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Didactic Aspects of Home Education in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

The paper deals with research results which were looking for didactic aspects of home education, the idea of educating children at home outside school environment. We have continued with this research with a research work from 2016, where family environment of pupils from alternative and innovative education system was monitored, among other things we were finding out reasons of parents who educate their children at home. Because home education does not have any concrete set procedures, which parents should educate their children, we were interested in the way the education takes place. We focused on teaching methods and forms in a mixed design, combination of qualitative and quantitative research, daily timetable, curriculum content and education results' assessment. In the first part we used non-structured dialogues with parents, which helped as an issue probe. Based on a dialogue analysis in the second part, the core part of our research was a questionnaire of own construction, which results have shown the way of home education and what its mutual indicators are.

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1. Introduction

Act No. 561/2004 Collection of Law on Pre-school, Basic, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and other education, in § 40 allows home education in the Czech Republic as another way of fulfilment of compulsory school education since the year 2005 in 1st grade of Primary school (since 2016 2nd grade of Primary school) and is called individual education (Školský zákon, 2004). For the needs of our research we preferred the term home education, which is more used by professionals and also public.

For the implementation of home education is essential to fulfil a number of conditions. A headmaster of primary school, where the child was accepted in order of compulsory education, permits home education at the request of child's legal guardians, when there are serious reasons for home education, sufficient conditions are ensured (conditions related to spatial and material technical provision of education and conditions related to health protection at home of an educated pupil) and a documents confirming secondary school degree of a person who would educate the pupil. Secondary education degree is required for the needs of home education at first grade of primary school; however university degree is required in School Act in order to educate the child in second grade of primary school. Then educated pupils sit for exams of relevant curriculum twice a year at school, which s/he had been accepted. Child's legal guardian's request should contain other facts above all that might have a certain influence on child's education and also a statement of a school counselling body (Školský zákon, 2004). Therefore it is evident from above, that the list of necessary conditions to do so in order to permit home education is significant. However, there is no information in what way should home education be done. Due to this fact we have mapped real course of children's education in their home environment.

2. Problem Statement

Historically for centuries, the family has had an exclusive task in upbringing and education. The introduction of compulsory schooling has fundamentally influenced the concept of relationship between family and society in terms of fulfilling the educational function. School attendance has had an impact on constitution of modern childhood image and on emerging relationship of parents towards school. Nowadays school significantly affects lives of every family and affects a considerable number of family issues, such as time, money, education, standards and social contacts. In contemporary family the whole structure is being changed, a number of children in family decreases and generational coexistence are restricted. Such two-generation family is according to Helus (2007) intimately related, characteristic feature is closing one into another, thus a family functioning is a private space. These structural changes are connected with increasing democratization of family relationships, where the family is more likely based on informal partnership and is connected with individual's interests' satisfaction even more than in the past. In this context, the quality of relationships among family members becomes important. Every family has certain needs, based on its experience, education and tries to be a good parent. Child's success at school means for parents a status confirmation as "a good" family or "a good" parent. Therefore the image of "a good" family is increasingly dependent on school, a trouble-free passage of the child through school, which further confirms the family as a good one. Which means that the status of "a good" parent depends on if their child does well at school. Parents have a certain image about a role of an "a good"

parent, but such image does not have to be in relation to a definition of “a good“ parent by school. These two images about a parent role might be in a conflict. For example, parents who “don’t need anything“ from school, might perceive themselves as trouble free as good parents. On the one hand the school can perceive this type of parents as trouble makers (Pohnětalová, 2015).

However, parents’ motivation to prioritise home education of their children stems not only from being a good parent or from their own experience of school education but there are several other factors which lead them. In the year 2016 we monitored within a research called Characteristics of pupils’ family environment of alternative and innovative educational systems, among other things we were finding out reasons for parents who educate their children at home. As stated, the key aspect of monitored families was their higher level of education and education means an important value to them. These statements were found which lead to home education: safe and known environment; possibility of curriculum layout; faster and more effective curriculum knowledge; more time for other equally important activities; opportunity to be with their children. (Pohnětalová et al., 2016).

According to Thematic report of the Czech School Inspectorate (Česká školní inspekce, 2016) there were 1667 pupils (of which 1339 - 1st grade primary school boys) educated in home education in the year 2015/2016. Although parents’ interest in this type of education is increasing there are not many researches dedicated to this issue. From the last years there are for instance research papers of Y. Kostecká (2010, 2014), further more Comparative study of home education (National Institute for Education - Národní institut pro vzdělávání, 2012). Despite the lack of research in this field is necessary to look at home education as an alternative education which Czech legislation allows. We hope that our research could contribute to deeper understanding of this issue.

3. Research Questions

The research issue is focused on examining didactic aspects of home education. Therefore it concerns particular groups of family groups, which implement home education with their children. For the purpose of our research we set the following research questions:

- How does education of children in home environment look like in terms of selected didactic means (teaching methods and forms, daily timetable, curriculum content, time dedicated to learning and education results ‘assessment)?
- What are common indicators of home education?
- What school’s influence is there in terms of course and results of home education?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of presented research was about to map deeply the real course of education in home environment with the focus on selected didactic means. There are many didactic sources. Some show learning processes (e.g. methods, forms and learning aids); others mediate content (textbooks, study texts, professional publications). In order to map real course of home education we selected these following means:

- Teaching methods and forms;

- Daily timetable;
- Learning aids and curriculum content;
- Assessment of education results.

5. Research Methods

There was a mixed research design (a combination of qualitative and quantitative research). In the first stage of research survey there were implemented unstructured individual interviews with parents from home education, which represented a certain probe of the given issue. Unstructured interview is referred to as an informal interview, non-standardized and finding out social reality. The interviewer did not enter into the interview with pre-prepared questions, but the questions were naturally created on respondents' basis.

Specifically, we conducted 8 interviews with children's mothers in home education. The goal of these unstructured interviews was no attempt to get information from all respondents about pre-given questions, but to find out how respondents themselves view home education and to reveal their experience or common features.

In the second, the crucial stage, there was used a questionnaire of own construction, that surveyed didactic aspects of home education. The questionnaire was constructed on basis of interview analysis and in total of 12 items, whereas 5 items were closed questions and 12 semi-closed questions (with a possibility of a free answer addition). The questionnaire was in an online version and there were 96 participating respondents. We had been expecting a higher number of respondents, however due to the fact that our respondents represented a specific, more restricted group of parents in relation to state education, the lower number was probably given by the fact that they did not want to be studied.

6. Findings

The following text firstly presents results of unstructured interviews' analysis, which became the basis of the questionnaire survey. The questionnaire survey presents crucial parts of the research and those results are presented in subchapter 6.2.

6.1. Analysis of Unstructured Interviews

As mentioned above, we have implemented eight unstructured interviews with children's mothers in home education. It was a deliberate choice. An important role at the choice of first four families was due to mediated knowledge of these families and their willingness to conduct interviews. To choose other four families was significant distance of their homes and school headmaster's recommendation. Respondents were familiarized with the research and assurance of maintaining the anonymity and confidentiality of the communication. Participants were treated with respect during the interviews, so that could take place in a pleasant atmosphere of mutual trust.

From a total number of eight interviews, in five cases there were families with two kids, in two cases there were families with six kids and one case it was a family with four kids. The main reasons that lead to implementation of home education mothers states as a possibility to spend more time with their

children and thereby also preserving the maximum impact on child's upbringing and education, more effective use of time and in three cases dissatisfaction with state education. In one case there was an organization reason; where for a family of six children would be difficult to take children to schools.

Furthermore the interviews showed that the most frequent issue is not set timetable that was similar to a school one but teaching happens to be during the whole day, also often during common daily situations (cooking, weighing food, feeding home animals, garden work, trips and etc.). In one family a set timetable appeared and it was only at the start of home education. Gradually, the timetable was spread according to family and child's needs. As far as curriculum content, mothers follow School educational program of appropriate primary school. Nevertheless, they place curriculum according to concrete demands, preferences and possibilities. As one respondent stated, who has sixth child in home education, that their education is more likely (free) and *"when we do not manage today, we will manage tomorrow"*. In all cases we talk about families where there are two children or more in home education, therefore apart from individual teaching there was also peer and group teaching. According to mothers' statements they use textbooks and workbooks in order of school's recommendation, but they mostly choose textbooks themselves. Interviews showed the fact that in all families there is space for practical tasks solving (which is related to daily activities during the day, where natural learning is realized), there are didactic games, experimental learning, mind maps, various learning posters made by children together with parents and siblings. Only in two families there is traditional classification being used, in other six families there is verbal evaluations, while children are led to self-assessment.

The analysis shows that this form of teaching is adapted to possibilities and conditions of the given families, apart from individual approach and more effective time use also a positive climate of home environment and hence absence of threat. With the reference to the identified methods and ways of teaching, this is a different course of education in comparison with school.

6.2. Results of the Questionnaire Results

First questionnaire items were dedicated to identifying questions, where we surveyed numbers of children in home education, their age, length of education and who is involved in the education. Out of a total number of 96 respondents there were 137 children in home education; most of them are children at first grade of primary school, i.e. from 7 up to 11 years of age (71 %), less frequently children at second grade of primary school (29 %). These results correspond with numbers of educated pupils in the school year 2015/2016, where there were recorded 1339 pupils of first grade and only 328 pupils of second grade.

The highest number of respondents (27%) has their child in home education, 26 % of respondents two years, 18 % three years, 17 % four years and 10 % five years. Three respondents stated that they had their children in home education already nine years. On average, these are respondents with a longer-term experience in the field of home education. By home education compulsory school attendance was started by 69 % respondents, 31% respondents stated that their child had started common school attendance in school. In most cases children are educated by their mother (80 %), or by another parent (6 %), which involves group teaching of multiple children from multiple families, or a group teaching with a teacher (3 %). The role of father did not occur in our research. 11 % respondents stated a combination of

learning. For example it is a combination of educating child at home in an alternative school (e.g. forest school) or a form of meeting with other families, or the child is present in school via Skype.

With the help of the following items we are searching how the home education of children takes place in terms of selected didactic means. Daily routine is the most important aspect. It is a fixed timetable in school that is mostly organized into individual learning hours, where the courses are alternated according to an educational plan. Everything is systematically organized and logically connected together. We were interested in what way the daily routine is laid out in home education. The highest number of respondents (52 %) do not carry out a fixed daily schedule at all, 36,5 % only sometimes and 11,5 % of respondents only use fixed timetable, similarly as in school. Also a place of education plays an important role. The most number of respondents (80,2 %) said that education is on-going and takes place anywhere, 16,7 % of respondents implement home education both indoor and outdoor. The smallest number group (3,1 %) teach their child only at home (table 01).

Table 01. Daily routine and place of home education

Daily routine	Number in percentage	Place of teaching	Number in percentage
fixed timetable	11,5 %	only at home	3,1 %
fixed timetable only sometimes	36,5 %	indoor and also outdoor	16,7 %
fixed timetable is not set	52 %	continuously and anywhere	80,2 %

Furthermore we were interested what means are used for pupil's assessment. In common school we talk about mark classification (on a scale from 1 up to 5); in alternative schools word evaluation prevails. In our research 90,1 % respondents use other forms of evaluation, than marking. The most frequent is word evaluation, self-evaluation and instant feedback. Only 9,9 % respondents use mark classification.

Table 02 depicts what teaching material and teaching methods are the most frequent ones in home education by our respondents. There the respondents could tick six items at most the ones they use the best.

Table 02. Teaching material and teaching methods in home education

Teaching material	Frequency	Teaching methods	Frequency
textbooks (school)	41	oral	56
textbooks (parents)	77	visual, demonstrational	64
WB (school)	28	didactic games	43
WB (parents)	83	spontaneous activities	66
common things	89	dialogues	54
encyclopaedia	85	discussion	54
books of maps	84	problems solving	50
literature	89	cooperative learning	26

professional publications	56	experiments	48
magazines	57	mind maps	30
man-made aids	81	drama	16
internet	26	excursions	60
didactic aids	11	projects	43
		creative activities	72
		practical activities	3
		presentations	1

Explanatory notes: WB - workbook; school – material recommended by school; parents – material according to parents' choice

As table shows, textbooks and workbooks are mostly selected by parents themselves; to a lesser extent they follow school's recommendation. Common things, literature and individually man-made things are widely used. From teaching methods creative activities, spontaneous activities, visual and demonstrational aids and excursion prevail. Results point out at the fact that home education of our respondents is represented by a high variability of teaching methods and ways together with teaching material choice which give space for child's creative potential. Whether it is really so we will not find out in our research, but it is a subject of further investigation.

Next item surveyed if anything changed in a way of teaching since the time when home education was implemented. It showed that 54 % respondents changed their teaching approach in terms of system concept (fixed daily schedule) to a freer organization. As given by Skočovská (2010) when she reached similar results.

We had expected that school, where the child has been enrolled to fulfil compulsory school attendance, would have a certain influence on implementation and way of home education. However this presumption has not been confirmed. Total of 21,9 % respondents perceive more significant impact (significant influence of school – 2,1 %, distinct influence of school – 19,8 %). Only mild influence of school is perceived by 31,2 % respondents and no influence at all by 46,9 % respondents.

7. Conclusion

Home education (according to legislation of individual education) creates one from legal forms of compulsory school attendance fulfilment in the Czech Republic, not only should this attention be paid to this alternative approach. The found facts enabled us to answer above mentioned research questions.

In the response to the first research question how the children education takes place in terms of selected didactic means, showed that the daily schedule and also method selection and teaching material have a certain variability, which shows the act, that a parent is responsible for education of his/her children and everything is adapted to needs of children and family possibilities. Home education in monitored families has two images. Either it is the implementation of formal school environment with a transfer of teaching methods from school desks into home environment (this way is called "homeschool", Mertin, 2003) or it is so called "life with children"(that Dobson describes as "home education", Dobson, 1998), where learning is carried out at any place there is no limit of fixed schedule, timetable, time or age.

This second form in our research is more dominant and depicts mutual indicators of home education and therefore corresponds with the second research question. What is the influence of school on course and results of home education? School has a little impact on home education. The influence of school is noticeable especially within School education program, where the family tries to observe partial outputs, also before the half term and final testing, when parents practice more selected curriculum with children. Our research also follows the fact that schools try to help families, provide teaching via Skype, offer learning in internet environment Moodle or personal consultation.

As Mertin states (2003) home education offers flexibility in learning organization, size of pupils' group, in communication and is embedded into natural family environment, where there is positive stress free supporting climate. From these reasons, home education presents a highly significant source of information, especially for the learning process itself.

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