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IS THE ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE FIRST CLASS CHANGING?

INTRODUCTION

Every year in February, compulsory school attendance enrolment takes place in the Czech Republic. The compulsory school attendance aims to provide compulsory education to the extent that is provided at the elementary school level. All legal documents use the term ‘compulsory school attendance’ however, this is at variance with the fact that two forms of education are recognized: school attendance of the pupil and homeschooling, which could be described as individual education of the pupil in the home environment. Given that these two forms of obtaining elementary education exist, the term ‘compulsory education’ should rather be used instead of ‘compulsory school attendance’. Consequently, the term ‘compulsory education’ will be used throughout the text.

The society has determined certain criteria for school enrolment, which should be fulfilled by the child. Compulsory education of the child starts at the beginning of the school year which follows after the day the child reaches the age of six. If the child is not adequately mature physically or mentally when it reaches the age threshold, the school principal postpones the beginning of compulsory education for another year. This postponement of compulsory education of the child must be applied for in writing by the legal representative of the child before May 31 of the calendar year when the child is to initiate its compulsory education. The application of the legal representative must be substantiated by a recommending assessment of an appropriate school counselling centre and a specialized physician or clinical

psychologist. The beginning of compulsory education may not be postponed longer than until the beginning of the school year during which the child reaches the age of eight.

Considering the facts above, the legal representative of the child is required to start the process of compulsory education enrolment, during which the child's presence is necessary, between January 15 and February 15 of the calendar year the compulsory education is to be initiated. Under normal living conditions, the enrolment takes place at an elementary school established by the municipality or a union of municipalities, in the school district where the future pupil has his or her place of permanent address. The place and time of enrolment in the first class of elementary education shall be determined by the school principal in a way usual at the given place.¹

Some steps taken by teachers in the process of the child's compulsory education enrolment do not seem beneficial for the child and its further life journey, which will be bound with the school environment for a long time. Although they are not at variance with the present legislation, they do evoke a number of questions. First class teachers want "prepared first-classers." However, this term is not supported by specialized literature, it is not defined, and teachers of future first-classers interpret this term in various ways. This then determines what the teacher inquires the child about, what criteria the teacher has determined. As mentioned by L. Šulová, the criteria are frequently discussed with the term school readiness.² Rather than being discussed, for teachers present at enrolment the criteria represent the teacher's fulfilment of their term school readiness.

General Background of Research

Research explorations of the enrolment process in children for compulsory education are related to two periods of time. These two periods are quite different for multiple reasons. The first period comprises the years 1991 and 1992, which is when the customs of the pre-revolutionary years were still felt in the school system including enrolment of children in the first class. The

¹ Act No. 561/2004 Coll., on pre-school, basic, secondary, tertiary professional and other education (the Education Act), <http://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/novy-skolsky-zakon> [access: 05.03.2016].

² L. Šulová, *Nástup dítěte do školy jako významný vývojový mezník*, "Poradce Ředitelky Školy" 2016, vol. 5, no. 5, p. 19.

second period comprises the years 2015 and 2016. Among other things, the Czech society has undergone public discussions concerning educational styles of pupils in the first grade of elementary school, concerning the requirements of the *Framework Educational Programme for Elementary Education*, formative evaluation of pupils, and models of education of pupils aged six to ten years. Many things have been transformed, especially the approach of teachers to children, which is now based on the humanistic, personality oriented model of education.

Research Focus

In this research exploration we are interested especially in the form of the enrolment process in compulsory education in the second observed period compared to the first period in terms of the determined indicators.

The “enrolment process” is understood as a process starting from the entry of the child accompanied by an adult in the elementary school building to the moment they leave the school building.

METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

Problem, hypothesis, and aim of research

The following research question was formulated: What differences do exist in the enrolment process when the first and second periods are compared?³

The question is further specified as follows: What indicators do show the greatest differences?

The aim of the research exploration was to contribute to the seeking of answers to the main formulated question.

First of all, the enrolment process is the matter of those teachers who are charged by the principal of their organization with preparation of the contents. An essential factual assumption is that the personal attitude of enrolment implementing teachers to the child has changed in the second period due to a transformation of the model of education. This transformation should

³ P. Gavora, *Metodologický profil kvantitatívnych výskumných štúdií publikovaných v časopise Pedagogika: porovnanie období 1995–2000 a 2000–2014*, “Pedagogika” 2015, vol. 65, no. 4.

be confirmed by the indicators. In particular, the assumption exists that the number of requirements placed on the child at enrolment has decreased.

The following research hypothesis is expected to be confirmed:

H: There are (statistically) significant differences between enrolment processes in the first and second periods, which can be identified based on frequencies of the determined indicators.

Research Setting

As mentioned above, the enrolment process was organized by teachers chosen from the educators working in a given school. In all cases, school principals had a policy of appointing the same teacher for enrolment process and future teaching process. In practice it meant that the very same teacher was responsible for the educational path of every enrolled by him/her child. It was the teacher whom the children enrolled in a given school year met on September 1 in the first class, and who guided them through the first class. Mentioned teachers formed a unit. The unit included 10 teachers in the first period and 10 teachers in the second period. All teachers were females. Each of the teachers was an employee of a different elementary school which was an independent legal entity. The same elementary schools as well as teachers were used both in the first and second periods. All teachers had a university master's degree with the required specialization. The teachers differed only in the length of their pedagogical experience.

The first subset, identified as A, was composed of teachers present at enrolment of children in the first period. Three teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience, 1 teacher with 6 to 10 years of experience, and 2 teachers in each of the other subgroups based on the length of pedagogical experience were present at enrolment.

In the second subset, identified as B, teachers of the two marginal groups were not present at enrolment – i.e. teachers with 1 to 5 years of experience and over 20 years of pedagogical experience. Three teachers with 6 to 10 years of experience, 5 teachers with 11 to 15 years of experience, and 2 teachers with 16 to 20 years of experience were present.

The research was performed at the same elementary schools in both periods.

Each of the teachers was observed while undergoing the enrolment process of ten children.

Data collection methods and the evaluation technique

Observation was the essential method of data collection. A video camera was used for recording.

The following indicators were determined for evaluation of the recording:

1. Giving the child time to adapt to the setting before proceeding with enrolment.
2. Establishing eye and communication contact with the child before proceeding with enrolment.
3. Motivating the child for fulfilment of the tasks.
4. Tasks assigned to the child and checked by the teacher during enrolment.
5. Verbal requirements of the teacher placed on the child during enrolment.
6. The teacher's assistance to the child in the course of performing an assigned task.
7. Positive evaluation of the child's efforts by the teacher.
8. Observation of the child's laterality, pinch grip, position of the hand against the paper, and the sitting position of the child at the desk.
9. Providing psychological support to the child's parents.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH

The data were processed as follows.⁴ The data were filled in tables. The indicator is found in the first column and in the first line of the table. Frequency observed for the indicator in subset A is found in the second column and in the second line, and frequency observed for the indicator in subset B is found in the second column and the third line. The sum of observed frequencies for both subsets is found in the second column in the fourth line. Chi-square value is calculated in the third column. The table has 1 degree of freedom, the critical value for chi-square value for the significance level 0.05, and the 1 degree of freedom is $\chi^2_{0,05}(1) = 3.841$.

⁴ M. Chráska, *Metody pedagogického výzkumu*, Praha 2007, pp. 72–73.

Table 1

Giving the child time to adapt to the setting before proceeding with enrolment	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 5.832$ is higher than critical
Subset A	49	
Subset B	76	
Total	125	

Source tables 1–9: my own research.

Table 2

Establishing eye and communication contact with the child before proceeding with enrolment	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 10.1325$ is higher than critical
Subset A	27	
Subset B	56	
Total	83	

Table 3

Motivating the child for fulfilment of the tasks	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 8.333$ is higher than critical
Subset A	1	
Subset B	11	
Total	12	

Table 4

Tasks assigned to the child and checked by the teacher	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 171.12$ is higher than critical
Subset A	96	
Subset B	382	
Total	478	

Table 5

Verbal requirements of the teacher placed on the child during enrolment	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 69.834$ is higher than critical
Subset A	186	
Subset B	56	
Total	242	

Table 6

The teacher's assistance to the child in the course of performing an assigned task	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 25.92$ is higher than critical 36
Subset A	7	
Subset B	43	
Total	50	

Table 7

Positive evaluation of the child's efforts by the teacher	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 1.153$ is lower than critical
Subset A	78	
Subset B	92	
Total	170	

Table 8

Observation of the child's laterality	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 0$ is lower than critical
Subset A	100	
Subset B	100	
Total	100	

Table 9

Providing psychological support to the child's parents by the teacher	Observed frequency	Calculated $\chi^2 = 86.17$ is higher than critical
Subset A	2	
Subset B	92	
Total	94	

Data Analysis

As could be noted from calculated data, a higher than critical value was calculated for indicators 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 9. This confirms our formulated hypothesis, i.e. that *there are (statistically) significant differences between enrolment processes in the first and second periods, which can be identified based on frequencies of the determined indicators.*

However, the indicators do not always show higher frequencies in the same subset.

We deduce from the results related to indicators 7 and 8 where the calculated value is lower than the critical value that no statistically significant differences occurred between the enrolment process in the first and second periods. Despite that, the frequency of indicator 7 is higher for subset B than for subset A. This proves that the approach of the teachers of subset B did actually improve in the enrolment process. The values for indicator 8 are identical.

The greatest differences between the subsets can be found in indicator 4 (tasks assigned to the child and checked by the teacher). Our essential factual assumption that the number of requirements placed on the child in the enrolment process decreased in the second period was disproven. The frequency of requirements placed on the child represented by indicator 4 was much higher compared to the first observed period.

Another part of the factual assumption, i.e. that the personal attitude of teachers engaged in enrolment of the child, was confirmed by frequencies of other indicators.

The following indicator values increased in the second period: "Giving the child time to adapt to the setting before proceeding with enrolment" (indicator 1), "Establishing eye and communication contact with the child before proceeding with enrolment" (indicator 2), "Motivating the child for fulfilment of the tasks" (indicator 3), "The teacher's assistance to the child in the course of performing an assigned task" (indicator 6), and "Positive evaluation of the child's efforts by the teacher" (indicator 7). In these indicators, the teachers showed a higher level of activity towards the child, and towards the parents in indicator 9. Indicator 5 (Verbal requirements of the teacher placed on the child during enrolment) showed a much higher frequency in teachers of subset A in the first observed period. The teachers gave orders to the children much more as clearly follows from the recordings.

COMMENTS RESULTING FROM OBSERVATION OF INDICATORS DURING THE ENROLMENT PROCESS

Indicator: Giving the child time to adapt to the setting before proceeding with enrolment

The following situations occurred:

- The teacher provided no time to the child to adapt, and after greeting the parents and the child she asked the child to sit down at the desk. She immediately presented one of the prepared tasks to the child.
- After greeting the parents the teacher dedicated herself to the parents and answered their questions:
 - “You are going to teach the first class next year?”
 - “How many children did come for enrolment before us?”
 - “Should we have taken off our shoes before entering the classroom?”

The child was looking around the classroom and had time to adapt to the setting to a certain extent.

- However, the time and help during adaptation to the setting were also provided by the parents to their child. After entering and greeting (and sometimes also without greeting) they oriented their child, for example:
 - “Look, there are many flowers on the windowsills here.”
 - “Look, little Markéta and her mom are leaving already. They have already registered.”

Parents observed their child as it paid attention to their message. Only then did they hand over the child to the teacher.

Based on the indicator’s frequency, the attitude of the teachers has clearly changed. Currently, teachers give more time to the child for adaptation before proceeding with enrolment.

Indicator: Establishing eye and communication contact with the child before proceeding with enrolment

Examples of situations:

- Most commonly, the teacher unfolded the topic of the enrolment:
 - “Soon you are going to start attending a large school...”
 - “We have already met, right? You were here with your kindergarten teacher.”

- “A friend of yours was here to register a short time ago...”
- The teacher turned the child’s attention to the equipment and decorations of the classroom.
- The teacher asked the child about how it came to the school (by car, on foot, by bike).

Again, we can conclude based on the data that the observed teachers present at enrolment in 2014 and 2015 had a more accommodating attitude to the children during enrolment, although the situation cannot be described as ideal.

Indicator: Motivating the child for fulfilment of the tasks

Each of the teachers turned the child’s attention to enrolment tasks. However, only in the following examples the actual motivation of the child was observed: by a short story; by comparison to an older sibling and by praising the sibling; by talking about what has been promised to the child after enrolment; by talking about what the child is going to do in the forthcoming week; by looking at the textbooks waiting for the child in the first class; by talking about what the child likes most to play with at home; by talking about what game is preferred by the child; by talking about what the child likes most to do, whether it likes any sport; by talking about the yesterday’s winter storm, joined also by the parents; by talking about a fairy tale remembered by the child.

This indicator showed the lowest frequencies in both subsets. Enrolment is an important event in the child’s life and it is surprising that the motivation of the child by the teacher immediately before proceeding with enrolment was missing.

Indicator: Tasks assigned to the child and checked by the teacher during enrolment

It is a broad scale of tasks assigned to the child with the explanation that they were used to determine school readiness of the child.

Examples

Positive questions:

- “What is the name of your grandmother?”
- “What domestic animals do you know?”
- “Beads of what colour are there more here?”
- “What will you do when you are alone at home and are hungry?”

Tasks assigned to the child by the teachers:

- “Put all vegetables to the right corner and fruits in the left.”
- “Describe the picture.”
- “Enumerate a number series.” “Find the way of the cat to the mouse.”
- “Walk along the line drawn on the floor.”

The number of areas followed by the teachers and the number of tasks in the areas rose very significantly.

Indicator: Verbal requirements of the teacher placed on the child during enrolment

During enrolment, the teachers used verbal requests to correct the child's behaviour. These requests took the form of instructions as well as questions.

Examples

- “Don't laugh, your hand then shakes and you draw a crooked line.”
- “Sit up straight.”
- “Concentrate.”
- “Look at what you are doing, not at your mom.”
- “Try once again.”
- “Would you like to come with me and look what books are on the desk there?”
- “Take off the sweater.” (Its sleeve was in the way when the child was writing.)
- “What about not talking while you do this?”

On the contrary, this indicator revealed a more accommodating relationship of the teachers of subset B to children during enrolment. Teachers of subset A placed much more verbal requirements on the child, which may be related to the persisting teaching style and disciplinary model at schools at the beginning of the 90s.

Indicator: The teacher's assistance to the child in the course of performing an assigned task

Assistance was manifested when the teacher helped the child using guiding questions and instructions:

- “How many colours are there here in total? So how many bowls do you have to take before you start sorting the beads?”
- “Count the corners of the figures at first.”
- “Prepare your hands like this to catch the ball.”

Teachers of subset B helped children during enrolment more often.

Indicator: Positive evaluation of the child's efforts by the teacher

Positive evaluation of the child should follow after every completed task, and general positive encouragement for the future role of the pupil at the end of enrolment. Looking at frequencies of the indicator “Tasks assigned to the child and checked by the teacher” and of the indicator “Positive evaluation of the child's efforts by the teacher”, their disproportion can be noted. As indicated by the records, teachers were rather thrifty with respect to positive evaluation. After performing a task, some thanked the child, others resorted to the laconic “Good.”... in the sense that the task has been done. Despite that, positive evaluations of the child's efforts by the teacher were recorded. However, in more than one half of the cases in the first subset (in 42 cases in total) and also in the second subset (in 58 cases in total), they were directed at the parents and not the child.

Application of the indicator is an important motivating factor for the child. Given that none of the teachers present at enrolment were a novice in the field of pedagogy, it is impossible that they would not realize this fact. Despite that, the actual observed situation is not joyful.

Indicator: Observation of the child's laterality, pinch grip, position of the hand against the paper, and the sitting position of the child at the desk

In all cases, the teachers noted down in what hand the child took the writing utensils and whether the child used the pinch grip. In cases when children grasped the writing utensils incorrectly, all teachers corrected their grip after making their notes. The teachers also corrected the sitting position of the child at the desk while explaining to the child and its parents how the child should sit.

Indicator: Providing psychological support to the child's parents

A certain level of nervousness could be observed in most parents coming to enrolment with their child. It is pleasing to note that during our research exploration, all teachers established verbal communication with the parents for the second subset, and that they communicated with the parents (and with the child) during enrolment. In the remaining eight cases of the second subset, the parents (fathers) manifested no concerns. The teacher thus focused only on the child. In the first subset, the teacher focused only on those parents who were her friends.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

The question whether the course of enrolment and its contents can show in detail if the child is or is not mature and ready for the school child role seems to be a problem. Meaning – whether all indicators can be actually adequately captured and described, which are substantial for deciding whether the child is ready, within the limits of its capabilities, to successfully initiate compulsory education. Whether the enrolment system that has been used for a number of years is suitable. And whether it serves any purpose at all. The time when the child is required to initiate compulsory education is clearly determined by the legislation. And compulsory education is mandatory. Actual education of the child should start only after the child initiates compulsory education. And the enrolment process should really be nothing more but enrolment, rather than resembling an admission procedure or an examination at some schools – and thus traumatizing both the child and the parents.

Obviously, the frequencies of the indicators reflect personalities of the teachers with their traits, duration of pedagogical experience, while other factors may also be present. The frequencies are also significantly affected by the children themselves. Despite that, the results do provide a certain indication that could be reflected by teachers present at enrolment. Those teachers who will be designated for enrolment process of the future first-classers may find the results inspiring.

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CZY ZMIENIA SIĘ PRZEBIEG ZAPISÓW DZIECI DO PIERWSZEJ KLASY?

Streszczenie: Celem opracowania jest teoretyczne przedstawienie rozwiązań dotyczących przebiegu zapisów dzieci w ramach obowiązkowej edukacji w Republice Czeskiej, które odbywają się w chwili obecnej, a ponadto zaprezentowanie wyników ustaleń, czy przebieg tego zapisu różni się w dwóch wyznaczonych okresach. W siedmiu spośród dziewięciu monitorowanych wskaźników została potwierdzona hipoteza, że pomiędzy przebiegiem zapisów w pierwszym i drugim okresie występują (statystycznie) znaczące różnice, które można identyfikować w częstotliwościach określonych wskaźników. Wyższe częstotliwości wskaźników zostały rozpoznane w różnych podzespołach.

Słowa kluczowe: obowiązkowa edukacja, wskaźnik, dziecko, uczeń, przebieg zapisów, nauczycielka

IS THE ENROLMENT OF CHILDREN IN THE FIRST CLASS CHANGING?

Summary: The purpose of the paper was to provide a theoretical description of the points of departure for the enrolment process of children in compulsory education in the Czech Republic as it has been developing at present. Furthermore, to present the results of our findings of whether the process of compulsory education enrolment differs greatly in two defined periods. The hypothesis that (statistically) significant differences exist between the process of enrolment in the first and second periods, which can be identified based on frequencies of the determined indicators, was confirmed by seven of the nine observed indicators. Higher frequencies of indicators were identified in different subsets.

Keywords: compulsory education, indicator, child, pupil, enrolment process, teacher