

CZ 1 National/regional case study

Writing and methodological approach Czech Republic

In the following case studies which present good practice in relation to active/advancing learning in collaborative environments (ALICE) - sometimes shortened to “collaborative learning”, it must be recognised that these are interpretations of interpretations (including translation from one language into the target language of English as *lingua franca*). The author is necessarily interpreting both what has been seen by that individual and what has been told to that person by others, who interpret the world and present it as they see and understand it. The reader of the case studies will also interpret the written words and other materials presented through the lens of their own experience and understanding.

The principle method for data generation for all the cases was a semi-structured interview devised by the author on the basis of guidelines given by the partners responsible for the initial research exercise to extract examples of good practice in teachers’ collaborative learning. In two of the cases, which feature good practice at local and school levels respectively, the author of the case studies presented was fortunate enough to have observed those players (actors) involved in the course of the activities which are deemed to be good practice. Additional research to seek to understand the central themes of the case studies was also undertaken.

Thus, although they are necessarily context-dependent and “laced with imperfection” (<http://isites.harvard.edu/icb/icb.do?keyword=qualitative&pageid=icb.page340906> -accessed 05042016), the stories presented will seek to demonstrate to a broad and diverse audience, the goodness of the professional practice, revealing the common facets of this gem in the process of learning.

Context

In order to comprehend more fully these stories that follow, the author outlines below some key facts about the Czech Republic and its education system. The sources for these facts may be found at:

<https://www.oecd.org/edu/EAG2012%20-%20Key%20Facts%20-%20Czech%20Republic.pdf>
file:///Users/glynnkirkham/Downloads/MSMT_Education2012-web.pdf

The Czech Republic is to be found in the centre of Europe. It has an area of 78,866 km². For administrative purposes there are 14 regions including the capital city, Prague. Each region is divided into municipalities. There is a population of 10.5 million inhabitants, approximately 1.2 million live in the capital city. Only five other towns had a population which exceeds 100,000. It can thus be recognised that there are many small towns and villages. Three ancient areas are still culturally significant: Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia.

There are a number of minority groups from neighbouring countries such as the Republics of Slovakia, Poland, Germany and Austria. There is also a significant Roma population. Other foreigners include those from the Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia and those from Western European countries with residence permits.

With some minor exceptions, the language of instruction in schools is Czech, which belongs to the western Slavic family of languages.

From 1945 until 1989, a member of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the Czech Republic has about a third of its population with any religious affinity. More than 80% of those declare themselves to be members of the Roman Catholic Church.

The Czech Republic has its own monetary unit, the koruna, and is outside the Eurozone.

Unemployment in the Czech Republic is about 7%.

It is a parliamentary democracy with a bicameral system – an assembly of 200 deputies elected under the proportional system and a Senate with 81 members, plus an elected president. The government is composed of a coalition headed by a Prime Minister. There is also a President who has significant powers as well as the title of head of state.

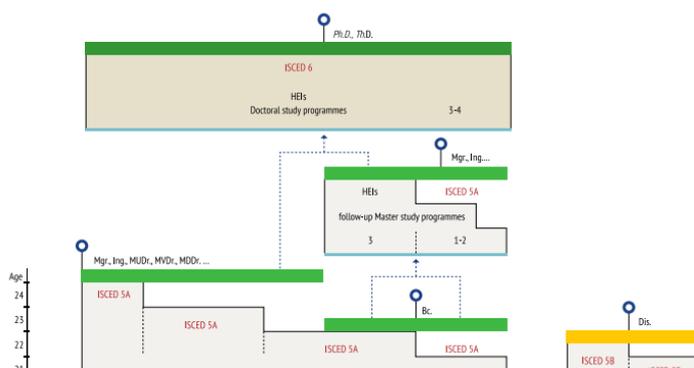
Public administration is carried out via central state administration together with self governing regional and local authorities (regions and municipalities). Following the Velvet Revolution, in 1989, and the creation of Czechoslovakia and then divorce in 1993, the Czech education system was transformed first as a result of the fall of the communist regime. In the area of educational administration, substantial changes affected the competencies of the Ministry were implemented after 1989. On 13th December 1990, the Czech National Council introduced a regional, decentralised school system. The municipality and the newly-established school authorities had autonomy. Teachers stopped being 'civil servants'. During this period, Olomouc became the administrative centre for Moravia and Silesia. In 2002, new reform gave school administration to the municipal and regional offices. School administration today lies mainly with the headteachers, who also have the right "to hire and fire". Each school has a set of founders but these have little active engagement with the schools policy-writing or management except in the appointment of headteacher. Schools and thereby headteachers have thus great autonomy.

Teachers and headteachers in the Czech Republic are comparatively poorly remunerated relative to teachers and headteachers in many parts of Europe. Class sizes are fixed at a maximum of 25 pupils per class. Contracted hours are also comparatively lower than in some other European countries.(OECD, 2013) A newly-developed career system is currently passing through legislation. There is no prescribed national curriculum (but an advisory one exists) and teachers are free to teach as they professionally adjudicate. As is also the case in number of other European countries, there is no national testing to assess learning progress until the age of 18. Success in this test is the normal route to higher education.

Compulsory school attendance is required for all children from the age of 6 to 15 years. Participation in early childhood education for children from the age of four years old is just under 90%. The Polish minority has its own schools which are allowed to teach in Polish. There are 25 nursery schools, 21 elementary schools and three upper secondary schools for this minority group.

The following diagram gives a visual description of the current education system in the Czech Republic.
Diagram

Organisation of the Education System in the Czech Republic



Additionally, a significant player in the field of education and in service of teachers is the N I DV (the National Institute for Continuing Professional Development) which has a long tradition of providing in-service education in the Czech Republic. It was founded in 2005 as a quasi-autonomous subsidiary organisation of the Ministry nationwide and it succeeds the earlier activities of the former thirteen regional educational centres, plus Prague. NIDV implement the agreed targets of the state educational policy and integration programmes in Czech and European education, in line with changes in education management and institutional support the continuing education of the players in the field. It focuses primarily on the implementation and promotion of the priority topics of national educational policy and also in its offer reflects the needs of teachers and schools in individual regions. Nationally and regionally, eight also offers educational programmes, which are financially supported by the European Social Fund (individual national projects, individual projects, others grant projects) and, in some cases, the stated budget.

Through its programmes in print and electronic form (www.nidv.cz) allows NIDV education teachers, methodologists, directors and school managers (functional training), and through seminars, courses, educational cycles and long-term training programmes that can be to organise and to order the entire teaching corps or more schools in the catchment area of the region. It uses the broad base of trainers and also works closely with universities and other institutions. Creating a concept of service teacher training and lifelong learning in the Czech Republic, provides educational, methodical and supportive services to schools and school facilities, performs various research investigations, provides information about new trends and changes in education or intentions statewide educational policy and the exchange of experiences among the professional school populace.

Case study 1. School Clubs - non-formal education - an example of national/regional good practice in collaboration

Context

Kierkegaard's famous quote reminds us that "Life can only be understood backwards; but it must be lived forwards." Thus, we resort to stories to tell of our experiences and those of others as we and they reflect upon and seek to comprehend phenomena.

This story begins with the search for good practice of teachers' learning from collaboration and an unexpected (but well-received) opportunity to engage with the theme but at a slight tangent. The deviation would be that the teachers whose opportunity for 'collaborative learning' was being examined would be operating pre- and post- normal school hours as school club leaders and activity guides. The idea came from my colleague, Tomáš, who holds responsibility for (among other things) the development of non-formal education opportunities for teachers at the National Institute for Continuing Professional Development (N I DV). His knowledge of and experience in the non-formal education sector was invaluable in identifying those working in this area and those responsible for their professional leadership. In the Czech Republic, it is qualified teachers who are the workforce operating within after-school clubs and leisure-time centres.

It should be noted that within the Czech Republic, as it in many other parts of Europe, the school day begins early and it finishes in the early afternoon. A normal working day for parents also begins early but finishes around 5 p.m. Many schools provide care for pupils before and after the school day. Those who are responsible for running these clubs are not necessarily fully-qualified teachers. Everyone who is to work in a school club needs, however, to have at least a "minimum pedagogical qualification" – an 80 hrs course - and they must undergo a police check to ascertain the safety of the children in their care. In addition to the pre- and after-school care services (which are normally fee-paying) many schools run after-school clubs. These clubs offer opportunities to develop further interests outside the curriculum for pupils and opportunities for additional remuneration for the teachers who engage in them. Involvement in after-school clubs is not a contractual obligation for teachers.

Reference to these clubs from the Ministry of School, Youth and Sport (MŠMT) describes them thus:

"School clubs provide leisure-based education to pupils of one or more schools according to their own educational programmes based on the interests and needs of individual pupils. School clubs differ from after-school centres mainly by the participants' age and the type of activities. Their activities are destined especially for older pupils (approx. 11 to 15-year-olds).

The number of school clubs has been increasing slightly since their number started being monitored. In the school year 2012/2013, there were 526 of them in the Czech Republic. In the school year 2014/15 operating in the Czech Republic has 552 school clubs in which were enrolled 44,873 students, representing 12.3% of pupils 2nd grade elementary school and lower grade multi-year high schools and eight-year conservatories. By comparison with the school year 2013/14, the number enrolled in school clubs by about 300 people." (<http://www.msmt.cz/areas-of-work/sport-and-youth/school-clubs?lang=2> accessed April 2016) In 2015/2016 there are 572 clubs with 46 980 enrolled. (<http://toiler.uiv.cz/rocenka/rocenka.asp>) The growth in these activities is thus demonstrated by the increasing year-on-year numbers.

Account of the good practice

As can be imagined, the experience and preparation for participation in school clubs as an instructor varies greatly between teachers involved. The learning experience for the pupils in the non-formal situations such as school clubs should be equally rigorously planned and developed by those giving instruction. Initial teacher education at the faculties of education does not provide opportunities to learn about or engage in non-formal education. As stated above, it is not a

contractable obligation on a teacher to participate in after-school clubs. It may be encouraged but would have to be rewarded.

Given this situation, it was essential that those embarking on such activities had professional support to enable them to do their job well and to ensure that the learning experience of the club attendees was of the highest order. Thus emerged the development of a rigorous and systematic development programme of individualised support based on a learning manual for teachers and leaders of the school clubs in order to enhance the quality of management and of instruction with a national base.

The programme was drawn up by a group of colleagues with extensive experience in the field of non-formal education as leaders of school clubs and instructors in the same, who are now active at national level in the professional development of teachers working in school clubs.

Additionally, there have been developments in the national qualifications framework which now recognise the necessity for training and qualification in non-formal education.

Participative professionalism

Within NIDV is now incorporated the former NIDM (National Institute for Children and Young People), which had been established in February 2008. Today, learning as an individual Informal education sits in a department of NIDV and is focused both on research and on developing leisure activities for children and young people and for their educational leaders.

Those operating from the department of non-formal education: provide methodological and conceptual activities in the field of leisure-time education of children and young people; develop and put on CPD for teachers in the field of leisure-time education; provide training for workers with children and young people in their free time; prepare training for civil servants and local government; carry out operational research and surveys, polls and investigations; administer and maintain the National Register of research on children and young people; monitor trends and respond to changes in this area of leisure-time activities.

The department necessarily has members whose experience and expertise matches these demands. Nonetheless, in the course of drawing up the programme, as well as reflecting on their own experiences, the authors and methodics took into account the many needs expressed to them by colleagues working in school clubs. Thus, the programme may be conceived of as a needs-based, grounded educational development.

advancement of equity

There is a national council now established for this educational activity. Each of the regions has a co-ordinator for the school clubs.

A national award recognises the involvement of those engaged in non-formal education.

There is an annual conference which brings together the regional co-ordinators and teachers.

Workshops are designed on the basis of needs established, reflections on these by those designing the programme.

Impact on learning (particularly deep learning)

There now exist professional qualifications in non-formal education of children and young people.

MŠMT has recognised the importance at national level of the role of non-formal education and has introduced a formal process of accreditation of proper persons (teachers) who engage as practitioners in the non-formal education of children and young people. Regrettably, there is still current debate - and final legislation to be determined - about what constitutes a 'pedagogue' and much opposition from fixed minds to those who, no matter what their personal qualities, academic achievement or recognition as an expert in a field which would interest young people, do not hold a full certificate recognised by the state as a teacher.

The National Qualifications Framework (NQF) is a state-guaranteed, nationwide system basing on professional qualifications, that as an element of continuing education by the Act no. 179/2006 on

verification and recognition of further education. On the basis of their actual knowledge and skills acquired at school or nonprofit organisation, practice, or on a course of study, the teachers can be gain such professional qualifications as are described in the National Qualifications Framework at <http://www.narodnikvalifikace.cz/>

In the years 2014 - 2015, in relation to the project, Keys for life and K2 - the quality and competitiveness of non-formal education were approved vocational qualifications (PK) in non-formal education of children and youth. More professional qualifications in this area were set in process for creation and approval.

The role of co-ordinators of volunteers was approved in 2014. Approved in 2015, were the following roles: Head of recreational events for children and youth; a separate head of leisure activities for children and youth; a head of leisure activities for children and youth. The ministry (MŠMT) appoints authorised persons to verify validation and recognition.

More personalised is the mentoring and support of new entrants to engagement in non-formal education. This is part of the role of the regional co-ordinator. It is also the case that much support derived from what has been learned by experienced practitioners, who share their learning with the novices.

NIDV has had the role of developing training programmes and has appropriately experienced personnel who are able to establish methodological guidelines for practice in the non-formal education of children and young people. These guidelines can be found in a written manual and also are available online with those teachers engaging in courses, in their own self education and in the support and guidance of others working in the same or similar school clubs.

Collaborative enquiry

Factors facilitating collaboration	- Factors hindering collaboration
Appropriately experienced senior personnel	Paucity of time available during school terms
Clear and well-written guidelines and manual	No clear standards for learning outcomes but benchmarking begun
Annual conference with workshops and seminars	Variety and multiplicity of clubs
Recognised qualification	Funding and resourcing
Regional co-ordinators	Opportunities for senior personnel in this field are limited nationally.
Tele-conferencing facility	Limited interest in non-formal education in the universities' faculties of education
Nationally-accredited training	

Factors facilitating collaboration	- Factors hindering collaboration
Established course for new entrants & mentoring	
Required course for club managers	

There is a fund of experience to be found both by those leading training (for example, those working as trainers and methodics in NIDV) and among the many headteachers and teachers across the country who will have engaged in non-formal education since the time of the establishment of the Czech Republic - and some before that. These senior personnel along with others persuaded the ministry of the benefits of non-formal education in school clubs and run by teachers. Nationally-accredited training along with a formal qualification establishes non-formal education as having validity and sustainability. It is unfortunate that currently the majority of faculties of education are not preparing students who wish to become teachers for possible work in non-formal education and in school clubs. The following universities, Ustí nad Labem University, Technical Universtiy in Liberec, Masaryk University Brno, University in Ceske Budejovice have, however, now developed leisure-time pedagogy as a study programme at both bachelor's and master's level but this is not a programme available across the state.

Through regional co-ordinators, mentors and tele-conferencing facilities, managers and leaders of activities within the school clubs can gain rapid support when and where needed from an experienced professional within the region. An established course for new entrants with a structured system of mentoring (from experienced teachers of non-formal education) furthers the necessary basis for support and for the sustenance of programmes through the required course for those who come to hold positions of management of the school clubs and interest groups for young people.

There is also an annual, national conference specifically for teachers and cub managers working in the school clubs and other leisure-time facilities. While such an event for those engaged in the management and activities in the school clubs offers workshops (which are needs-determined) and seminars on good practice in non-formal education, it is a fact that not everyone engaged in non-formal education as a teacher or manager is able to attend the conference. Nonetheless, the regions are well-represented at the conferences and thus able to benefit attendees (and those with whom they work and mentor) from the ideas and discussion at the conferences.

It is also the case that not every teacher who engages in non-formal education to the benefit of children and young people gains any monetary reward. This may be either because the work is valued but there is insufficient money in the budget of the school or the 'teacher' (necessarily called 'educator' to overcome the legal status issue referred to above) seeks merely to be a 'volunteer' (albeit with a contract since officially, at least, there are no volunteers in school clubs since you have to have a contract to be allowed to work with children in theses facilities) because he or she is interested in particular subject and wishes to pursue it with young people outside the curriculum.

After teaching all day, teachers who engage in non-formal education have reduced time to follow their interests in this field since the daytime teaching and its preparation has to be a first priority. Consequently, the opportunities to engage with other teachers, to collaborate around themes of

common interest is left to but a few. Information technology in the form of social and professional networks is a major player in the field of collaboration between those involved in non-formal education. A further reason for such a device is so important is that the variety and the multiplicity of interests of teachers and their learners and co-learners (their charges and their peers) means that it may not be possible to meet with someone locally who the same interest and who runs non-formal in education in that same or cognate area of interest.

Opportunities for those leading the programmes nationally are also currently limited. It is doubtless, however, that they too benefit from their engagement with headteachers and teachers on the courses which they train. They benefit from the discussion and debate about the current issues and about the way ahead for non-formal education. Non-formal education is now incorporated in school development plans and in the strategic and action plans for NIDV at national and regional level. Further, like the teachers and headteachers who interact and collaborate via electronic means, it is possible for those leading nationally to collaborate with the others of similar standing in other countries both nearby and far away.

Today, learning as an individual and in collaboration with others has no national boundaries and is, with just a few exceptions, control-free. Without the expense of air travel, rail or road delays and diversions, by means of the Internet it is possible to spend more time interacting, collaborating, reflecting and learning together and in individual research and reflection than sitting in transit as a passenger or driver. Reflecting on this thought leads one to conclude that the context and environment in which learning takes place is relevant for supporting direct experience. Thus, a recommendation for the continued professional development of those in leadership of non-formal education nationally should seek to collaborate with those from other cultures around the world who also value non-formal education. That we might learn together from one another, with one another and by one another.

For non-formal education in the Czech Republic, the story of good practice has begun and continues.

For more information, see <http://znv.nidv.cz/neformalni-vzdelavani>

