

# Change or Tradition in Daily Practice in Elementary Teaching In the Czech Republic, Poland and Portugal

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## 1. SLIDE

In my research and PhD thesis, I deal with the questions of change in education, , anchored customs and practice in teachers' lives and in their daily work in the elementary school. I have conducted research in three countries: Poland, the Czech Republic, and Portugal. In my comparative study I researched the possible effects of post-authoritarian regimes on education and compared teachers' practices in the three countries. Most important, I highlighted teachers' current views: to what extent they are aware of the power of tradition from nowadays and how they feel about current, innovative trends.

## 2. SLIDE INTRODUCTION

## 3. SLIDE

One of the inspirations for this work was **Grammar of Schooling**, the concept from the article by Tyack and Tobin. They describe historical attempts to fundamentally change methods of schooling and explain the reasons for acceptance or non-acceptance. In Poland and the Czech Republic, the biggest changes that inevitably affected education grew out of the changes in the social, political and economic system that followed the democratic revolution in 1989. Portugal started rebuilding education 15 years earlier, after the Carnation Revolution.

The challenge of change in society and in education was enormous; educators had a chance to be inspired by different approaches, schools and systems. They could, and can, use overall emerging democratic principles to make a new education attractive to a changing society.

In my research I wanted to deal with question, **how deeply** are elementary teachers able to accept change in their daily practice -- WHY yes, WHY no. **Many teachers feel comfortable in everyday school practices they are used to, even though the social and political context has changed.**

#### 4. SLIDE

This dilemma – between the comfort of the customary and the challenge of innovation -- is one of the sources of “the Grammar of Schooling.” This GOS is a conceptual framework for my project, provided by David Tyack and William Tobin.

They define “Grammar of Schooling” as “the regular structure and rules that organize the work of instruction,” including standardized organizational practices such as “dividing time and space, classifying students and allocating them to classrooms, and splintering knowledge into ‘subjects’ ” (Tyack and Tobin, 1993, p. 454).

In their article, they also suggested changes in teaching. **These aspects and other, new ones I have followed and described in my work.** I focused on these common practices and added new ones, which appeared in **my phenomenographic research category of description** and were the most important resource for my analysis.

#### 5. SLIDE

Tyack and Tobin try to illuminate why some educational reforms take strong hold, while other efforts to change what they call the “Grammar of Schooling” – the way the schooling process is organized and proceeds – remain unsuccessful.

I addressed my main research question: **How does the “Grammar of Schooling” transform teachers’ awareness of democratization of educational interactions among subjects of education, including students, teachers and parents?** In other words: **What kind of “Grammar of Schooling” is internalized and practiced by teachers in the Polish, Portuguese and Czech schools?**

#### 6. SLIDE

The perspectives how to understand changes, how to understand **the persistence or transiency of institutional frameworks, are various.**

At the end of the article, Tyack and Tobin emphasized the most important influences on successful changes in our schools. They are:

**Political influence of education:** education responds to changing social condition and ideologies (school curriculum).

**A functionalist approach:** organizational stability and changes in schooling mesh smoothly with the social system, and GoS is part of the general social changes and needs of society.

**The cultural construction of schooling:** coherence of educational institutions conforms with the general public's beliefs about what a "real school" is, in terms of cultural beliefs and institutional forms.

In addition, all three major political philosophies (Henry Giroux) cope with fighting between tradition and innovation. For traditional values and norms, there are **conservative and neoconservative** pedagogical philosophy, then **neoliberal and liberal**, which highlight decentralization as a key principle of autonomy and free choice of school. Finally there are **theories representing critical consciousness** and transformative and emancipatory approaches. These approaches, especially P. Freire's views about magical, naïve and critical consciousness, are parts of my data analysis in my dissertation.

## **7. SLIDE**

I have divided the potential changes in elementary schools into two groups. The first comes from above, suggested by politicians, influenced by general changes throughout the EU or other countries, on behalf of emancipation, equal opportunity, etc. What kind of "Grammar of Schooling" is an effect of bureaucracy (administrative decree)? The second group consists of changes the teacher can realize alone within the school conditions, in the system, often based on the above primary changes or those to which teachers progressed during their practice. Teachers can change their attitudes toward teaching for different reasons – actual classes, particular conditions in the school, parents, new methods in pedagogy.

Within my comparative study, I want to describe the opportunities of teachers in the Czech Republic, Portugal and Poland -- their attitudes in dealing with small and large changes and putting them into practice. I describe the conditions for applying changes in teachers' practice and the possibility of changing their consciousness from established traditional practices to progressive changes in teaching. **I want to address what determines the adherence to certain well-established rules, and vice versa -- what makes certain changes possible.**

## **8. SLIDE METHODOLOGY**

## **9. SLIDE**

In my phenomenographic research, I sought to identify, in interviews with elementary teachers during their daily practice, the main problems articulated by my respondents. I am interested in their reactions to changes in the education system they have experienced through during their practice, and also their opportunities and willingness to participate in these changes – their points of view, how they reflect possible changes and the current trends in education. Teachers were selected for the research from elementary schools in the three countries. The set of carefully open-ended key questions was designed to relate both to **the**

**general life of teachers and their professional careers**, and at the same time reflects topics **related to the current problems of education in the given** country.

#### 10. SLIDE

The term elementary education does not exist in this ISCED system, but it is always part of primary education (first grade, first cycle, part of basic schooling). Each country has its own names for school types. According to ISCED 2011, ISCED 1 typically lasts from four to seven years; the most common duration is six years. ISCED 2 typically lasts two to five years; the most common duration is three years. The programs at level **ISCED 1, considered elementary schooling**, are typically designed to provide pupils with fundamental skills in reading, writing and mathematics -- i.e., literacy and numeracy. They establish a solid foundation for learning and understanding core areas of knowledge and personal and social development, in preparation for lower secondary education. Age is typically the only entry requirement at this level. (Eurydice, 2017).

#### 11.SLIDE Charter

#### 12.SLIDE FINDINGS

#### 13. SLIDE

**My dissertation is not finished, so I don't want to present my final findings. But** I have two examples about elementary education. First, there are experience from Portuguese and Erasmus students at the University of Lisbon, who study in in the early stages of their teacher training and where I had the opportunity to teach and give workshop; and second, opinions from a very experienced and positive Czech teacher.

There are several practical examples from the Erasmus students -- how they see elementary education years later, how or why they appreciate it, how they see differences from next level of education, what elementary educations means or meant to them as a period in their lives. I just wanted to point out how young people see elementary education, what they appreciated and what they criticized, what could be changed and what could be preserved in the future.

If one of the main joint goals of education is to produce a happy, satisfied personality, the first years of school attendance should emphasize the best basics so that the children will like school as long as possible.. These examples can be beneficial.

#### 14. charter

#### 15. SLIDE

I can say that these conclusions one of my respondents are parts of the conclusions of my research. She described very nicely all her feelings from her teaching career and her opinions of today's schools and society. She highlighted the main aims of teachers and education, reacted to changes in education. Let's spend some time presenting ; she deserves it. She mentioned, among other things, issues related to inclusion, social equality and disadvantage.

***New changes may not always be meaningful.** So many new concepts have been abandoned in my time.*

***The personality of the director plays a key role** in the lives of the education staff-- his or her honesty, flexibility, openness, willingness to solve problems and listen to the opinions of others; not being driven just by quantity but also quality in education; leadership methods and **ability to motivate teachers.***

*There is a need to increase the prestige of educators in society. Increased financial support. Maybe a change of system.*

***The current state of affairs will lead to the creation of elites.** Private elementary schools are focusing on the development of talents. In the public schools will be children from the middle and poorer strata of the population, who will lose the opportunity for equal education.*

***I am convinced that children are still the same.** They should look forward to school and experience feelings of happiness and belonging, even if they are not rewarded as winners. **This is the task of the teacher!** Only this way can people make progress in life -- people with an ingrained sense of order who are not harmed by school. **Without work, you don't get cake.** ... The teacher without motivation cannot manage. If the teachers don't work well, the pupils don't have good results in the school, good and fruitful time in the school....*

***Obstacles to education are, very often, dysfunctional families,** parents who cannot bring up their children well or just do not have or make time for them. Their attention is often driven by communication technologies, personal interests. And grandparents, too, are working! They have no choice.*

*The child is left to fate and must manage the situation somehow. This is the beginning of unstable, unanchored, always **unhappy individuals** -- people who see a problem in everything, even though the solution is sometimes very simple; people who don't like school and hate the teachers .*

*I know the current concept of education is not optimal: **large classes, complex collectives, often inappropriate spaces***

*It is up to each of us how much joy we can find in our work. It is a proficiency not to bend to the various pressures around us, and to try to maintain flexibility (which is important to every teacher and his health).*

*I have not been indoctrinating myself for 36 years. I am doing my job this way so that I can enjoy it. That does not mean that I do not make a lot of effort. The fundamental idea of my entire career was that children at school must feel good.*

## **16.SLIDE CONCLUSION**

### **17. SLIDE**

**Success has many parents, but failure is an orphan**

By analyzing my research results, one can see, that in all three countries, teachers at the elementary level are open to change not only from necessity, but also from their own beliefs. They want to learn and to try new methods of work, to educate themselves, to “do something for themselves.”.

If the laws of a given country allow, different innovative schools are created, and teachers are willing to learn another way than mainstream. Even parents may want to educate their children in a different way. (I don't mean just aiming for as much as possible knowledge in the shortest time. these preferences exist in all three countries, especially in private education, but a democratic society should not even restrict or prohibit this style of education.)

But there are values or traditions in each country that may change very slowly -- for example, a child assessment system, grading in elementary classes. The most progressive in this aspects in Poland, where grading was almost completely eliminated. In both the Czech Republic and Portugal, the formative, or written, assessment is being incorporated more slowly. Publicly posting grades in school halls is still common in some schools in Portugal, and it is taken for granted and parents and the public demanding it; it is typical of the GoS, a rooted tradition. Nobody thinks it should be different, except for a few progressive teachers or schools.

Again, teachers at the elementary level are open to change, but they have to be supported, appreciated, esteemed, given positive feedback for their activity. Conditions for elementary teachers in these three countries are not ideal, and I believe that young people who are willing to do this job, this profession, really want it; they like children or have other positive and moral purposes.

“Every initiative from the administration needs to be conducted so that the capacity of educators for innovation is improved. Fullan (1990) pointed out that staff development itself is still an innovation and that to establish it requires changes in the culture of the school.” There I can remind you again of the teacher I mentioned on the previous slide, ***The personality of the director plays a key role...***

I mention Fullan’s opinions, which he highlighted, that for fundamental change two conditions are required: that the educational system is currently **open to change** and that the education of children **needs improvement**. Nowadays, there is the idea that both excellence and equity are urgently needed. (p.340)

That why I use this quotation: **Success has many parents, but failure is an orphan.** Because we should appreciate all action from active teachers, and everyone who are willing to improve to school culture and cooperation between the school and the public. Even if the change is unsuccessful. **Because “those who think that the problems of education are artifacts of the larger society and that the improvement of schooling can wait for social change are unlikely to embrace change as part of their job.”**

Fullan, Michael (1990). Staff development, innovation, and institutional development. In Bruce Joyce (Ed.), *Changing school culture through staff development* (pp. 3-25). Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

*Tyack D. a Tobin, W. (1994). The "Grammar" of Schooling: Why Has It Been So Hard to Change? Source: American Educational Research Journal, 31:3, pp. 453-479*

