

ABSTRACT

This dissertation is designed as a theoretical research study, whose aim is to explore the possibilities of mapping and development of the community aspect of schools. This field of study is still relatively unexplored. The goal of this dissertation is to outline theoretically the concept of a Community school, and to stress the change of paradigm of current education and focus on how the role of school changes in current society. The dissertation also focuses on theoretical aspects of school perception and current scientific knowledge in given area. The research focuses on the analysis and characteristics of the Community school model.

Further goal of the empirical research was to determine whether there is a reliable instrument to help identify the type and quality of a given Community school, identify a basic typological distribution of Community schools in the Czech Republic, identify how individual concepts of Community schools differ in the content and delivery of their curricula, and how are principles of Community schools interconnected with the principles of inclusive education, and in particular with the provision of equal opportunities.

The qualitative research was carried out in five elementary schools in the Czech Republic that identify themselves as Community schools. These five schools formed the research sample. The data collection consisted of structured interviews, focus groups and the analysis of school documentation.

The dissertation is based on the concept of a Community school as a system with complex structure. Therefore, the system approach can be applied – Each school has its own structure, an environment containing elements activating the system – these elements activate processes which affect the structure. The school responds to the environment and in return influences the environment.

Our results indicate that participants in the educational process consider deciding how much impact should a school have on the processes outside the school the key for including the school in the life of a community. Results also point to certain differences between individual schools even though they espouse similar educational values. These differences are mostly due to decentralization of the educational process, system of financing, political support of Community schools, size of each community and the characteristics of the local population.

Relatively small differences are caused by the type of people working in the school, their personal preferences and other internal factors. External factors play much bigger role.

One of the important steps to effectively disseminating the concept of Community schools and to further theoretical development of this concept is mapping and understanding of the heterogeneity of circumstances, regulations and educational processes. The aforementioned external factors could be conceived as certain predictors of delays in the transformation of a regular school to a Community school. Based on empirical findings, this dissertation also discusses suggestions for pedagogical theory and practical applications. It also explores its limitations and offers suggestions for further research.

KEYWORDS: Community school, local community, Parental engagement, inclusion, out-of-school activities, socio-economically excluded sites, lifelong learning, strategic documents of educational policy