



# Czech School Heads: Researching their Life and Professional Paths (with special emphasis to learning)

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# Headteachers in the context of the operation of the Czech educational system

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## ○ **Headteacher's role**

- transformation of the role since early 1990s on
- duties and responsibility
- legal status of schools
- more expectations: self-evaluation, curricular reform, school boards

## ○ **Conditions for becoming basic school (6-15) headteacher:**

- teacher training qualification (master's degree)
- minimum 4 years of teacher practice
- passing the selection procedure



# About the research

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□ Topic:

**Headteachers of Czech Schools and their Life and Professional Careers**

□ Research assignor:

**Czech Science Foundation (GAČR #406/07/0845)**

The project's aim was to contribute to the knowledge of the theory and practice of headteachers' work in the context of the development of their life and professional careers.



# Emphasis on learning as part of the professional career

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**Contribution to the understanding of lifelong learning and workplace learning, with stress on:**

- the unity of life and work stories
- the learning processes in, for, and through the workplace
- the perception of the interconnection among formal, non-formal, and informal learning



# Research methodology

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- Qualitative approach

- ❖ biographical and narrative design — life history

- ❖ combination of data collection methods:

- biographical interviews with headteachers
- focus group
- in-depth interviews with headteachers' collaborators
- participated observations
- document analysis



# Research sample

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## ❖ **Intentional choice:**

- gender
- working experience
- size and location of the school
- image of the school

## ☐ **2007–2009: biographical interviews**

(headteachers of 9 basic schools)

- series of three interviews with each respondent
- additional interviews — resource triangulation
- analysis (life history design)

## ☐ **2009: focus group** (10 headteachers)



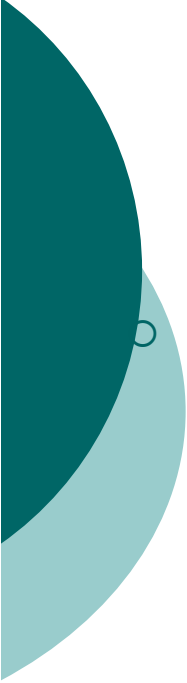
# Main stages of headteachers' careers

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- ❖ **Data analysis:**

- ❖ **three stages of the career** (to be structured internally)
- ❖ + decisive moments before entering the position

- **Stage 0:** professional career before “headteaching”
- **Beginner**
- **Intermediate**
- **Advanced**



## Stage 0: critical incidents before taking up the headteacher's position

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### ○ Occupational choice — teacher


- care of children
- safe and pragmatic choice

*I've always told you, and it's still like that, that I wanted to work with kids. Teaching was a natural choice then. (Headteacher 2)*

*So I was realistic about my capacities, as they say, and thought about it... and teaching was the best of all options, as for scientific maths I didn't feel good enough, though I'd have liked it. (Headteacher 5)*

### ○ Invitation to become headteacher

*A colleague of mine... and our psychologist too, they said I had the potential. They said, you should give it a try, you are good for that and we trust you. And the other thing was the situation in my family... so I said to myself ok, someone must be the breadwinner. So I applied. (Headteacher 2)*



## **Stage 0:** preparation for career change as opportunity to learn

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### **Ignorance or unclear image of “what a good teacher and a good headteacher do”**

*I didn't have the feeling that university had made me ready for the school and the practice. And the headteacher role? No way. I was naive in that. (Headteacher 8)*

- **Strong realization and inner acceptance of the fact that new things will have to be learned**

**Headteacher 2:** *I had to learn everything again.*

**Question:** *How did you proceed?*

**Headteacher 2:** *Well, as I knew I went for it legs first, I didn't wait for you to put up a training, or for the law to oblige me. I was going for that, myself.*



# Beginner (part 1)

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□ **Context of the stage: opportunities to learn — outer stimuli and/or barriers?**

- lacking formal preparation
- a “false” beginner – almost no tolerance period
- inherited culture: the “shadow” of the previous headteacher
- ex-teacher’s reputation



# Beginner (part 2)

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- **Context of the stage: opportunities to learn — outer stimuli and/or barriers?**
  - acceptance of career change
  - optimistic approach
  - efforts to change or influence things, to build up the school in one's own way

*When I went for it, I mean being head, you know, I had a kind of idea everyone has who can see headteaching from the outside, you know. My idea was there will be law and order in the school and the kids will immediately have excellent knowledge.*

**(Headteacher 6)**



# Beginner: attitude to learning (part 1)

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- **Formal and non-formal education** — functional training programmes
- **Creating headteacher networks** — aiming at the share of experience
- **Headteacher model** — tendency to take over existing solutions
- **„Intuitive“ approach to the role** — learning new things despite errors

*So earlier I was simply doing everything myself. And generally, I think the headteachers I meet do it like that. They have the enthusiasm and they feel they don't have time but have to do everything themselves. So they stay from seven till five in the school, and still someone else comes then. So I had such tendency too. But I understood that things need their time. I started to work in a different way then.*  
**(Headteacher 5)**



# Beginner: attitude to learning (part 2)

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## **Dominant instigation to learning: to experience a personal success**

- self-reflection and self-evaluation in critical situations
- repeated feeling of success — entering the next stage

*The dispute with parents that occurred there was actually helpful to me. I learned I had to withstand and explain things. When I dared enter the classroom to tell the parents that they themselves and their children are responsible for their education I thought they would beat me up there. In the end I could stand it but it was difficult.*

**(Headteacher 1)**



# Intermediate (performing stage)

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- **Context of the stage: opportunities to learn — stimuli and/or barriers?**
  - “sobering up” from the initial optimism
  - identification with the school and its problems — absorption by the operation of the school
  - realization of the alienation of the rest of the school — “it’s up to myself to do it all”

*One of my naive ideas was how I can build up a younger team. That won’t be much of a problem. Well, naive. But main thing, practice showed me that a young team might only be an advantage in regard to finance, yes. Saving money. But that’s it. Not in this school. They bring new ideas, yes, but abandon most of them right away, finding out that not everything works. I stopped being so keen. (Headteacher 2)*

*She just lives with the school, devotes a lot to that. Of course her demands to herself and others are corresponding. Sometimes exaggerated perhaps, but she’s living it. (Deputy of headteacher 9)*



# Intermediate headteacher: attitude to learning (part 1)

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- ❖ **Main source of knowledge is one's own practice**
  - certain disappointment of the formal education
  - dominant for this stage is learning within the school (learning from the acquired experience)
- ❖ **Additional source is the completed network of colleagues —**  
sharing the experience
- ❖ **Delegating as one of the ways to overcome one's own limits**

*In the beginning it was myself doing everything on my own. Or rather such tendency, not everything, but most things on my own, though a lot of them unnecessary. But that's completely normal. One must grasp that. A beginner has no experience.*

**(Headteacher 1)**



# Intermediate headteacher: attitude to learning (part 2)

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❖ **Again, to experience success is the dominant instigation to learning**

- the goal is not personal success anymore but that of the school
- repeated feeling of success: entry into another stage

*Maybe feedback is important for the head in this stage. To know whether he does the job all right. That means to investigate with parents and pupils. With colleagues, it's that none of them would probably tell you frankly. But to investigate whether the school is heading the way it should. (A focus group headteacher)*



# Advanced headteacher

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- **Context of the stage: opportunities to learn — stimuli and/or barriers?**
  - stereotype (problems have been mastered)
  - crisis — weariness
  - being on the top of the mountain?

*I think an experienced headteacher is to be recognized through his or her ability to consider things a couple of moves ahead. In other words, based on the experience he or she could acquire, they already can anticipate what's going to happen.*

**(A focus group headteacher)**

*In this period, one starts to think about how to pass on experience to others. So people are looking for successors and, at the same time, looking for things for which they didn't have enough time before. **(Headteacher 3)***



# Advanced headteacher: attitude to learning

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## **Dominant instigation to learning: looking for new challenges**

- in the school: returning to initial ideals
- outside the school:
  - ⇒ learning takes place both within the school and outside

*But for the time being I like it, even the new things. And since I am member of other committees, in the Municipality, in the Regional Office, in supervisory boards, it's simply functions that help the school, and I can get money through projects and so on. (A focus group headteacher)*

*We've been a pilot school. The head invented that. It was new for everyone. And there was really little enthusiasm for being in that pilot. But he said, I want it, we'll be ahead, we'll learn it beforehand. (Deputy of headteacher 3)*

- ❖ (First) systematic contemplation of the future — career planning or maintenance?



# Some conclusions

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- Czech school headteachers:
  - at career change they do not wait for “being ready”
  - they choose direct ways to satisfy their needs of learning, disregarding the character (formal, non-formal, informal)
- Headteachers’ needs change considerably when their careers pass from one stage to another.
- Implications for evaluation, training and support...