOLSTVÍ, MLÁDEŽE A TĚLOVÝCHOVY, Informace o zapojení České republiky do vzdělávacích projektů OECD (on-line), at <http://www.msmt.cz/mezinarodni-vztahy/organizace-pro-ekonomickou-spolupraci-a-rozvoj-oecd>, accessed June 16, 2014.

10 © Weisbuch zur allgemeinen und beruflichen Bildung. Lehren und Lernen – auf dem Weg zur kognitiven Gesellschaft, p. 4 (on-line), at http://europa.eu/documents/comm/white_papers/pdf/com95_590_de.pdf, accessed June 16, 2014.

11 For more cf. Ludmila MUCHOVÁ, *Náboženská výchova ve službě české škole*, Brno: Kartuziánské nakladatelství, 2005.

al education oriented especially on situations close to life and on practical acting. Pedagogues should therefore strive to meet the following goals:

- enable pupils to master learning strategies and motivate them to life-long learning;
- stimulate pupils to creative thinking, logical reasoning and problem solving;
- lead pupils to all-rounded, effective and open communication;
- develop the pupils' ability to cooperate and respect the work and success of oneself and others;
- prepare pupils to express themselves as autonomous, free and responsible personalities, assert their rights and fulfil their obligations;
- create in pupils the need to express positive emotions in behaviour, acting and experiencing life situations; develop sensitivity and sensitive relationships to persons, the environment and nature;
- teach pupils to actively develop and protect physical, mental and social health and take responsibility for it;
- lead pupils to tolerance and respectfulness to others, their cultures and spiritual values, teach them to live together with others;
- help pupils to recognize and develop their abilities in harmony with their real possibilities and apply them together with the acquired knowledge and skills in deciding about their life and professional orientation.

The other point of view is the answer to the question what goals are to be reached by the pupils themselves in the sphere of their abilities, skills and habits, attitudes and values. When we perceive a goal as all a pupil has mastered at the end of the learning process, we speak of "pupil competencies". The GEP PE defines six key competencies pupils should attain in the course of school education. It defines competency as "sum of knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes and values important for the personal development and assertion of every member of society. Their selection and conception derives from the values generally accepted by the society and from generally shared ideas of what competencies of an individual contribute to her education, to happy and successful life, and boost the functions of civic society."¹² From the point of view of GEP PE it therefore holds that the goal for which a teacher strives is reached not by applying certain contents and methods with respect to it, but only when it has become the pupils' competency at the end of the learning process. Competencies correspond to teachers' goals, but are not exhausted in them, they are aimed at an answer to the question how the pupils themselves have dealt with the contents and methods mediated by the teacher and to what extent they have actually transformed them into their own new competencies. This is evident already from their enumeration: competency to learning; competency to problem solving; communicative competency; social and personal competencies; civic competencies; work competencies. It is by far not a question of how much encyclopaedic knowledge pupils have mastered, but how they have learnt to deal with this knowledge and use it for practical life. By practical life the GEP PE understands primarily the happy and successful life of a citizen. Those who criticise the system of white papers, out of which this concept arose and towards which it is directed, suspect that the effort to prepare pupils for conscious citizenship in fact conceals an effort to educate a human being capable of adjusting to all, especially economic conditions – to become formable, yet efficient workforce.

12 © Upravený Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání platný od 1. 9. 2013 (online), at <http://www.msmt.cz/vzdelavani/zakladni-vzdelavani/upraveny-ramcovy-vzdelavaci-program-pro-zakladni-vzdelavani>, accessed May 27, 2014.

Educational standards and the problem of external evaluation of pupil performance in the service of developing the intellectual abilities of pupils: pressure for performance

Educational standards are particular test tasks whose evaluation can be easily quantified. In an appendix to the GEP PE they are elaborated for the two grades in which testing pupil competencies is regularly carried out – for 5th grade, in which pupils complete the 1st level of primary education, and for 9th grade, in which pupils complete their primary education as a whole. For example the standards for the educational subject Czech language in 5th grade are divided into three areas: communicative and stylistic education, linguistic education and literary education. For each area a number of test tasks are prepared, altogether there are about fifty. I give an example:

Educational subject: Czech language; grade 5; topic area: communicative and stylistic education; GEP PE expected output: The pupil reads adequately demanding texts with understanding, both quietly and aloud.

Indicators:

- *The pupil suggests a suitable title*
- *The pupil assesses the truth/falsity of statements based on the text read*
- *The pupil decides if a given piece of information is/is not implied by the text*
- *The pupil finds the answer to a question in the text.*

There follows an illustrative task. Set text:

Almost all ideas and discoveries made throughout the ages can be found in books. The book is one of the greatest human inventions. There are many kinds of books – from fiction (e.g. short stories and novels) to reference works (e.g. handbooks, dictionaries, encyclopaedias). The first book was produced by the Egyptians 5 000 years ago. It was written on papyrus scrolls. Books as we know them today were invented by the Romans. To make pages they used treated animal skin – parchment. For centuries books were written by hand. They were rare and expensive. In the 8th century the Chinese invented the printing press. In Europe it spread in the 15th century. The printing press made it possible to produce a greater number of books. Nowadays computers and photographic instruments are used to produce books; machines print alone, fold paper, stitch it together and bind it into books.

1. Suggest a suitable title for the text you have read.

2. Decide, based on the text you have read, whether the following statements are true or false:

- | | |
|--|-----------------|
| <i>a) In the past books were rare and expensive because they were written by hand.</i> | <i>Yes – No</i> |
| <i>b) Many important ideas and discoveries are recorded in books.</i> | <i>Yes – No</i> |
| <i>c) There are few kinds of books, mostly encyclopaedias.</i> | <i>Yes – No</i> |
| <i>d) The printing press spread to Europe in the 19th century.</i> | <i>Yes – No</i> |

3. Decide whether the following information is or is not implied by the text: The oldest known Czech printed book is Kronika trojanská (1468).

4. What is the name of treated animal skin used by the Romans to make book pages?¹³

¹³ © Standardy pro základní vzdělávání. Český jazyk a literatura, p. 3 (on-line), at <http://www.zszerotnova.cz/svp priloha2013-2014.pdf>, accessed May 27, 2014.

As we can see, it is a matter of precise operationalization of more abstractly formulated pupil competencies. The pressure has transferred from the original focus of the Czech school on mastering encyclopaedic knowledge to intellectual skills in manipulating the original information. Pupils are to find information, assess it and suggest solutions to problems. The example makes manifest the aim of making the pupils' skill of working with texts easy to assess. But such assessment tells us nothing about how interesting such activities are for children, how they enjoy them, whether they find joy in formulating their ideas so that others can understand them readily, much less to express their emotions, experience, or that they have encountered beauty. The set of test tasks appears very objective, yet at the same time it is very cold and distant from the experiential world of children and youth. And it certainly says nothing about how such acquired ability to work with texts will enable children to grasp their own life as an opportunity to fill their life with meaning. If the teacher of Czech language works on such tasks systematically, the children will learn to solve them quite mechanically and therefore successfully. We will rise along the scale in PISA evaluation. Is it enough?

Many pedagogues in EU countries criticise the mechanism of testing standards. They point out that the White Paper dealing with the orientation of the school systems of the countries concerned mention such values as development of the pupils' personality, their communication ability or ability to solve problems, but that these are subordinated to the pressure on developing the pupils' intellectual abilities in view of their later competitiveness in the labour market. According to them the school thus becomes space creating competitive environment for children and youth and within it pressure for performance. Performance in comparable situations also becomes the prevailing criterion of pupil assessment. In this way e.g. according to W. Schöning general education and education to basic human values are subordinated to the orientation on educational standards. The school, constantly under pressure to prepare pupils for comparative tests, gradually resigns on leading pupils to sensitivity to their own innerness, on strengthening their positive aspects, on focusing on their ability to take distance and oppose consumption pressures, or to critically reflect on them. According to him the sense of general education is not just knowledge applied to particular problem situations, but also developing the ability to search for and find inner peace and balance while maintaining a firm and constant attitude to one's connection to other human beings and the world. Schöning believes that excessive emphasis on international comparison of pupils' intellectual performance reflects the interest of international capital in workforce flexible and creative enough to subordinate everything to the career advancement granted to them. The enumeration of competencies is also of affirmative character. They have no meaning in themselves, merely in relation to measurable performance, which will one day allow the thus trained pupils to assert themselves in the competition of labour market and together with similarly successful others set in movement flexible, yet anonymous functional networks.¹⁴

The trickiness of external evaluation based on quantitative, objectively measurable indices is experienced daily by every university teacher. The quality of her publication work is measured by means of quantitative indices such as the number of papers published in journals with academic renown. If the author of this paper seriously followed the goal of pointing out the trickiness of the key competencies used in the Czech curricular reform after 2005 with respect to educating to values giving meaning to life, it would be much more appropriate to place the paper in a more popular journal of pedagogy, where the experts most concerned with the

14 Cf. Wolfgang SCHÖNIG, Die Schule des 21. Jahrhunderts als Raum der Bildung? – Nachdenken über die Engpässe der neoliberalen Schulreform, in: *Kultur der Anerkennung. Würde – Gerechtigkeit – Partizipation für Schulkultur, Schulentwicklung und Religion*, ed. Martin JÄGGLE et al., Hohengrehren: Schneider Verlag, 2013, pp. 42–43.

issue – teachers themselves – would have a chance to notice it. But with respect to the need to obtain certain assessment the paper is conceived on a level which will allow it to be published in a peer-reviewed journal unlikely to reach primary school teachers. Paradoxical about this is particularly the fact that the sciences, in whose field this pressure for quantification and thereby for objective assessment of the publication activity of scientists arose, have fairly quickly reached the moral limits of usability. So the journal *Respekt* reports how the prestigious journal *Nature* published the results of the epochal research of the young Japanese scientist Obokata in cooperation with a team of Japanese and American scientists. Later it turned out that some faulty drafts were published and the described experiments were not reproducible. The quality of such contribution is therefore highly dubious. On the other hand, the Nobel Prize for physics holder P. Higgs adds that due to his low publication activity he would probably not be acceptable for a university at all. And the so-called San Francisco Manifest demands that the expertise of academic papers be assessed strictly by their content, not by place of publication.¹⁵

W. Schönig cites E. Weinert who pointed out the overt expectations concerning comparative evaluations of pupil performance, since pupil results reflect a much greater number of factors than a mere short-term change in didactic measures which changes learning conditions. Weinert speaks e.g. of long-term atmosphere in the class, of long-term educational, learning and communication style deriving from the pedagogical art of the teachers. If we therefore want to improve pupil performance, we cannot merely change teaching methods, but must count with the fact that they intersect with a number of more general pedagogical measures.¹⁶ Evaluations conducted in the form of comparative performance tests are generally not expected to improve the pedagogical relationships in the school environment; they are rather expected to multiply and increase “human capital”. The successes and failures in comparative tests “brand” schools. We learn from the news in which regions schools were most successful in PISA tests, in which regions they were the least successful. What does this in fact say of those regions and their schools? The real educational level of our pupils cannot be measured with these tests. The test results are constituted by hard, objective data. Soft qualitative data having to do with human subjectivity cannot be measured so easily.

When the General Educational Programme for Primary Education became valid it obliged individual schools not only to regularly assess pupil performance, but also to do so-called self-evaluation. With respect to pupil performance they had to formulate means of assessment (with marks, verbally, or a combination of the two) and publish the criteria of assessment. Self-evaluation was to be specified with respect to areas, goals, criteria and instruments, including the timing of evaluative activities.¹⁷ The version of GEP PE valid since September 1st 2013 does not oblige schools to carry out self-evaluation any more. It was left out of the chapter dealing with principles, evaluation and adaptations of school educational programme; only requirements for formulating the criteria and forms of evaluating pupils remained.¹⁸ While key competencies and the corresponding standards aim to evaluate pupil performance, there is a broad sphere of school life which has to do with its educational atmosphere. This can also be evaluated by means of special instruments. In order to understand their logic, we must now turn for a moment to the concepts of school culture and climate.

15 Cf. Zdeněk SLANINA, *Věda v kyselém lázni*, *Respekt*, roč. XXV, pp. 19–23.

16 Cf. Wolfgang SCHÖNIG, *Die Schule des 21. Jahrhunderts als Raum der Bildung? – Nachdenken über die Engpässe der neoliberalen Schulreform*, in: *Kultur der Anerkennung. Würde – Gerechtigkeit – Partizipation für Schulkultur, Schulentwicklung und Religion*, ed. Martin JÄGGLE et al., Hohengrehren: Schneider Verlag, 2013, p. 44.

17 Cf. © Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání (Se změnami provedenými k 1. 9. 2007), Praha: VÚP, p. 119 (on-line), at http://www.vuppraha.cz/wp-content/uploads/2009/12/RVPZV_2007-07.pdf, accessed June 11, 2014.

18 Cf. © Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání (Verze platná od 1. 9. 2013), Praha: MŠMT ČR, p. 135 (on-line), at <http://www.nuv.cz/file/433>, accessed June 11, 2014.

School culture and climate and the problem of internal school evaluation – assistance on the path of educating to life meaning

Orientation on performance linked with the pupils' later success in the labour market is by far not the only and most important task of the school. But if we are to define the whole sphere of cultivating preferred values, mutual relationships and preparation for happy personal life in the midst of closer and wider interpersonal relationships, we encounter the concepts of school culture and school climate. Pedagogues find it difficult to define them clearly. I have therefore selected a very extensive definition penned by a pedagogue with long-term professional interest in school culture. According to M. Pol school culture is an "omnipresent and fairly stable factor of school life, which contains convictions and values, understanding, attitudes, meanings, norms, symbols, rituals, ceremonies, preferred behaviour, manifest in the behaviour of people in the school. It comprises an experiential foundation and a potential for change and quality of the school. Its core is usually formed by values."¹⁹ The foundational, non-material elements of school culture are therefore values, norms and relationships.

School climate is a phenomenon of social, group character. It is exhausted in the generalized attitudes of all agents in the school, in how pupils, teachers and other employees perceive all that takes place in the building, classrooms and the teaching body, as well as in how they emotionally react to all that. School climate will therefore be examined by pedagogues in co-operation with psychologists. Good school climate should create safe space for shared life and development for all concerned. That is how D. Nezvalová characterizes school climate in a cogent study text, where one can also find a description of the programme Health Promoting School (HPS). We can use it as an example of how spiritual values can quite logically enter the self-evaluation criteria for evaluating a school by means of examining the school culture and social climate. The programme aims to create a safe and socially stimulating social environment in the whole school, in each class, among the pupils and among the teachers, by developing humanistic attitudes to which the acting and behaviour of all participants of school life will correspond. The basic humanistic attitudes mentioned by the HPS programme are respect, trust and tolerance; recognition, sympathy and empathy; openness – helpfulness; and finally the will to cooperate and help.²⁰

The culture and climate of organizations were first investigated by managers of production companies and organizations oriented on generating profit. Better social climate and high quality organization culture were to become instruments for making work more efficient and increasing profit. And some authors – pedagogues and psychologists – who create evaluation instruments for examining school climate openly say that this is so in the case of schools as well. Let us quote e.g. from the introduction for teachers administering a questionnaire examining the school climate by the authors Urbánek and Chvál:

"The social climate in the environment of the specific school organization not only influences the performance level of result, but brings a further effect, a sort of 'added value', proper to the very meaning of education: positively perceived social relationships and processes in an educational institution present a suitable and for education desirable model of a functioning community to all concerned, especially the pupils. The experiential level of pupils, which on the social level heavily relies on the efficacy of the concealed curriculum, is a highly effective

19 Pol quoted according to © Danuše NEZVALOVÁ, *Kultura školy a klima školy*, Ostrava: Přírodovědecká fakulta UP, pp. 12-13 (on-line), at http://esfmoduly.upol.cz/texty/kultura_klima_skoly.pdf, accessed June 11, 2014.

20 Cf. *ibid.*

instrument of intervention in deeper educational levels at the level of attitudes, opinions, convictions, shared values etc. This fact can significantly contribute to the future social and professional orientation of children in every further potential community in which the pupils will necessarily take part in the future. From the point of view of diagnostics the social climate is a convenient indicator of the quality of school work. School climate is complex in character and from the point of view of agents emphasises the relational level of school functioning.”²¹

The authors of this instrument for evaluating school climate evidently view the values at which evaluating the social climate of a school is aimed as something over and above the basic requirement for school, which is increasing the pupils’ performance levels. Nonetheless, we really find a search for the presence of a number of values, especially ethical ones, in school climate evaluation instruments. We can show this on the example of a method for setting school priorities called Good School by M. Pol and B. Lazarová.

The set of statements employed has to do with values and value orientation. I have selected the explicit ones: Teachers strive to stimulate pupils’ activity, teachers plan instruction with respect to pupils’ interests, the school strives to support the all-rounded individual development of pupils, the school administration regularly discusses the value system of the school with teachers, strives to be fair to all, school employees are ready to devote something extra to the school, the school administration supports and stimulates employees’ initiative, the school takes care of the aesthetic arrangement of classrooms, responsibility for the school’s development is carried by each individual, discussion of values is governed by a set procedure and rules, teachers openly speak of conflicts, when someone has a different opinion of the value system she can communicate it in open discussion, individuals receive support if they need it, teachers listen to the pupils’ personal problems, expressions of emotions are respected in the teachers’ team, the relationships of teachers and pupils are open, communication among teachers is very open.²² In these statements, which in the course of the evaluation process come to be discussed especially by the teaching staff, values are formulated sometimes specifically (e.g. listening to pupils’ personal problems, responsibility for the school’s development is carried by each individual, willingness to do something “extra” for the school, etc.), sometimes in fairly general terms (e.g. discussion over different approaches to values etc.).

Abroad one can find more specific evaluation instruments, even linked to the term “spiritual values”. E. Muroňová, who as part of her dissertation investigated how the presence of spiritual values in school environment can be identified and assessed, started from the definition of S. Kučerová: “Spiritual values are ends in themselves, they are not means to anything beyond themselves. They can be subordinated only to the whole of life as the highest integrative idea. They are only possible as the inner experiences of a human being who truly desires to face up to the problems of human existence.”²³

Of the spiritual dimension of school culture E. Muroňová remarks that it comprises forms of individual spirituality – whether of pupils, teachers, other school employees, parents, architects, etc., who take part in the school, enter it or have entered it in the past – but also reflects the spirituality of the society, or the more enclosed community of the municipality in which the school is located. The spiritual dimension, which is their sum, is reflected at all levels of

21 © Petr URBÁNEK – Martin CHVÁL, *Klima učitelského sboru*. Dotazník pro učitele, p. 5 (on-line), at http://www.nuov.cz/uploads/AE/evaluacni_nastroje/16_Klima_ucitelskeho_sboru.pdf, accessed November 18, 2014.

22 Cf. Milan POL – Bohumíra LAZAROVÁ, *Dobrá škola. Metoda pro stanovení priorit školy. Evaluační nástroje*, Praha: Národní ústav odborného vzdělávání, 2011.

23 Stanislava KUČEROVÁ, *Člověk – hodnoty – výchova. Kapitoly z filosofie výchovy*, Praha: Vydáno vlastním nákladem, 1996, p. 77.

school culture and is in a unique manner more or less beneficial to the meaningfulness of the school institution and the life meaning of those who constitute the school. The spiritual dimension is “brought” to the school, present in the school, and also “taken away” from the school as fulfilling or not fulfilling a certain personal demand. According to this author the spiritual dimension is – analogically to spiritual values – present in the everyday activity of the school in three ways:

- As a visible part of the curriculum, e.g. as educational contents in history, literature, religion classes, but also as existential questions requiring reflection as part of instruction of any other subject. In this sense it is legitimate to speak e.g. of the spiritual dimension of the curriculum.
- As a dimension of the school culture as such, which then influences the school’s life. In this sense it is legitimate to speak e.g. of the spiritual dimension of education.
- As a hidden part of school culture constituted by the individual agents present in the school, e.g. as situations that arise at break-time and somehow point to the meaning of life.²⁴

E. Muroňová also described the empirical research of A. Martinová (2005), on the basis of which the author categorizes spirituality according to its manifestations in society into manifestations of spirituality directed to oneself, to experience and harmony, to security, to a sense of belonging with people and the world, and to overcoming limits. In the course of a simple exploratory research Muroňová somewhat modified these starting categories, operationalized them into specific statements and verified how they can be identified in the school environment at two levels: real presence and teacher ideals. In the final discussion she concludes: “Reflection of the spiritual dimension in school environment brings anthropologically fundamental qualities needed for personal integration, given by the development of human identity and linked to a feeling of life’s meaning, life’s end and its fulfilment with respect to this last end. For Czech schooling reflection of spirituality means e.g. reflection of categories such as gratitude for the gift of life, which is fundamentally unique (category 1), life at all levels, with joys and sorrows (category 2), appreciation of beauty and harmony (category 3), value of external limits and rituals bringing orientation and security (category 4), a sense of belonging with people and willingness to sacrifice oneself (category 5), wonder, but also humility with an awareness of one’s limits (category 6), assuming responsibility from the point of view of personal as well as widest global goals (category 7).”²⁵

As we can see, E. Muroňová’s categories in fact only develop the logotherapeutic model of three paths to filling life with meaning.

Conclusion

What did I mean to say by all this? That we have not done so badly in the PISA tests – we can equip pupils for the competition struggle in the labour market in an average manner by orienting instruction on acquiring knowledge and its intellectual processing, which will later manifest itself in specific situations, particularly in the labour market. As the experience of many parents who teach their children at home show, knowledge for a future vocation and a good position in competition can be acquired by means of the media or within programme in-

24 Cf. Eva MUROŇOVÁ, *Spirituální dimenze kultury školy na základní škole na příkladu ČR*, Brno: PF MU, dissertation, 2011, p. 96.

25 Cf. *ibid.*, p. 228.

struction quite independently and in a much faster and more enjoyable manner than at school. But such children do not encounter an environment that is much more extensive than their own family, where they can establish much wider social contacts, confront a great spectrum of spiritual values, or begin to test how difficult the task of ordering values and filling one's life with meaning really is.

Preparation for a future vocation, which pupils will demonstrate in worldwide competition, is quite certainly a very important task of the school. I have shown that this task is implied by EU documents aimed at the economic growth and competitiveness of individual countries. Besides this "economic demand" I also pointed out the demand to "educate to meaningful life", as presented e.g. by logotherapy. This demand shows that at least equal attention as to increasing the competitiveness of pupils – future citizens – in the labour market should be paid to the pedagogical spiritual atmosphere prevailing in Czech school. Creating a friendly environment where all pupils – the brightest ones as well as the ones with less than average performance – feel accepted as they are, feel the readiness of teachers and fellow pupils to assist them, where they consciously and joyfully participate in the life of their school and learn to accept life's pains, to forgive, to give and experience love, is a long-term task whose fulfilment will cost time and energy. Perhaps such atmosphere will generate less one-sided pressure on improving pupil performance and as a result pupils will not experience extraordinary success in comparative performance tests. But if school does not provide children with an excellent preparation for competition fight, it does not mean that it does not prepare them for life, since employment and work is without doubt a part of life, but not the only part if logotherapy is right. What will matter for our children in the future more than the amount of money they earn is the ability to be faithful in love, patient in help or in the art of forgiving and allowing the people around them to start anew. These are the presuppositions for living a life filled with meaning, of which logotherapy says that it can be realized only in service to values beyond the sphere of one's own profit. The question posed by V. E. Frankl to people in general is transfigured in the school environment and becomes a doubting questioning of the meaning of educating the growing-up generation for future profit, its own and that of society, or even for effort at self-realization to the detriment of others. I have shown that it is possible to focus on the spiritual dimension of school life by means of specific evaluation instruments available to Czech schools. But no one requires schools to do that now and so the topic has quickly disappeared from academic discussion as well. And the rigorously objectively evaluated publications of expert pedagogues find new problems to deal with, perhaps ones that are more easily grasped.

I have presented streamlining pupil performance and filling life with meaning as two tasks of the school which need not contradict each other. For both, evaluation instruments are available to the Czech teaching public. The question remains what reasons the authors of GEP PE had to stop motivating schools to actively use one of them.

Is School Education Meaningful If It Does Not Lead Pupils to Seek Meaning?

Abstract The paper links the characteristic of postmodern European society, the changed demands on pupil performance in EU schools and the logotherapeutic view of the human being seeking the meaning of life. The author states the discrepancy between the economic and political pressure on school systems to prepare pupils for the future competitiveness of their countries in the global labour market and human effort to fill life with spiritual, nonmaterial values. She points out that this happens even though the spiritual

and social climate of schools can be perceived and changed with self-evaluation tools.

Keywords postmodern society; logotherapy; school culture; social climate of school; key competencies; standards