

# Transfer as a basic characteristic of Czech school reform – the interwar Czechoslovak education reform movement and its resistance to «best practices» from abroad

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**ABSTRACT:** The article focuses on the processes of transfer in the educational reform discussion in Czechoslovakia in the interwar period. It reconstructs the educational reform movements that were central to the Czech educational reform discourse. It is analysed how open the Czech reform educational debate was to the influence of abroad educational trends. At the same time, it is analysed how the Czech reform educational discussion was based on the domestic tradition. The dynamics of the Czech reform educational discussion is presented. In the perspective of policy lending and policy borrowing it is analysed what role abroad inspirations played in the Czech reform educational discussion. The study asks whether the Czech reform educational discussion was enriched or 'colonized' by 'best practices' in the context of transfer.

**EET/TEE KEYWORDS:** Transfer; School reform; Progressive education; Czechoslovakia; XX Century.

## *Introduction*

Interwar Czechoslovakia is an interesting example of geopolitical, cultural and social space in terms of the transfer of reformist educational knowledge, the circulation and transformation of reforming educational ideas and experiences, or its construction and transformation. In the centre of Europe, in the democratic republic established after the «dismantling of the old order» and the collapse of the Habsburg monarchy, in a space where different national, religious, cultural and social identities ‘competed’ and confronted each other, an extremely interesting educational debate on school reform and education took place between 1918-1938. From the point of view of continuity and discontinuity, this discussion was, on the one hand, related to the existing ‘map’ and logic of educational thinking in the Czech lands at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries; and on the other, it was extremely open to foreign influences, impulses and perspectives.

### *1. School reform in Czechoslovakia – topic outlines*

The question of education and its reform in multinational Czechoslovakia was shaped by national perspectives. In the Czech lands, Czech and (Sudeto) German<sup>1</sup> views clashed, resulting in national tensions<sup>2</sup> or conflicting com-

<sup>1</sup> The term «Sudeten German point of view» here refers to the perspective of Czech Germans, i.e. citizens of the Czech lands of the monarchy and later Czechoslovakia, who declared their German nationality and spoke the German language. For example, according to the 1921 population census in the Czech lands – Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia – there were approximately 6,700,000 inhabitants of Czechoslovak nationality and almost 3,000,000 inhabitants of German nationality out of a total population of 9,800,000 in Czechoslovakia.

<sup>2</sup> The question of the broader cultural, social and socio-political transformation of the school has been an important one for teachers since the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, at a time when national and civil society was being formed. Since the national rivalry between Czechs and Germans in the Czech lands of the monarchy determined the dynamics of socio-cultural and political life in many respects (the school question not excluded), teachers’ school reform programmes before and after the establishment of the state also differed according to national perspective. See T. Zara, *Imagined Noncommunities: National Indifference as a Category of Analysis*, «Slavic Review», vol. 69, n. 1, 2010, pp. 93-119; M. Zvánovec, *Der nationale Schulkampf in Böhmen*, Berlin, Walter de Gruyter, 2021; J. Osterkamp, *Vielfalt ordnen. Das föderale Europa der Habsburgermonarchie (Vormärz bis 1918)*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2020; J. Balcarová, *Jeden za všechny, všichni za jednoho!. Bund der Deutschen a jeho předchůdci v procesu utváření sudetoněmecké identity*, Praha, Karolinum, 2013; P.M. Haslinger, P.H. Hein-Kircher, R. Jaworski (edd.), *Heimstätten der Nation. Ostmitteleuropäische Vereins – und Gesellschaftshäuser im transnationalen Vergleich*, Marburg, Herder-Institut Verlag, 2013; P.M. Judson, *Guardians of the Nation. Activists on the Language Frontiers of Imperial Austria*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2006; P.M. Judson, *The Habsburg Empire. A New History*, Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 2016; P. Urbanitsch, *Das Schulwesen*

munity<sup>3</sup>. In Slovakia, the reformist educational debate was also structured differently than in the Czech lands. (This was determined both by the ‘heritage’ of the Hungarian school legislation and by the different national-cultural development of Slovakia until 1918.)

The situation in Carpathian Ruthenia was also specific with regard to the school reform program. (This was due to the multi-ethnic and diverse religious composition of the often very religious population of Carpathian Ruthenia, the traditional forms of social and cultural life, and the weak industrial production in this part of Czechoslovakia.) It is therefore ‘precarious’ to speak of a unified view of school and educational reform in Czechoslovakia. This view was non-uniform not only because of the ‘national’ diversity of the newly formed Czechoslovakia, but also with regard to the differences in academic educational discourse, with regard to the direction of educational research, with regard to the socio-cultural agenda of the teaching profession, etc. Moreover, diversity, heterogeneity, confrontation, transfer and circulation also took place within the Czech, German, Slovak, Ruthenian debates.

German teachers were more likely to listen to culturally critical and civilization-pessimistic voices<sup>4</sup>, and in the German academic sphere in Czechoslovakia, spiritualistic-philosophical and idealistic trends were mixed with quantitatively oriented and empirical directions of educational research<sup>5</sup>. Moreover, the establishment of Czechoslovakia was initially read by German teachers as a project that ‘put at risk’ their «national interests»<sup>6</sup>. The German teachers in Czechoslovakia responded with an attempt to unite all teachers and the “new education” was seen as offering the basis for the unification of all Germans without political and socio-cultural differences. This utopian ideal could not, of course, be realized, yet it significantly influenced the program and transfer of educational reform as part of the ‘renewal’ of German

*in Cisleithanien – Element eines kooperativen Imperiums?*, in J. Osterkamp, (ed.), *Kooperatives Imperium. Politische Zusammenarbeit in der späten Habsburgermonarchie*. Göttingen, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2018, pp. 95-116; P. M. Judson, M.L. Rozenblith (edd.), *Constructing nationalities in East Europe*, New York, Berghahn Books, 2005; Ch. Brenner, K. Braun, T. Kasper, (edd.), *Jugend in der Tschechoslowakei: Konzepte und Lebenswelte 1918–1989*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2015.

<sup>3</sup> J. Kořalka, *Češi v habsburské říši a v Evropě 1815-1914*, Praha, Argo, 1996, and J. Křen, *Dvě století střední Evropy*, Praha, Argo, 2005, and J.Křen, *Konfliktní společenství. Češi a Němci 1780-1918*, Praha, Academia, 1991.

<sup>4</sup> T. Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte 1866-1918, 1. part*, München, C.H. Beck, 1994, and F. Stern, *Kulturpessimismus als politische Gefahr*, München, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1986, and B. Stambolis, *Der Mythos der Jugend. Ein Aspekt der politischen Kultur im 20. Jahrhundert*, Schwalbach, Wochenschau Verlag, 2003, and B. Stambolis (ed.), *Jugendbewegt geprägt*, Göttingen, V&R unipress Verlag, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> T. Kasper, *Die deutsche und tschechische Pädagogik in Prag*, in S. Höhne, L. Udolph (edd.), *Deutsche – Tschechen – Böhmen. Kulturelle Integration und Desintegration im 20. Jahrhundert*, Köln, Weimar, Wien, Böhlau Verlag, 2010, pp. 231-243.

<sup>6</sup> T. Kasper, *Výchova či politika*, Praha, Karolinum, 2007.

culture in Czechoslovakia<sup>7</sup>. At the same time, German teachers were more cautious about the development of the Czech educational reform program and looked for inspiration for school reform mainly in the German concepts of Kerschesteiner's working school or the Schulgemeinschaft models.

Of course, Czech teachers also intensively discussed the role and importance of school reform for the reform of society and developed the role of the "new school" in consolidating democratic and liberal conditions in the democratic republic. In contrast to their German counterparts, Czech teachers had their "own" state and regarded its establishment as the achievement or 'victory' of the ideas of democracy and socio-cultural progress as formulated and discussed at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries<sup>8</sup>. It was the President of the new state, Professor of sociology and philosophy, T.G. Masaryk (1850-1937), who was the moral and political guarantor of a program that strived to realise the ideas of civic equality, as well as the ideals linking the principles of liberal thought and humanity<sup>9</sup> (freedom of individual opinion, freedom from church influence in all spheres of life, a scientific worldview, and belief in progress)<sup>10</sup>. This program was accepted by Czech teachers across their political and social affiliations (it resonated with both liberal-left, socialist, and conservative national, and often also with Christian teachers)<sup>11</sup>. The school reform was therefore viewed by many teachers as part of the liberal democratic direction of the state, which determined its less critical orientation towards the negative impacts of modern society and civilisation (cultural criticism). The majority of Czech teachers accepted the ideas of progress (as was the case in the positivist strongly oriented educational academic debate influenced also by evolutionism), which led to the strengthening of the trust of Czech teach-

<sup>7</sup> Id., *Die deutsche Jugendbewegung in der Tschechoslowakei 1918-1933*, in Ch. Brenner, K. Braun, T. Kasper (edd.), *Jugend in der Tschechoslowakei: Konzepte und Lebenswelte 1918-1989*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2015, pp. 25-59, and T. Kasper, *Lebenserneuerung – Karl Metzners Erziehungsprogramm für den Deutschböhmisches Wandervogel und die Freie Schulgemeinde Leitmeritz*, in E. Conze, S. Rappe-Weber (edd.), *Ludwigstein. Annäherungen an die Geschichte der Burg*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015, pp. 337-360, and T. Kasper, *German Youth in Czechoslovakia and the "Struggle" for a "New Person and A New Society"*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. X, n. 2, 2015, pp. 9-22.

<sup>8</sup> T. Kasper, D. Kasperová, *National, State and Civic Education in the Czech Lands of Austro-Hungarian Empire in Czechoslovakia after 1918*, «History of Education & Children's Literature», vol. X, n. 1, 2015, pp. 251-278.

<sup>9</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *The Ideals of Humanity; And How to Work: Lectures Delivered in 1898 at the University of Prague*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1938, and Id., *Modern man and religion*, London, George Allen & Unwin, 1938, and Id., *Rusko a Evropa: studie o duchovních proudech v Rusku: k ruské filosofii dějin a náboženství*, Praha, Jan Laichter, 1930-1933, and P. Selver, *Masaryk: a Biography*, London, Michael Joseph, 1940.

<sup>10</sup> A.K. Kudláč, *Příběh(y) Volné myšlenky*, Praha, NLN, 2005, and *Volná myšlenka v Československé republice: ideový základ, úkoly, organisace, její činnost a tisk*, Praha, Vydavatelství Volné myšlenky československé, 1924.

<sup>11</sup> D. Kasperová, *Československá obec učitelská v kontextu reformy vzdělávání učitelů (ŠVSP) a reformy školy*, Praha, Academia, 2018.

ers in other aspects of Czech school reform – in science and research<sup>12</sup>. Research was to lead to scientific knowledge of the child as the ‘basis’ of school reform. This was primarily experimental educational research on the child (child study)<sup>13</sup>, which was to ‘substitute’ the philosophical-pedagogical, idealistic-speculative background of the school reform, as well as to ‘overcome’ the Herbartian orientation of educational science and school practise.

The topic of the transfer and circulation of reforming educational concepts in the interwar debate is not only complex and multifaceted because of the national specifics of the then Czechoslovak state. The topic can also be viewed from the perspective of the actors – by examining to what extent and which teachers were active in the international transfer of educational reform concepts. Whether it was kindergarten teachers (particularly active in the transfer and adoption of ideas from abroad), teachers in the primary and lower-secondary schools, or secondary school teachers (either at the lower-secondary level of grammar and secondary schools or at the upper-secondary level). Of course, the ‘preferences’ given to different foreign models of educational reform also varied according to the educational level at which the teachers were working.

Another essential characteristic that determined the choice of inspiration from foreign models was the aspect of the reform educational debate as a broader part of the so-called reform of society, the reform of life<sup>14</sup>. Similarly to the Western European countries, the question of how, in what way and according to what program the socio-cultural and political direction of society could be reformed was loudly voiced in liberal democratic Czechoslovakia. Different interpretations of the ‘challenges’ of modernisation, industrialisation, bureaucratisation (the total depersonalisation of life) or urbanisation were evident in the answers. These responses varied in the degree of perceived cultural pessimism towards the lifestyle of modern society and also in the political orientation of the teachers. The view of the reform of life and society was structured differently between the revolutionary (communist), liberal-left and the so-called socialist (social democratic), Christian-conservative or national-conservative wing of teachers.

In transfer, to complete the mosaic and context of the transfer reform debate, we must not lose the efforts in progress to reform teacher education and its academisation. School reform was impossible without transforming teacher

<sup>12</sup> T. Kasper, D. Kasperová, “*Nová škola*” v meziválečném Československu ve Zlíně: ideje, aktéři, místa, Praha, Academia, 2020.

<sup>13</sup> M. Depaepe, *Zum Wohl des Kindes?: Pädologie, pädagogische Psychologie und experimentelle Pädagogik in Europa und den USA, 1890-1940*, Leuven, University Press, 1993.

<sup>14</sup> K. Buchholz, R. Lachota, H. Peckmann, K. Wolbert (edd.), *Die Lebensreform. Entwürfe zur Neugestaltung von Leben und Kunst um 1900*, Darmstadt, Häusser Verlag und anabas Verlag, 2001, and D. Krebs, J. Reulecke, *Handbuch der deutschen Reformbewegungen: 1880–1933*, Wuppertal, Hammer Verlag, 1998, and J. Reulecke, “*Ich möchte einer werden so wie die*”: *Männerbünde im 20. Jahrhundert*, Frankfurt am Main, Campus Verlag, 2001.

training – both in the spirit of academisation<sup>15</sup> and with regard to the importance of the outputs of the ‘new’ educational science, and with regard to the didactic training of teachers for the school in a learning by doing, active, democratic way. In this respect, Czech teachers reflected the foreign experience with the reform of teacher education and the professionalisation of the teacher profession<sup>16</sup>. The aspect of active women teachers, not only from the ranks of kindergarten teachers, but also from primary and lower secondary schools, also brought dynamism to the transfer in the Czech educational reform debate.

## 2. *Questions, methodological approach, sources*

The Czech educational debate has been in contact with many ‘models’, has been part of the international reform educational debate institutionalized in conferences, journals and discussions in the New Education Fellowship (NEF) and has been able to communicate with many reform educational concepts from different cultural and political areas. This fact is reflected in the three main sources of this study – the journal «New Schools» [«Nové školy»] as the official platform of Czechoslovak representation in the NEF (published from 1926-1935), the journal «School Reforms» [«Školské reformy»] (published from 1919 to 1940) as a periodical focused on the discussion of the Czechoslovak reform educational movement and reflection on the reform educational movement abroad, and the «Pedagogical Bulletin» [«Věstník pedagogický»] (published from 1923-1943). In the case of the Bulletin, it was the journal of the Pedagogical Institute of J.A. Comenius, an institution established after the establishment of the independent state by the Ministry of Education to promote the exchange of experience in the field of school reform between Czechoslovakia and abroad. For this reason, among other things, an extensive educational library of representative foreign pedagogical, psychological, and sociological research sources was built up, as well as from other fields of knowledge. The exchange of experience between Czechoslovakia and abroad was also the task of the newly established International Department at the

<sup>15</sup> D. Kasperová, *Československá obec učitelská v kontextu reformy vzdělávání učitelů (ŠVSP) a reformy školy*, cit. and Ead., “Und wir streben höher”. *Die Bemühungen der tschechischen und deutschen Lehrerschaft um die Hochschulbildung in der Zwischenkriegszeit in der Tschechoslowakei*, in R. Horlacher, A.Hoffmann-Ocon (edd.), *Pädagogik und pädagogisches Wissen in der Lehrerbildung*, Bad Heilbrunn, Verlag Klinkhardt, 2016, pp. 171-190.

<sup>16</sup> The reform educational initiatives also resonated in the lectures of professors of the important Czech teachers’ association, the School of Higher Educational Studies, which was supposed to substitute the unfulfilled promise of public higher education for teachers and to support new directions in educational research.



Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment, which had been working since 1919. Reflection on foreign educational reform concepts in Czechoslovakia also took place thanks to the teachers themselves and their self-help organizations, but also thanks to scholars who analyzed selected foreign pedagogical/psychological orientations and concepts.

As is evident from the sources; American, Western European, Soviet, Southern and Eastern European, and partly South American discussions were reflected and analysed Czechoslovak representatives of the reform pedagogical movement attended international NEF conferences, visited foreign reform pedagogical schools, and were in professional contact with many representatives of foreign reform pedagogical discussions. They either translated foreign educational papers or reported on them in detail and widely in the analysed journals. It is therefore a question whether and, especially, how the transfer and circulation of reform educational concepts took place between the foreign movements of the interwar period and the Czech debate. The transfer was not one-way – experiences and ideas were permanently reflected. Their circulation and transfer, their mission and transmission to the Czech educational reform debate were given by their open-mindedness, the ability to integrate the ‘foreign’ into the ‘own’ debate. What ‘models’, how and why they were to be transferred or to be recognized is mainly a report of the Czech discussion. What experiences, what educational reform approaches and principals were to be borrowed/ lent, i.e. the ‘popularity’ of some foreign concepts, were determined by the traditions, logic, optics and educational dynamics of the Czech debate itself.

The aim of the article is to identify which foreign reform-oriented educational trends and concepts were reflected in the Czech discussion and, of course, how this reflection changed the structuring and ‘order’ of the Czech reform-oriented educational debate. This is a comparative pedagogical view, in which the transfer does not take place as a transfer-translation from one discursive framework to another, but as an impulse which, in order to be reflected and selected for transfer (confrontation) at all, must have some relevance for the ‘logic’ of the domestic, i.e. Czech reform and educational discussion. The ‘migratory schema’ of the reformist educational experience – what and how was transferred – is closely linked to the hermeneutic view, i.e. to the question why something was given attention, attributed importance for transfer, why something became a challenge for change or an alternative to the existing order. Related to this is the question of how the ‘new’ element does or does not change the order of discourse, why it changes it, or why the original system ‘resisted’ not being reconstructed. In this sense, transfer can be viewed from a discursive analytical perspective<sup>17</sup>. A discursive analytic approach is also

<sup>17</sup> R. Keller, K. Hornidge, J.W. Schünemann, *The Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Dis-*

useful for finding answers to the questions we ask in light of our empirical sources, which are primarily print-based. This is a corpus of journals focused on school reform in the interwar period in the Czechoslovakia.

At the same time, the issue of change and transfer (policy transfer) can be viewed from the position of policy borrowing and policy lending. That is, what, why and how was to be 'borrowed and lent'. In doing so, the role of 'best practices', the process of adaptation, is not highlighted, but the view of the transformation of the identity of the system or the restructuring of the debate<sup>18</sup>. In a comparative perspective, it is possible to look for separate entities (especially nationally separated ones) and their competition, exchange, or to understand the educational reform movement globally as a world society, where the different components do not stand separately (transnational, transcultural views) but intertwine and communicate with each other. If we compare national separate entities, we want to understand the nature of culture and intercultural differences<sup>19</sup>, in contrast, the transcultural, transnational or global view does not emphasize separate components but a 'global space'<sup>20</sup>.

In a transnational, transcultural, global-logical conception, the world educational reform movement can be seen as a plurality of entities in unity ('world society'), where the different components connect, meet and 'inspire'. If we focus on society (sociological concept), we can view transfer as the adaptation of one system to another, as one-way dissemination and assimilation, as a process of one-way borrowing and lending from a dominant centre to a weak periphery. Such an approach would, of course, be completely out-of-character for our topic. We view the transfer in a reflexive way as an open meeting and fusion of the Czech and international aspects, as a dynamic process of growth and transformation of identity, where one is not without the other and the reflection of the other takes place at the same time as the reflection of the self. What (what ideas, experiences), why should have been 'borrowed' into the Czech reform educational discussion, what and why the Czech reform educational discussion wanted to 'borrow' from the foreign space, or what and why it refused (consciously and loudly, or unconsciously and quietly) is the basis of the transfer. What is essential is not a view in the spirit of 'outdated' tradition and 'modern' innovation, but in the spirit of a reflective conception of change<sup>21</sup>.

course, New York, Routledge, 2018, and R. Keller, *Diskursforschung*, Wiesbaden, VS Verlag, 2011.

<sup>18</sup> G. Steiner Khamsi, *Understanding Policy Borrowing and Lending*, in G. Steiner Khamsi, F. Waldow (edd.), *World Yearbook of Education*, New York, Routledge, 2012, pp. 3-17, here p. 4.

<sup>19</sup> J. Schriewer, *Neither Orthodoxy nor Randomness: Differing Logics of Conducting Comparative and International Studies in Education*, «Comparative Education», vol. 50, n. 1, 2014, pp. 84-101, here p. 89.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 97.

<sup>21</sup> G. Steiner Khamsi, *Cross-National Policy Borrowing: Understanding Reception and*



### 3. *The Reform educational movement from a “global” perspective – Czech and foreign school reform trends as a joint cultural phenomenon*

By reading the sources of many Czech reform teachers and educators from the interwar period, it is clear that their efforts and thought contexts were in line with the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which in many ways was in the ‘service’ of the nation-state. This, however, did not exclude other (‘higher’) tasks of school reform – the promotion of democratic society, questions of the reform of society, or efforts to overcome utilitarian and nation-oriented views of man and society and to find ways and means to work for the advancement of universally human ideals and ideas of cosmopolitanism. In this sense, it is relevant to ask to what extent the Czech educational reform movement between the wars can be viewed from a transnational or global perspective. Specifically, it has been shown that it is useful for reconstruction, recontextualization and analysis to look at the different language and cultural-social cross-national trends of interwar school reform and education not only in relation to each other but as part of a more or less common cultural-educational phenomenon. Even if there was not one theoretical background behind it<sup>22</sup>, it was connected personally, institutionally, and ideologically. The shared «ideological crossovers» and personal ‘cooperation’ made it possible to place the different components of the reform educational movement not only «beside each other» but «across each other». In this sense, the transnational (global) conception of the phenomenon is also useful in comparative analysis and in terms of «knowledge transfer», the practices of policy borrowing and policy lending.

We ask which reformist educational experiences were noticed more strongly in the Czech debate. A reading of the texts shows that they were the ones that the Czech debate was able to understand, that in some way corresponded to the challenges, problems, and issues it recognized as relevant to those it was dealing with. Attention was given, therefore, to those concepts and experiences that in some sense confirmed the Czech school reform program and its own positions. Thus, at the centre of the educational transfer were experiences and concepts that supported pupils’ self-efficacy, active learning, but also issues of differentiation in learning, self-learning, the facilitation of social life and the development of the democratic life of the school, or the issue of so-called healthy and ‘natural’ learning schools. An important theme that the Czech debate also followed abroad was the formation of a unified, differentiated school that would support a socially fair and equitable access to education.

In general, the Czech reform educational discussion was very open to exter-

*Translation*, «Asia Pacific Journal of Education», vol. 34, n. 2. 2014, pp. 153-167, here pp. 161-163.

<sup>22</sup> J. Oelkers, *Die Reformpädagogik. Eine Dogmengeschichte*, Weinheim, Juventa Verlag, 1989.

nal perspectives and ‘inspirations’. On the one hand, it noted trends that corresponded with its strong experimental-pedagogical and empirical tradition (with research on the child weakening Herbartian psychology and pedagogy), with directions that, in the spirit of positivism and evolutionism, understood education in terms of growth, progress («to a higher, more perfect or healthier stage of education, or society»). On the other hand, we observe a ‘break’ from the great narratives of linear growth or development and find an openness to directions that work in education with an optic towards the spontaneous, the unique. Vitalism, psychoanalysis, and spiritualist movements have been less prominently studied; reform educational examples that emphasize the active role of the individual in his or her holistic and moral formation for personal and civic life have been studied more prominently. In this way, reform pedagogues also reflected on the Marxist premises of the world view and the Marxist principles of the revolutionary transformation of production relations and its implications for education, even if in most critical ways. The reform teachers understood the role of education in its own way and did not expect the transformation of education from the Marxist social-political revolutionary transformation overcoming capitalism, from the collective education of the state. More vocally, they underlined civic and moral education. It understood education and public enlightenment as a way of facilitating the social progress of the individual and at the same time strengthening liberal ideals that do not negate the individuality of the person. However, greater attention was paid to schools in Soviet Russia and the USSR. Caution was also evident among the Czech reform teachers against eugenic views of the «healthy individual and healthy society» that would eliminate everyone and everything that would distort the ‘healthy body’ of the nation. They were more inspired by the eubiotic aspirations for a «natural school» that was to offer a holistically conceived physical, psychological and moral development of the child not as a «higher foundation» of a healthy society, but as an individual and unique actor in the democratic life of society. However, the fundamental educational ‘field’ that attracted the attention of the Czech reform educational movement was the American example – particularly the American pragmatic and experimental and quantitative pedagogical discussion<sup>23</sup> emphasizing the situation and the importance of the environment for behavioural change. Also, the American experience with university teacher education and its goals, was an important

<sup>23</sup> E. Lippert, *Některé výsledky experimentální pedagogiky a zejména didaktiky*, «Školské reformy», vol. 8, n. 1, 1927, pp. 14-15, and vol. 8, n. 5, 1927, pp. 88-91 and vol. 8, n. 6, 1927, pp. 138-139 and vol. 8, n. 7, 1927, pp. 157 and vol. 8, n. 8, pp. 185-187. See also V. Příhoda *Vědecké řízení školské práce*, «Školské reformy», vol. 8, n. 1, 1927, pp. 20-22 and vol. 8, n. 3, 1927, pp. 49-51 and vol. 8, n. 5, 1927, pp. 65-68 and see E. Lippert, *Z americké metodiky školské*, «Školské reformy», vol. 8, n. 2, 1927, 43-45 and vol. 8, n. 3, 1927, pp. 91-92 and vol. 8, n. 5, 1927, pp. 137-138 and vol. 8, n. 8, 1927, pp. 203-205.

topic for Czech teachers and professors<sup>24</sup>. The transfer of American educational knowledge will be discussed in a separate subchapter, as its role of ‘best practice’ has led to a strong «disintegration or fragmentation» of the Czech educational community.

As mentioned above, directions and examples based on paedopsychological research of the child were of central importance for the Czech reform educational discussion. In particular, these were the works of the J.J. Rousseau Institute in Geneva. Here contacts were established, both personal and by correspondence, with A. Ferrier, as an important representative of the NEF, who visited Czechoslovakia several times in person. Among other things, he positively evaluated that Czechoslovakia intended to base the school reform on psychological research of the child, on the knowledge of childhood<sup>25</sup>. The Czech reform teachers also had access to Adolphe Ferrière’s thought through the translation of his 1930 book, *Přetvořme školu* (Let’s Transform the School)<sup>26</sup>. Claparéd’s functional view, which emphasises activity (play), by which the child/pupil answers his/her «own question», and activity is a function for the child’s development, was further studied. Czech teachers noted Claparéd’s focus on the specifics of the child’s self-activity according to his/her individual development and free will<sup>27</sup>. Claparéd’s ideas had a significant impact on Czech work in the field of individualization of learning and the sociology of childhood<sup>28</sup>. In this respect, Decroly’s experiences were also studied<sup>29</sup>. Decroly’s centres working with the child’s environment were inspiring

<sup>24</sup> S.G. Coutts, *Jak si představuji školskou fakultu*, «Nové školy», vol. 4, n. 5-6, 1930, pp. 161-169.

S. Velinský, *Proč chodíme studovat americké školství do Spojených států*, «Nové školy», vol. 4, n. 1-2, 1929, pp. 37-39. S. Velinský, *Odborná příprava učitelů ve Spojených státech*, «Nové školy», vol. 3, n. 5-6, 1929, pp. 166-183.

<sup>25</sup> *Do druhého roku*, «Nové školy», vol. 2, n. 1-2, pp. 1-4.

<sup>26</sup> A. Ferrière, *Přetvořme školu! Výzva k rodičům a úřadům*, Brno, Vydavatelství odbor Ústředního spolku jednot učitelských, 1930. The translation was realized by Otokar Chlup, professor of Masaryk University in Brno and chairman of the Czech NEF branch, as well as Jan Uher, professor of the same university, and Stanislav Velinský, associate professor of Charles University in Prague.

<sup>27</sup> Translations E. Claparède, *Psychologie dítěte a experimentální pedagogika, part 1.*, Brno, Ústřední spolek učitelský na Moravě, 1925, and E. Claparède, *Psychologie dítěte a experimentální pedagogika, part II.*, Praha, Dědictví Komenského, 1928. Also translations to the didactic: E. Claparède, *Škola podle míry (L'école sur mesure)*, Praha, Dědictví Komenského, 1935.

<sup>28</sup> Claparéd’s view of learning and the pupil was important for the Czech educational psychology of Stanislav Velinský – for his works (S. Velinský, *Individuální základy sociální pedagogiky: pokus o vymezení oboru a úkolu sociální pedagogiky*, Brno, Společnost nových škol, 1927, and S. Velinský, *Individualisace metod jako základ zvýšené efektivity školské práce. Part I.*, Praha, ŠVSP, 1931, and Id., *Individualisace metod jako základ zvýšené výkonnosti školské práce. Part II.*, Praha, B. Ondráček, 1933), but also for the sociology of education (A. I. Bláha, *Sociologie dětství*, Brno, Ústřední spolek jednot učitelských, 1927).

<sup>29</sup> A. Hamaid, *Metoda Decrolyho*, Praha, nákladem Vladimíra Orla, 1926.

for Czech reform teachers, but on the other hand they pointed out the systematic versus 'spontaneous' pupil's questioning of the world around him<sup>30</sup>. In terms of individualization, differentiation and the experience with self-efficacy, Czech teachers had many opportunities in the press to actively study the Dalton plan and the Winnet system. They actively tested and reflected on these concepts themselves.

The pedagogy of M. Montessori had a considerable influence on the Czech reform discussion, however, the influence of F. Fröbel still prevailed among German kindergarten teachers in the Czechoslovakia. Thanks to the active role of kindergarten teachers in the Czech pedagogical reform movement, trips to Montessori method seminars were organized after 1920 and Montessori's articles and writings were translated<sup>31</sup>. Both the Montessori method and the Daltonian plan, the Winnet system, were more deeply known on the NEF congresses, where Czech teachers networked with teachers from abroad – both in Calais (1921) and Montreaux (1923), but especially in Heidelberg (1925) and Locarno (1927), or Helsingør (1929) and Nice (1932). The topic of freedom in education, discussed at the Locarno conference, as well as the topic of humanity, world citizenship and the reform of society, discussed at the Nice congress, were of great interest to Czech teachers.

Czech reform teachers also closely followed foreign inspirations in the new subject of manual work, which they saw as a space for the holistic and moral development of the individual. Also art education (especially music and art education, also literary), but also rhythmic education (the importance of the school of Jacques Delacroz, about which Czech reform teachers actively wrote in the interwar period) was intended to lead the pupil to an understanding of music, art, physical movement, artistic expression, thereby enhancing the experiences of the pupil<sup>32</sup>. It was not about the technique of music or drawing, about physical performance, but also about the aesthetic-physical development of the pupil. The experience of the reformist teachers from abroad, from the articles published in *New Era*, was reciprocated in this sense.

Another area that Czech education paid attention to was Russian, and later Soviet, pedagogy. At the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, in the pan-Slavic

<sup>30</sup> Czech teachers visited Decroly at his school several times in the 1930s.

<sup>31</sup> Translations M. Montessori, *Příručka vědecké pedagogiky*, Praha, Svaz čsl. učitelek škol mateřských, 1926, and V. Sajdová, *Marie Montessoriová a její metoda výchovy*, Praha, nákl. Vlastní, 1935. Also see B. Kožíšková, *Školy dr. Montessori v Římě*, «Nové školy», vol. 4, n. 5-6, 1931, pp. 396-398.

<sup>32</sup> To the music development of child see: A. Cmíral, *O novou praxi v hudební výchově*, Praha, nákladem vlastním, 1937. To the art development of child see: L. Ondrůjová-Velinská, *Dětská kresba: přehled dosavadního pedopsychologického badání o hlavních jejích problémech, příspěvek k jejímu experimentálnímu zkoumání*, Brno, Společnost nových škol, 1930, and L. Ondrůjová-Velinská (ed.), *Rytmika: Pomůcka psychologicky zdůvodněné výchovy dětí 3letých-8letých: Teorie a praktické příklady pro školy mateřské a elementární stupně obecných škol*, Praha, Dědictví Komenského, 1934.

mood<sup>33</sup>, Russian culture, literature and, of course, education attracted the attention of the professional and wider community. In particular, the writings of L. N. Tolstoy were studied, translated and analysed. Czech educators visited Yasnaya Polyana and several travel memoirs were written about their trips to Russia<sup>34</sup>, reflecting on education in Tsarist Russia. Tolstoy was an inspiration to Czech educators because of his appeal for a so-called free, natural, Natural-Self education and education that limited the influence of state and church institutions without neglecting the role of Christianity. Between the wars, however, Tolstoy's influence lessened.

The interwar period reflected the «Soviet way» to a new society<sup>35</sup>. Attention was paid to the «impacts and consequences» of the revolutionary transformation of Russia based on the Marxist critique of modernity (the alienation of man in the capitalist world), as well to the communist aspirations for international proletarian unification (which the West of course was afraid of) and the road to a society without social and class differences<sup>36</sup>. The educational aims of Soviet Russia both after 1917 and during the period of the new economic program in 1921-29, and especially during the period of Stalin's takeover of power, the period of state economic planning, collectivization and industrialization under the three Five-Year Plan, were reflected on and analyzed retrospectively. Czech discussion reflected the quantitative development of Soviet education, the reduction in the number of uneducated, the growth in the number of schools, the development of pre-school education, and the development of social pedagogical activities. The transformation of the Soviet school life

<sup>33</sup> Pan-Slavism – a movement celebrating national affinity and Slavic unity.

<sup>34</sup> K. Velemínský, *U Tolstého*, Praha, Pokrok, 1908, and L.N. Tolstoj, K. Velemínský (edd.), *Tolstoj mládeži: výbor ze spisů L.N. Tolstého*, Praha, Jos. R. Vilímek, 1909, and K.Velemínský, *L.N. Tolstoj jako pedagog*, Praha, Ústř. nakladat. a knihkup. učitelstva čl., 1923, and T.G. Masaryk (edd.), *Československé vzpomínky na Jasnou Poljanu.*, Praha, B. Kočí, 1925.

<sup>35</sup> Czechoslovakia did not diplomatically accept the Soviet Union until 1934.

<sup>36</sup> In interwar Czechoslovakia there were two major societies for cultivating cultural and economic contacts with the USSR. This was the Society for Economic and Cultural Rapprochement with New Russia, which functioned from 1925 and published the journal *New Russia* (1925-1929). In addition, the Union of Friends of the USSR was active from 1930, publishing the magazine *World of Soviets*. Both organisations were controlled by the state, as they did not hide communist and, from the point of view of the state authorities, anti-state activities. On the role of the new Russia see Z. Fierlinger, *Sovětské Rusko*, Praha, Ústřední dělnické knihkupectví a nakladatelství, 1932. Here to the topic of education pp. 171-180. To the point of view of Soviet Union in interwar Czechoslovakia see Z. Nejedlý, *Boj o nové Rusko*, Praha, Svoboda, 1948; Z. Nejedlý, K. Ripka, J. Gallas (edd.), *Československo Sovětskému svazu k 20. výročí*, Praha, Společnost pro kulturní a hospodářské styky s SSSR, 1937; partly also see Z. Nejedlý, *Z prvních dvou let republiky: politické stati 1918-1920*, Praha, Melantrich, 1921. Here especially relations with Russia pp. 299-310. How the Soviet Union's struggles in reducing illiteracy, the implementation of obligatory education, the implementation of ideological communist education in schools and leisure organizations, the participation of workers' children in secondary and higher education, the orientation of universities, the linking of schools with the practice of production (industrial, agricultural), and the further and lifelong education of the population were reflected.

was also studied – the change of educational goals in the spirit of polytechnic education, education linked to the development of the socialist production and economy, accentuation of collective forms of education, accent on ideological education in school and in extracurricular education, the so-called scientific orientation of education and the elimination of all church influence on education, the laicization of school<sup>37</sup>. The Soviet school was seen as one of the models of a working school, which, however, understood the meaning of work as a task for the realization of external socio-political goals, not as a means of learning and moral development of the pupil. This reflected the ideological grounding of the meaning of work in the Soviet school, with collective forms of education and learning preferred over individualizing methods. Yet, for example, the use of the Dalton Plan or project-based learning in the Soviet school of the 1920s was well known to Czech teachers<sup>38</sup>. The Soviet school, however, was associated in the Czech reformist pedagogical debate with the collective responsibility of the state for education, with the overpoliticisation of education, the advocacy of ideological goals in education and training, with collectivism, which was intended to ‘denounce’ real pupil self-government to formalism<sup>39</sup>. Other limits of ‘building’ the Soviet school were also discussed in the pages of the reformist press<sup>40</sup>. Conversely, the positive role of the Soviet school in the development of social solidarity, in the creation of a character that limits ‘egoism’ and personal profit, rather than one that enjoys friendship and collective life, was highlighted. Here, however, it was also pointed out that much in the USSR was still at the level of unfulfilled ideals and had ended up highly formalistic<sup>41</sup>. The analysis reflects the development of the Soviet school from its enthusiasm for free forms of education in the 1920s, which were inspired significantly by Western European and American models, to the rejection of this free direction after 1925 and the ‘return’ to the scientific orientation of the school serving the development of industry<sup>42</sup>. In this respect, the emphasis on polytechnic education, technical and natural science subjects, the linking of the school with the needs of industrial practice (enterprises,

<sup>37</sup> K. Hanuš, *Dětská samospráva v sovětské škole*, «Nové školy», vol. 6, n. 4, 1933, pp. 97-105.

<sup>38</sup> F. Holzmann, *O sovětském lidovém školství*, «Školské reformy», vol. 6, n. 8, 1925, pp. 124-125 and vol. 6, n. 9, 1925, pp. 140-142 and vol. 6, n. 10, 1925, pp. 154-159.

<sup>39</sup> F. Holzmann, *O sovětském lidovém školství*, «Školské reformy», vol. 7, n. 1, 1926, pp. 10-13 and vol. 6, n. 2, 1925, pp. 43-45 and vol. 6, n. 3, 1925, pp. 72-74 and vol. 6, n. 5, 1925, pp. 124.

<sup>40</sup> P.A. Pinkevič, *Metody činné školy*, «Nové školy», vol. 3, n. 7-8, 1929, pp. 248-262.

<sup>41</sup> F. Holzmann, *O sovětském lidovém školství*, «Školské reformy», vol. 7, n. 1, 1926, pp. 10-13 and vol. 6, n. 2, 1925, pp. 43-45 and vol. 6, n. 3, 1925, pp. 72-74 and vol. 6, n. 5, 1925, pp. 124.

<sup>42</sup> P. Denk (ed.), *Nová ruská škola*, Brno, VOÚSJU, 1932, and *Škola a lidové vzdělání v SSSR*, Praha, Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní sblížení s SSSR, 1934; See also J. Uher, *Z pohledů na ruské školství a příbuzné instituce*, «Nové školy», vol. 8, n. 4-5, 1935, pp. 97-107.



workshops, kolkhozes, sovkhoses, tractor stations, etc.), as well as the return to systematic teaching based on ‘scientific logic’ translated into the content of the curriculum in each subject were reflected. Besides, the development of the Soviet school was not only reflected in the pages of magazines, but also during study trips of Czech reform teachers, associate professors and university professors – there were such trips in 1928, 1930 and 1936 all featured in detailed analytical reports. Furthermore, the programs of the Soviets in the fields of science, education and school reform and out-of-school education were also reported on. However, the writings of N.K. Krupskaya, A.S. Makarenko or P.P. Blonsky were not translated. The absence of primary sources of the ‘new’ Soviet school thus hindered the transfer of this model to the Czech pedagogical discussion and referred those interested in Soviet education to secondary literature transmitting a critical or, on the contrary, positive image of the new Soviet school<sup>43</sup>. Secondary sources on the development of Soviet Russia did not hide their disillusionment with Russia’s failure to overcome underdevelopment compared to Czechoslovakia, but also in comparison with Central and Western Europe. On the other hand, there were positive votes about the rapid transformation of Russia through revolutionary socialist reforms. Reading the journal sources, one can see the distance and caution towards the model of the new Russia adopted for interwar Czechoslovakia. The lack of attention to liberal values, and the lack of civil rights in the political, economic and cultural spheres stood in contrast to the Czech tradition. President T.G. Masaryk, a significant authority for Czech teachers, also pointed out the differences between Russia and Czechoslovakia. Masaryk analysed Russian history, culture and thought and pointed out the differences from the Western Enlightenment and liberal model of the running of society<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, the Soviet image of the new man did not become a strong model for the Czech educational discussion, although much attention was paid to it.

Czech reform teachers devoted much more space to the implementation of the ideas of social equality and the development of socialist education. In this respect, the Viennese school reform was certainly a stronger ‘model’ than the Soviet school<sup>45</sup>. Vienna was visited several times. The influence of the peda-

<sup>43</sup> In 1925-1929 the journal *New Russia* was published – for cultural rapprochement with the new Russia. Also K. Velemínský, *Rusko včera a dnes: dojmy a úvahy z cest*, Praha, V. Petr, 1929. K.Velemínský visited Russia in 1907, 1910 and during the celebration of Tolstoy’s birth in 1928. He was a translator and supporter of the ideas of L.N. Tolstoy (1828-1910). The transformation and development of Soviet Russia and the USSR in education was also reflected in several books: *Škola a lidové vzdělání v SSSR*. Praha, Společnost pro hospodářské a kulturní sblížení s SSSR, 1934. and J. Uher, *Několik pohledů na SSSR*, Brno, Moravský legionář, 1934.

<sup>44</sup> T.G. Masaryk, *Die philosophischen und sociologischen Grundlagen des Marxismus: Studien zur sozialen Frage*, Wien, Carl Konegen, 1899, and T.G. Masaryk, *The Spirit of Russia: Studies in History, Literature and Philosophy*, London, Allen & Unwin, 1919.

<sup>45</sup> Školská reforma ve Vídni, Praha, ŠVSP, 1929.

gological program of the Viennese reform was more significant on the activities of the left-oriented Czech reform teachers<sup>46</sup>.

#### 4. *'Best practices' from abroad – constructive models or destructive instruments of school reform?*

Thanks to the role and importance of the contacts of Czech teachers with their countrymen in the USA, the Czech discussion on school reform has been inspired to a large extent not only by American pedagogical thinking and pedo-psychological research, but also by American democracy and socio-cultural and political life. Czechs in the USA<sup>47</sup> were in cultural contact with their homeland and could help democratize Czech political and social life after 1918. They supported (organizationally, financially) the trips of Czech scientists to the USA<sup>48</sup>, trips of Czech teachers, as well as translations and other transfer of information and experience with American schools to Czechoslovakia. On study trips, teachers and professors reflected not only on the experience of schools and university courses, but also the whole spirit and world of America. At the forefront of their interest was the economic freedom, the entrepreneurship, development, the prosperity of the United States of America, which was seen as the result of trust in the citizen, and non-interference of the state bureaucracy in one's business and personal lives. Inspiration was also seen in the broader democratic life of American cities and states, in social activity and social assistance or solidarity among the American population, and in the belief in the citizen's dignity and activity as the basis of the state. The model was therefore the American way of life, which was also seen in the running of the school, in the ways of teaching, in the social life of the American school<sup>49</sup>. Thanks to the strong Czech minority communities in Chicago

<sup>46</sup> Social democratic and communist-minded teachers founded several important educational experiments in interwar Czechoslovakia, which through education, enlightenment led to the ideas of civic solidarity and equity (social democratic teaching), or the ideas of the world revolution (communist teaching). These were the so-called Free School of Labour in Kladno (from 1920) and the educational experiments of Jaroslav Sedlák and Karel Žitný in Prague (from 1922), as well as the experiences of the social pedagogical experiment in the home for orphaned children in Krnsko (since 1919).

<sup>47</sup> D. Hájková, *„Naše česká věc“: Češi v Americe za první světové války*, Praha, NLN, 2011.

<sup>48</sup> K. Velemínský, *Paedagogická centrála ve Washingtoně*, Praha, nákl. Vlastním, 1901-1925, and K. Velemínský, B. Mašek, F. Hýbl, *Praktický směr ve školách Spojených Států*, Praha, vlastní náklad, 1913-1914, and K. Velemínský, *Výchova česká a americká*; T. G. Masaryk, Chicago, J. Tvrzický-Kramer, 1913, and K. Velemínský, *Žákovská samospráva ve výchovných a školách Spojených států*, Praha, Jan Laichter, 1914, and Id., *Americká výchova: studie ze školské cesty po Spojených státech severoamerických*, Praha, F. Borový, 1918-1919. About Czech-American cooperation see T.G. Masaryk, *Americké přednášky*, Praha, Čin, 1929.

<sup>49</sup> D. Kasperová, *Child, Pupil, School and the Reform of Society – a few notes regarding the*

and New York<sup>50</sup>, many study trips of Czech teachers and educators were focused on these areas. The University of Chicago and Columbia University's International Teachers College in New York became institutions where Czech representatives gained intensive experience of the American debate on the role of empirical education and experimental psychology with regard to school reform. In the pages of the journal (especially *School Reforms and Pedagogical Bulletin*), one wing of reform educators from Czechoslovakia gave detailed attention to the American experience of school reform. This allowed the Czech reader to learn a detailed analysis of H. Parkhurst's Dalton Plan, the experience with Washburn's Winnet System<sup>51</sup>, and the experience with the method of global reading and writing. The specific experience of the American discussion with the reform of different teaching courses, especially at the primary and lower secondary level, was also reflected. It was looked at how the goals and methods of teaching in American schools were changing, and how new textbooks were designed. Ideas of the social and democratic life of American schools were also discussed, and this was put in relation to the American way of life, as well as to the results of quantitative psychology and scientific research of the child. American education was also presented as a space for the implementation of the principles of the rationalization movement. This is evidenced by translations of American manuals and books on scientific management and the rationalisation movement, the role of Czechoslovakia and Czech educators in the international rationalisation movement<sup>52</sup> (leading roles in

*Czechoslovakian Inter-War Pedagogical Reform Debate*, «Pedagogika», vol. 64, n. 5, 2014, pp. 487-501; and D. Kasperová, *Die "neue Schule" und der "neue Mensch". Zlín als Laboratorium der Erziehung – und Schulreform in der Ersten Tschechoslowakischen Republik*, in Ch. Brenner, K. Braun, T. Kasper (edd.), *Jugend in der Tschechoslowakei: Konzepte und Lebenswelte 1918–1989*, Göttingen, Vandenhoeck Ruprecht, 2015, pp. 181-208.

<sup>50</sup> M. Nekola, *České Chicago*, Praha, NLN, 2017, and M. Nekola, *Český New York*, Praha, Euromedia Group, 2021, and Id., *Czechs in the Northwest: Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington*, Praha, Ministerstvo zahraničních věcí ČR, 2022.

<sup>51</sup> C. Washburne visited Czechoslovakia in 1922-23, where he got to know several Czech experimental schools. See C. Washburne, *Vinnetka – výchovná laboratoř*, «Nové školy», vol. 2, n. 1-2, 1927, pp. 4-13.

<sup>52</sup> The world rationalisation movement was organised both through international congresses (1924 Prague, 1925 Brussels), through specialized literature (journals, publications) and institutionally – the Comité International d'Organisation Scientifique (until 1927 based in Prague). The crucial importance for the rationalisation movement in Europe was given by the birthplace of this thinking – the USA (American Engineering Council, or Taylor Society). For more on this cf. V. Verunáč, *Světové hnutí vědecké organizace*, Praha, 1926, p. 12.

Czechoslovakia also developed rationalisation ideas and experience thanks to a major institution of education and applied science – the Masaryk Academy of Labour (part of which was the Psychotechnical Institute), founded in 1920 in Prague. Other institutions and institutes developing rationalisation principles were active in Czechoslovakia in the fields of social life, agriculture, energy, technology, etc. Furthermore, the journal «Nová práce» («New Work») played an important role (published from 1918), which from 1928 also offered a supplement of reports from the National Committee for the Scientific Management of Society. The importance of the

rationalisation societies, organising conferences on the rationalisation movement in Czechoslovakia)<sup>53</sup>, and the establishment of institutes and societies for the use of rationalisation principles in Czech interwar society. Of crucial importance was the establishment of specialised institutes at Czechoslovak government ministries to promote the use of rationalisation principles. Lastly, it is necessary to mention the activities of Czech corporations that established their own psychotechnical departments to help rationalise work and production, maximise profits and at the same time to support modern ways of working and personal life of employees. These included private companies as well as public enterprises and state institutions<sup>54</sup>.

But what were the consequences of the adoption of the model of the American rationalization movement and the transfer of American quantitative, experimental and empirical pedagogy for the Czech context? Was it exclusively a positive example that was not problematized? Or, on the contrary, did the import of American rationalisation, as well as behaviourism and pragmatism, provoke misunderstanding, feelings of concern and lead to a negative reaction?

The role of the American rationalisation movement came to be perceived, at least in some quarters, as a threat to Czech educational discussion on school reform. For the «popularizers» of rationalization, it played a positive role as an inspiration. This group of educators thought about the arrangement of school buildings, the course of teaching, and teaching processes from the rationalisation perspective and according to its logic suggested many changes in Czech education<sup>55</sup>. These supporters based the reform of the Czech school both on the importance of observing and measuring pupils' learning behaviour (behaviourism) and the premises of active learning in an active and democratic school (pragmatism). A second, significant group of educators were seriously concerned by the uncritical acceptance and zealous intensity with which the opposing wing wanted to change the daily running of schools and determine the goals of school reform. At the same time, these critics underlined the difference of the rationalizing principles, the quantitative educational sciences in contrast to the historic Czech tradition. The American 'best practice' caused 'worries' for some of them that it would lead to the colonization of the Czech reform pedagogical tradition and experience. It was argued that American so-

rationalisation movement and scientific planning in the Czechoslovak Republic is also illustrated by the encyclopaedia (1932-1934) *Encyclopaedia of Efficiency* (volumes Man + Production + Commerce).

<sup>53</sup> V. Verunáč (ed.), *Racionalisace, vědecká organizace a otázka sociální*, Praha, A. Němec, 1927, and V. Verunáč (ed.), *Laboretismus: Soubor přednášek a statí*, Praha, 1934, and V. Příhoda, *Racionalisace školství*, Praha, Orbis, 1930.

<sup>54</sup> D. Kasperová, *Výchova průmyslového člověka a firma Baťa v meziválečném Zlíně*, Liberec, TUL, 2014.

<sup>55</sup> Kasper, Kasperová, *The Baťa Company in Zlín – a Shoe Company or a School Company*, «History of Education», cit., pp. 321-348, and T. Kasper, D.Kasperová, «Nová škola» v meziválečném Československu ve Zlíně: ideje, aktéři, místa, Praha, Academia, 2020.

ciety differed greatly from the Czechoslovak world, and the critics' camp also highlighted the apparently simplistic tendencies of the rationalization movement in terms of the philosophical view of man, society, and the world, as well as of the child and education. Educational goals were to be reduced in the view of this critique, and educational and training practices were to be formalised. The rationalization movement was to bring technocratic simplifications<sup>56</sup>, a psychotechnical flattening of human mental life, as well as an undermining of «humanistic ideals» in the discussion of the role of education for society. The American 'best practice' fragmented the Czech pedagogical reform debate and became no longer a source of inspiration, but rather a source of pedagogical dispute about the 'basis' of educational science and the orientation of the Czech school reform<sup>57</sup>. The inspiring ideas from the American discussion, which so dynamized thinking about the goals and means of school reform, or with regard to the direction of Czech educational science, were evaluated as threatening by some Czech educators. This development could reasonably be interpreted as having a negative impact of best practice on the Czech pedagogical reform debate, and in part this was certainly the case. The critics of the American school and education system no longer wanted to merely point out the limits of the specific approaches, but took on the task of discrediting the models and closing Czech educational thinking against them. To be successful in this strategy, the critics had to simplify, repeat, escalate, and polarize their views and arguments. Many articles in the journal *New Schools*, which was supposed to analyze reform educational attempts in the spirit of the NEF, completely changed their position after 1930<sup>58</sup>. On the one hand, the journal ignored the themes of the reform educational experience abroad and restricted itself to topics that were very far from school reform. On the other hand, the journal published the results of its own reform educational experiments and perspectives that were intended to weaken or negate the premises of the American educational debate. These texts not only regarded American rationalization models as scientifically weak and simplistic, but also pointed out their 'corrupting' role. This emotional charge diverted attention away from the scientific arguments. We can ask whether this criticism undermined and re-

<sup>56</sup> L. Tondl, *Technický svět a hodnoty*, in J. Janko, E. Těšínská (edd.), *Technokracie v českých zemích 1900–1950*, Praha, Archiv AV ČR, 1999, pp. 13-17.

<sup>57</sup> O. Chlup, Úvodem, «Nové školy», vol. 5, n. 1, 1931, pp. 1-3; also J. Uher, *Američané kritizují svou výchovu*, «Nové školy», vol. 5, n. 1, 1931, pp. 9-13, and J. Uher, *Američané kritizují svou výchovu*, «Nové školy», vol. 5, n. 2, 1931, pp. 39-46, and J. Uher, *Američané kritizují svou výchovu*, «Nové školy», vol. 5, n. 3, 1931, pp. 65-69.

<sup>58</sup> Czech experimental schools, whose program was based on the discourse of American progressive pedagogy and the experience of American schools and the broader rationalization debate, opened in the Czechoslovakia in September 1929. Their number increased until 1938, the year of the collapse of interwar Czechoslovakia. On the tradition of the rationalization movement in the Czech pedagogical debate, cf. esp: V. Příhoda, *Racionalisace školství*, cit.

stricted the transfer of the American rationalization movement or of American pedagogy and psychology reforms. Of course it did not completely stop the free flow of ideas. Rather, it changed the dynamics and culture of the Czech reform educational debate and quickly began to highlight and give equal value to domestic traditions as well as discussion of alternative models and examples of good practice from abroad. In particular, in the late 1930s, the journal *New Schools* showed a greater interest in the Soviet experience of school reform<sup>59</sup>.

The more important question, however, is whether the ‘controversy’ about the direction of Czech school reform and education and the rejection of the «American transfer» could have had a more fundamental impact on the subsequent stagnation of the Czech school reform and educational debate, as it closed in on itself. In 1935 the journal *New schools* the Czech alternative to the NEF journals, was published for the last time. It is not possible to reconstruct from primary sources the definitive reasons why. We do not know whether the crucial drivers were financial, internal disputes in the editorial office, or divisions that resulted from the ‘split’ of Czech educators on the question of the transfer of American educational themes. It should be noted that until 1935 the magazine did not highlight financial or conceptual difficulties. It is likely, therefore, that the cessation of publication of this important Czech medium on school reform may reflect controversy and inconsistency in the Czech reform debate and its closing in on itself. That this self-enclosure was finally unsuccessful is evidenced by several facts. After 1928, a number of experimental schools were established and continued to grow rapidly in Czechoslovakia, these institutions were programmatically, conceptually based on the premises and experience of the American rationalization movement and American pragmatism. The reformed curricula of comprehensive schools (primary and lower secondary schools) published by the Ministry of Education after 1930 incorporated in many respects the experience of Czech experimental schools with the ‘models’ of American active and democratic schools.

### *Conclusions*

What was manifested in the transfer of ideas between educational reformers around the world and the Czech reform movement? As has already been pointed out, the Czech pedagogical scene was very open to influences from abroad, and therefore the question of transfer became a very important part of interwar educational life in Czechoslovakia. The transfer took place thanks to teachers and academics. Transfer of reforming educational ideas and experi-

<sup>59</sup> The managing editor of the *New Schools* magazine was Professor Otokar Chlup, a member of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and interested in the Soviet world of thought.



ences was closely linked to broader levels of the debate on the reform of society and man. The exchange was very active and dynamic, as there were many platforms and media that allowed the dissemination of viewpoints – journals, study trips, expert workshops, publications, translations, analytical reports, critical reports. Transfer not only informed the new, the unknown, but also helped to clarify the Czech pedagogical reform agenda. Dialogue with those in other countries also helped to cultivate Czech reform-oriented educational debate.

Reform educational transfer in the Czech case faced many very concrete challenges if new experiences were understood as best practices and their transfer involved some form of adaptation and ‘translation’ into the Czech debate. In a situation where part of the educational discussion had come to interpret the American educational influence as threatening, transfer of ideas was no longer regarded as an enriching influence on the Czech system. A significant group of Czech educators worked to discredit the ‘model’ without offering a critical and balanced view. However, such practices weakened expert critical reflection on new ideas and experiences. At the same time, these practices additionally weakened the resilience of the Czech educational debate, reducing it to one which recycled a reduced repertoire of ideas and subsequently to further uncritical adoption of other models from alternative social models, such as the Soviet Union.

It can therefore be seen that the transfer and adoption of new concepts can only effectively take place in the context of a wider acceptance of new meanings for domestic discussion. Openness, but also a realistic perspective shown towards the new and latest thinking is fundamental if transfer is to take place or be successful. It is clear from the Czech case that best practices can play a very negative role if they are pushed forward uncritically, without thought for specific context and internally unacceptable.