The primary school teacher in socialist Czechoslovakia in the era of normalization (1969-1989)

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Masaryk University

Founded as the second Czech university on 28 January 1919

Located in Brno, South Moravia

MU = 9 faculties, 200 departments, institutes and clinics.

MU = 43,253 students, including 6,493 international students.

Department of Educational Sciences

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This paper is one of the outputs
of a three-year project called

Everyday life of basic schools in the normalization period as seen by teachers. Applying oral history to research in history of contemporary education

(2014-2016)

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GAČR
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Starting points

Communist dictatorship

1948 – 1960

Communists take over all political power and state administration.

1960 – 1968

Gradual calming down of political situation.

Efforts to revitalize the Communist Party.

1968

Turnover – Warsaw Pact Army invasion.

1969 – 1989

A new tightening up of the communist rule (**“Normalization“**).

Late 1980s – gradual dissipation of the Eastern Block

1989 – the Velvet Revolution

History of pedagogy

Historical-pedagogic research focused on contemporary history of education – *existing and growing reluctance to critical analysis of the development of the system of education in the Czech republic after 1945*

(Cach, 1991)

Archive materials from 1969-1989

(example of "unavailable" materials)

Moravian Land Archive – the biggest archive in CR

Documents/sources covering education have not been processed yet = **are unavailable to the public**

Unavailable materials contain e.g.

statistics,
so-called education system status reports
curricula, school timetables,
teachers' correspondence

Only limited sources can be accessed
(for research purposes)

Life course studies / Oral history

Studying biographies and life stories is **largely the only opportunity to access empirical material concerning important characteristics of former communist societies**

(Konopásek,1999; see also e.g. Shapiro, & Shapiro, 2004)

Methodological inspirations

Everyday life of basic schools in the normalization period
as seen by teachers.
Applying oral history to research in history of contemporary education

General history

History of the Everyday (Alltagsgeschichte)

Microhistory = “science of real life“ – explores external behaviours and internal beliefs of individual people

Educational sciences

Qualitative research in educational sciences (as inspiration and a tool to develop oral history methodology)

Researching **life stories of teachers**

Visual history (photo albums, films)

***

Combining this with “**traditional** “ **sources and methods** of history research

Research methodology

Phase 1: research in current Czech and European history and history of the Czechoslovak school system (with emphasis on the Normalization period, 1969-1989), archival research

Aim= theoretical (interpretation) framework + basis for a detailed preparation of the empirical research

Research methodology

Phase 2: centred around a large empirical study based on oral history

Respondents: teachers (basic schools), members and non-members of the communist party, different subject specialization

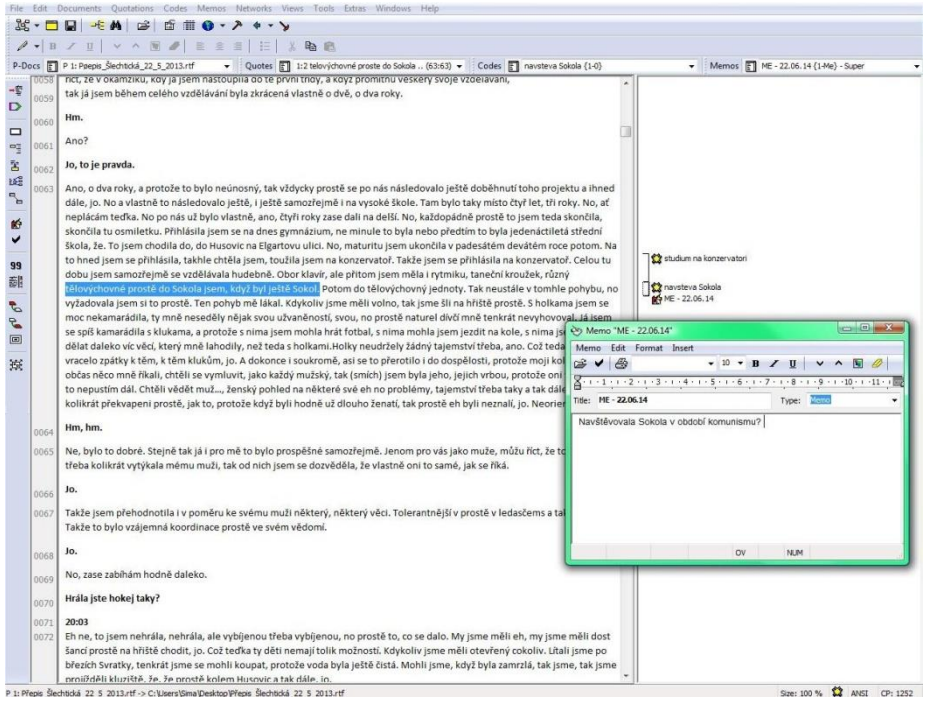
Interview with each respondent will typically consist of two sessions + think aloud technique or visual history

Data analysis

Structural analysis (Labov, 1972) - structuring the material into short histories

Content analysis – focus on narrative topics (reveal all topics relevant to the research)

Analysis: Atlas.ti software



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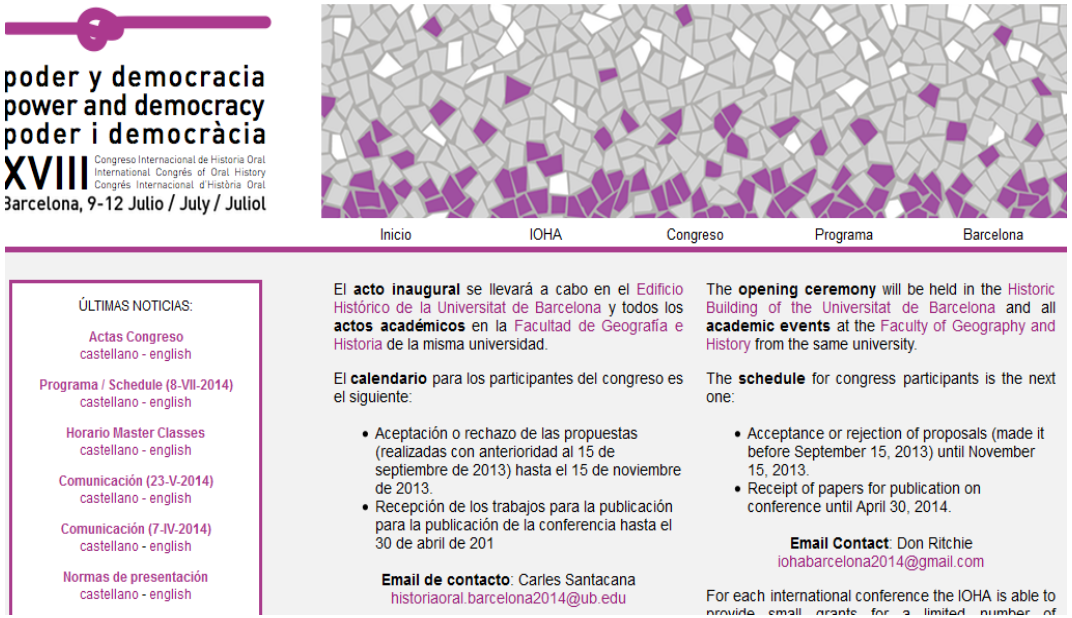

http://www.ub.edu/historiaoral.barcelona2014/pdf/comunicaciones.pdf

Pilot study

Sample and methodology

Respondents:

Jitka[*] (1941, secondary school of pedagogy, 40 years in education, composite classes);

Jarmila[*] (1940, secondary-school teacher, Latin and Czech, headmistress in a grammar school);

Štěpánka[*](1942, primary school teacher, Music and Russian);

Karla[*] (1941, Russian and Arts)

Interviews: biographical focus, May through June 2013, March through April 2014, recorded and transcribed.

Themes analysis

[*] *The names of the respondents have been changed for ethical reasons.*

Teaching aids

Textbooks and teaching aids development

“Textbooks were crazy then as well. In the 1980s, I don’t remember exactly any more, well I… It was a bag of bullshit... I subscribed to many magazines with lives of composers or some other graphic material. ***I made overviews myself****, well, because there were none available, for example a survey, a survey of musical scales or other professional things…” (*Štěpánka*).*

Pupil evaluation upon finishing basic school

Teachers' dilemma – student evaluation reports

(the reports could influence their future education etc.)

*"Well, the **reports included everything**, things relating to upbringing, i.e. character traits, that he or she is friendly/likes to work on his/her own/likes being part of a team – is a good team member and so on. **And there was an item, if he or she is Christian**, if he or she takes religion classes. And I must say we left it out more often than not…"(*Karla*)*

Everyday life of schools and municipalities

Everyday life was more about problems than politics

“ … there was ***the pastor, … the party secretary, the local party unit president, the guy who was running the local shop, and my husband in the village. Those five met in the pub, they always arranged a meeting, that was where all problems were resolved****, whatever issue there was… School and other stuff…“ (*Jitka*)*

1984 – school year opening

Class (end of 1960s)

1989

Happiness after 1989

“ … I knew how to leave even after 1989 without any problems, I had no problems at all. Quite the opposite, they urged me to compete for a job position… “

“ … I had always liked learning and Latin attracted me so much when they founded the classical grammar school here. So I was a rank-and-file teacher for those last six years and I was awfully glad …“ (Jarmila).

An example of a critical moment

Dissatisfaction after 1989

*“And it happened to me at the school that the young ones came... And they regarded us like we were outdated, our generation. That we do not teach in this or that way, that we should have like this...“ (*Jitka*)*

Methodological notes

Problems:

Communist Party membership – a sensitive topic (in general, party members must be interviewed as well)

“Fear of being examined“ in respondents (perceive the researcher as a threat)

Positive aspects:

Details from lives, micro-stories – explain general knowledge

Challenges for history of education

A big research topic: for various school levels, professions, and outside school etc.

Help in understanding transformation of the Czech educational system in the 1990s.

Thank you for your attention

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