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The first issue of Historia scholastica Journal presents 10 studies, most of them in some way thematizing the impact of the totalitarian regime on the field of education. A. Canales focuses on the change of educational policy of the Franco Regime in Spain in the 1960s, which was in contradiction with the still prevailing political and ideological principles of Franco's Dictatorship. E. Protner's study provides insight into the discontinuity of pre- and post-war Marxist pedagogy in Yugoslavia, using the example of slovenian pedagogue Jože Jurančič. How communist ideology was reflected in the functioning of education in Yugoslavia, specifically in Bosnia and Herzegovina, shows in her study S. Šušnjara.

Three other studies focus on education in the area of states in the territory of the former Soviet Union. I. Nelin examines the evolution of psychoanalytic pedagogical ideas in the Soviet Union, his study highlights the experiments in psychoanalytic education and their subsequent prohibition due to political shifts.

E. Bērziņš and I. Ķestere examines how Soviet narratives in the field of history of education were deconstructed in the Baltic States and how historians constructed a new view of the national history of these states.

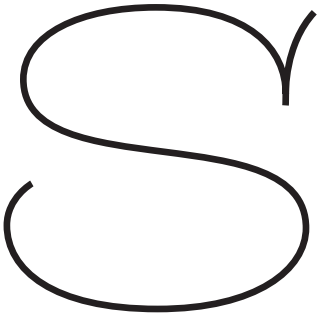
I. Ivanavičė and I. Stonkuvienė focuses on the mechanism of ideological assimilation of Lithuanian Roma through school and education in the Soviet Union; the study explores key dimensions of Roma education, including the construction of the New Soviet Man, the impact of forced sedentarisation, and the role of schooling in promoting linguistic assimilation, discipline, and social control. Belonging is an important phenomenon, the basis of which does not have to be only belonging to one ethnic group, as is the case in the study of Roma in Lithuania. F. Guerrini explores generational belonging in the generation of children born during the war. Her work focuses not only on specific research on belonging in the war generation, but also shows the theoretical perspectives of research on such a complex phenomenon as belonging.

Two studies in this issue relate to special education. J. Randák looks into the situation in special education in Czechoslovakia after the communists came to power in February 1948 and shows that the optimistic proclamations of the state representatives were often at odds with the real experience of teachers at special schools. K. Eliášková and M. Šmejkalová examine teaching of Czech language of visually impaired pupils at special schools from 1972 to 2010. The long period of research allowed the authors to examine not only the development of didactic approaches, but also the change in the ideological framework of education during this time.

While most studies deal with education in the second half of the 20th century, I. Garai investigates the issue of deprofessionalization of secondary school teachers in pre-war Hungary.

We believe that all of the submitted studies will contribute to the clarification of many unresolved research questions as well as stimulate interest in further research.

Jan Šimek



Studie
Studies

The State's Uncertain Custody. Educational Care in Special Schools in Post-war Czechoslovakia

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Abstract The study focuses on the conditions in special education in Czechoslovakia in the first years after the Communist Party came to power in February 1948. It discusses opinions held by experts on new socialist pedagogy, psychology, hygiene and defectology, outlining the positions and roles attributed to special education by state authorities and institutions. Its main focus is the experience of special school teachers, which was often at odds with the optimistic proclamations made by state representatives and the new socialist science. The network of special schools in Czechoslovakia at the time was inadequate. Many children proposed for placement in special schools never enrolled in them and were therefore left beyond the reach of the emancipatory potential of these institutions, which were supposed to prepare them for adult life.

Keywords Czechoslovakia, 1948–1955, socialism, communist dictatorship, special schools, defectology, childhood

Introduction

In the spring of 1949, Jaroslav Kubišta, a miner from the North Bohemian town of Záluží near Most, addressed a letter to Prague's Ministry of Education. He pointed out that in North Bohemia there were "many children who need special care because they have mental defects". Kubišta himself was the father of a boy who attended a special school during his last year of schooling. As he told the Ministry, his son was able-bodied and capable of manual work. He assured the officials that "given the present need for every labourer, I am anxious that he should be a useful member of the nation". He could not, however, "get his son into any institution". He was referring to facilities for youth educated

in special schools that prepared them for future careers. However, all the three institutes then operating in the Czech part of Czechoslovakia were overcrowded.[1] Kubišta was therefore asking the Ministry to "ensure that these children are taken care of and that this pressing issue is resolved". He ended the letter with a political statement, "I am a miner and I know what work is and what the building of the republic needs in terms of manpower".[2]

A year earlier, in February 1948, the political situation in Czechoslovakia had changed. The Communist Party of Czechoslovakia took power and would keep it for the next forty undemocratic years. Judging by Kubišta's letter, the rhetoric of building Czechoslovak socialism fuelled expectations as to what the state administration should be doing, including demands related to the care of children and youth who, although mentally different, were capable of education: that is to say, special school candidates and pupils. However, the miner Kubišta certainly did not know what members of the Czechoslovak National Assembly had already admitted in October 1948, discussing the problems of the first Czechoslovak Five-Year Economic Plan, namely that, due to other financial priorities, the Plan would not take into account the need to establish homes for young people in need of special care (Holman, 1949, p. 109), as children with physical and mental differences were formally called.

Time passed, but the situation did not improve. At the beginning of November 1953, teachers at the local special school in Mělník, Central Bohemia, convened a meeting. In its course, a problem that had been plaguing their institution was brought to light – the school was in dire need of a dormitory to house pupils from more distant places in the Mělník region. The existing building was not suitable. The headmaster therefore expressed himself firmly at the meeting: "We will ask

1 The institutes were located in Jirkov near Chomutov in North Bohemia, in Chroustovice in East Bohemia and in Kelč near Valašské Meziříčí in Moravia.

2 Umístění absolventů zvláštních škol – Kubišta Jaroslav, horník, dopis ze dne 9. května 1949. Collection Ministerstvo školství (unarranged), call number 13, B-. Národní archiv ("NA").

for another, more suitable one." Some improvement would be made by extending the school building, but in any case "having the pupils commute is only an insufficient substitute".[3]

The proposal put forward by the miner Kubišta and the dissatisfaction of the teachers in Mělník highlight the unavailability of educational care for special school pupils and candidates. As the following text will show, some of these pupils found themselves in a specific situation at that time – in an era that announced a happy (socialist) future for all, they lacked access to the desired, and officially prescribed, educational care.

Generally, the literature has paid little attention specifically to children from Czech special schools (Randák, 2022b). Although Victoria Schmidt's work on the segregation of Romani children and children with disabilities is thematically close to this paper (2015; 2019), it does not discuss the practice of special education in much detail. This paper therefore builds on texts that have explored expert perspectives on children with mental differences (Randák, 2018; Fapšo & Randák, 2021; Fapšo & Randák, 2023) and also draws on texts that provide an overview of the history of special education (Titzl, 2000; Titzl, 2005; Černá et al., 2015). Last but not least, Monika Mužáková's special education studies also need to be mentioned for their oral history-based exploration of the environment in communist Czechoslovakia in families having children with intellectual disabilities (2016; 2019; 2020).

The following paragraphs will first discuss expert opinion on the influence of the environment on the educational process and then examine and evaluate, in light of the experience of special school teachers, the role officially attributed to special education. Temporally, the paper discusses the situation in the late 1940s and early 1950s, when state leaders and post-war researchers made optimistic proclamations, while the reality observed did not easily align with their visions. Its aim is to present and interpret the ambiguity of special education in that

3 Zápis o pracovní poradě učit. sboru zvláštní školy v Mělníku konané 2. listopadu 1953. Protokoly pedagogické rady 1954–1955, Collection Základní škola praktická a Základní škola speciální Mělník. Státní okresní archiv ("SOkA") Mělník.

period. Geographically, it discusses the situation in the Czech part of former Czechoslovakia, specifically the area of Central and Northern and North-Western Bohemia, where, incidentally, immigrants from other parts of Czechoslovakia had replaced the German-speaking population that had been expelled in the aftermath of World War II.

The Influence of Environment and Education

In 1950, Josef Linhart (1917–1992), a representative of socialist-oriented psychology, published *Vliv prostředí a výchovy na duševní vývoj dítěte* [*The Influence of Environment and Education on the Mental Development of the Child*] (Linhart, 1950). In this book, this associate professor at the Prague Faculty of Education decided to deal with the bourgeois doctrine of heredity. Specifically, he targeted the German evolutionary biologist August Weissmann (1834–1914) and the American geneticist Thomas Hunt Morgan (1866–1945), who further developed the laws of inheritance formulated in the 1860s by Johann Gregor Mendel (1822–1884), the founder of modern genetics. Linhart argued that their teachings, disapprovingly labelled as Weissmann-Morganism (Hašek, 1951), overestimated the influence of heredity in the human organism, while fundamentally underestimating the influence of the external environment (Linhart, 1950, pp. 27–28).

Referring to the results of Soviet science, especially those of Ivan Petrovich Pavlov (1849–1936), Linhart opposed the fate of genes in favour of the formative influence of the environment, including the social, and ideally socialist, environment (Linhart, 1950, p. 13). He also argued that a child's development became chaotic due to the uncontrolled influence of the environment. Planned upbringing and education, on the other hand, he saw as a deliberate process of "intervention in mental and physical development" aimed at achieving what society needs (Linhart, 1950, p. 43) and considered schools to play a crucial role in it (Linhart, 1950, p. 67).

Linhart was not alone in his view that it was possible to productively form a child's character, abilities and personality. Anna Lebedová of the John Amos Comenius Pedagogical Research Institute – a key centre of Czechoslovak pedagogical theory – similarly took issue with

the Weismann-Morgan-Mendelian theory of heredity in the key journal *Pedagogika*, describing it as an unscientific tool serving the "imperialist ruling class" (Lebedová, 1951, p. 25). She also expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that some teachers "believe that the abilities and talents of children are something given, unchangeable, that they are fated by an unchanging heredity and an unchanging environment" (Lebedová, 1951, p. 22).

School hygiene was another area where the influence of the environment on children was also being considered. Miloš Kredba (1894–1967), a physician, summarised its foundations in a book. He reminded the readers of his *Školní hygiena* [*School Hygiene*] that a human being "lives and works in a certain living and working environment", his external world. The human organism responds to such surroundings, he says, "so that a balance is always maintained between it and this external world". Thus, if there is a relationship between the organism and the actor's external world, "there is also a certain mutual unity between the two elements". The human organism, which "is constantly being impacted by the torrent of influences from the external world, tries to respond to this torrent through the central nervous system" (Kredba, 1953, p. 6).

Schoolchildren's intellectual level is never discussed by Linhart, Lebedová and Kredba, but given that special school candidates were children capable of education, the view emphasizing the importance of external conditions in education can be considered relevant for such candidates as well, as a purposefully organized environment was supposed to stimulate even less gifted children. After all, local authorities negotiating the establishment of special schools in their municipalities were also aware of this fact. For example, in the spring of 1949 the special school in Jablonné v Podještědí in North Bohemia thought that the school building had to have an "educational effect on the feelings of the pupils".[4] Children transferred to this institution required

4 Organisaci KSČ v Markvarticích, p. 1. Zvláštní škola. Collection MěNV Jablonné v Podještědí, inv. No. 308. SOkA Česká Lípa.

"not only special educational care, but also the best environment in order for the school to achieve its purpose".[5]

Defectology, proposed in 1953 by Miloš Sovák (1905–1989), can be considered the key concept for pupils from special schools (Sovák, 1953a; Sovák, 1953b; Sovák, 1954). What did Sovák, a physician and professor at the Prague Faculty of Education, and therefore Linhart's and Kredba's colleague, propose? In his view, the key component of an actor's environment was the social relations into which one grows through upbringing and education. He therefore considered an actor to be defective only when his or her autonomy within social relations was impaired, a common feature in defective people being their limited relations to the community, upbringing, education and work. At the same time, defectology did not consider a defect to constitute a fatal flaw, a definitive loss (Sovák, 1953a, p. 239). Sovák specifically considered defectiveness to be a disorder, possibly long-term but not permanent, since the fate of a handicap can be reversed by rehabilitation and re-education. The development of working competencies was exactly how this was to be achieved (Popelář, 1953, p. 92; for a general discussion see Fapšo & Randák, 2021). To consider defective individuals as inferior was therefore unjustified and outdated under his concept (Sovák, 1953a, p. 242).

Czech experts were simply optimistic. The fate of genes or organ failure was to be overcome by harnessing the Czechoslovak socialist education system. The biologically or genetically given was becoming socially conditioned in the new pedagogical-psychological logic. It is in this context that special schools' role within emerging Czechoslovak socialism needs to be understood: as institutions providing an educational environment essential for the development of children and youth with mental differences.

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5 Organisaci KSČ v Markvarticích, p. 2. Zvláštní škola. Collection MěNV Jablonné v Podještědí, inv. No. 308. SOkA Česká Lípa. Similar ideas are featured in Zpráva o činnosti IV. ref. za rok 1949. Školství v kraji Libereckém, p. 14. Collection Krajský národní výbor (KNV) Liberec, box No. 406. Státní oblastní archiv ("SOA") Litoměřice.

Special Schools

Tasked with educating future generations in the new socialist system, the education system became one of the key parts of the ideological apparatus of the Czechoslovak communist dictatorship. Its organisation had been laid down by the Education Act, approved by the National Assembly in April 1948. It also mentioned schools for youth in need of special care, that is for youth "physically defective and with defects of the senses and speech, mentally and morally defective […]" (Chlup, Král & Kahuda, 1949, p. 22). The law made educational care for children and youth with differences, for the first time, an exclusive agenda of the state. It also made the promise that: "Pupil dormitories or other accommodation facilities necessary shall be established at schools as required" (Chlup, Král & Kahuda, 1949, p. 22).

Special schools specifically were expected to educate the "mentally defective youth". Given the emancipatory ethos associated with building a more just socialist society, they were not supposed to marginalise these children. They were conceived as institutions providing "other" education, aimed at forming intellectually weaker, yet morally reliable people who would find employment after completing their education. Therefore, the role assigned to special schools by the Ministry of Education was primarily vocational, as summarised in the 1954 *Učební plán a učební osnovy pro zvláštní školy* [*Learning Plan and Curriculum for Special Schools*], which specified that the special school "provides children with defective mental development with a basic general education by methods and means appropriate to their development and abilities in order for them to be able to integrate into production and thus become useful members of socialist society and builders of the Republic" (Učební plán, 1954, p. 3).

In the stimulating environment of these special schools, young people in need of special care were to be guided to live proper lives in socialist society. In addition, however, these schools were also seen by local government officials, arguing in favour of their establishment, as an instrument of prevention to take care of mentally less gifted children so that they would not become a burden on the municipalities or the state in adulthood. In Jablonné v Podještědí, these officials were

very specific in that they did not "wish especially in a growing socialist society to see pariahs growing up before our eyes, whom we could not responsibly integrate into industrial and economic life".[6]

It was work performance that was supposed to serve as the argument for securing a good reputation for special schools and their pupils in the eyes of the public. Raising awareness of their pupils' work, which individual schools were encouraged to do, can be seen as an affirmation of normality in terms of work. Special school children's achievements in growing crops were entered into competitions in which they reaped prizes even in confrontation with pupils of standard schools. Similarly, the fruits of their labour were displayed in public places, such as shop windows.[7] The crops growing club at the special school in Nový Bor in North Bohemia sent the magazine it published to all the schools in the Nový Bor district and to special schools in North Bohemia, as well as to schools in Prague and Slovakia. In June 1956, the special school in Mimoň prepared an exhibition of handicrafts, which was widely visited and praised by the public.[8] Special school pupils' products were also successful at regional competitions for young technicians.[9]

In addition to their pedagogical-psychological optimism about the formation of the child, there was one more thing that the above expert voices had in a common: they all came from Prague, the centre of Czechoslovakia. However, the likes of August Weissmann, Thomas

6 Organisaci KSČ v Markvarticích, p. 2. Zvláštní škola. Collection MěNV Jablonné v Podještědí, inv. No. 308. SOkA Česká Lípa. Similar ideas are featured in Memorandum o umístění zvláštní školy v severočeských Litoměřicích. Collection ONV Litoměřice 1949–1960, Školské záležitosti, inv. No. 370–1 , box No. 690; Souhrnné zprávy o školství v okrese, Memorandum o umístění zvláštní školy v Litoměřicích ze dne 21. ledna 1950, p. 1. SOkA Litoměřice/Lovosice.

7 Usnesení ke zvýšení úrovně, p. 2. Záležitosti mládeže vyžadující zvláštní péče, Kabinet učitelstva pro mládež vyžadující zvláštní péče. Collection ONV Rumburk, inv. No. 259. SOkA Děčín.

8 Zprávy o stavu školství – situační, výroční, Výroční zpráva za školní rok 1955/56 z okr. Česká Lípa o stavu školství, Připomínky k práci zvláštních škol. Collection ONV Česká Lípa. SOkA Česká Lípa.

9 Zápisy o poradách 1951/52–1957/58, Zápis osmé porady učitelů zvláštní školy ve Cvikově dne 13. května 1954. Collection Zvláštní škola Cvikov. SOkA Česká Lípa.

Hunt Morgan and Ivan Petrovich Pavlov can also be encountered outside Prague institutions, in local special schools. For example, in the North Bohemian town of Cvikov, one of the teachers spoke about the influence of the bourgeois concept of genetics during a pedagogical meeting in March 1952, criticizing the Weissmann-Morgan doctrine, as he called it, as putting too much emphasis on the passing of parents' traits onto their offspring and thus making the development of the child predetermined by heredity. A month later, the members of the Cvikov special school discussed the teachings of Pavlov. In December 1953, a teacher presented a report on heredity at a pedagogical council meeting of the same school: "Idealists claim that heredity is something unchangeable, over which man has no influence. A child is therefore born with innate immutable characteristics. This reduces the role of the teacher to that of a mere babysitter." By contrast, materialists, such as Michurin or Lysenko, had, according to the teacher, "correctly proven […] that inherited characteristics can be changed through proper upbringing." For special school teachers "this is a particularly important insight, as it proves scientifically the validity and necessity of our schools".[10]

For teachers of special schools this opinion would be confirmed by the study of domestic authors. For example, the minutes of the pedagogical council held by the special school in Mělník in August 1954 state that during summer holidays the members of the teaching staff studied Linhart's book *Vliv prostředí a výchovy na duševní vývoj dítěte* [*The Influence of Environment and Education on the Mental Development of the Child*].[11] It should also be noted that becoming employed as a special school teacher required passing a special school teaching examination or a final defectology examination. Thus, teachers can be assumed

10 Zápisy o poradách 1951/52–1957/58, Zápis čtvrté porady učitelů zvláštní školy ve Cvikově, konané dne 15. prosince 1953. Collection Zvláštní škola Cvikov. SOkA Česká Lípa.

11 Zápis o schůzi pedagogické rady zvláštní školy v Mělníku konané dne 18. října 1954. Collection Základní škola praktická a Základní škola speciální Mělník, Protokoly pedagogické rady 1954–1955. SOkA Mělník.

to have been instructed in the spirit of pedagogical-psychological optimism that attributed a fundamental role to education and the external environment.

Teachers professionally instructed in the spirit of such optimism could then develop higher expectations as to the employment prospects of their pupils. This is confirmed by the dissatisfaction expressed in the report drawn up about the special school in Cvikov in September 1954: "It is necessary for the higher authorities to deal with the integration of our pupils who leave school for the workforce." Unfortunately, special school pupils would be refused by factories and apprenticeship schools because of their lesser knowledge. Although they were not suited for every job, the Cvikov teachers argued, they could still be "good craftsmen, especially if they had the skills". But the state needed to stand up for these children by setting up special apprenticeships. Their lack of integration into mainstream society is "the main reason why the public still looks at special schools with scepticism".[12]

This in my view goes to show that knowledge is never limited just to the centre. However, in local contexts, it acquires different functions and meanings, is re-produced in different circumstances, in different situations and by different institutions and individual actors, and is now *somehow* put into practice in relation to children in education as such (Sarasin, 2011; Östling et al., 2018; Östling, 2020). The extent of its influence is not evidenced by the fact that it has been mentioned in the local setting, but whether it has become an actively used means of evaluating and reflecting on its conditions and momentary situations (Haikola, 2020, p. 269). It is therefore worth paying attention to what stimuli, motives and aspects of the educational approach to special school children have received attention at the local level since the early 1950s.

For example, minutes of the pedagogical councils and meetings of the teaching staff and reports produced by school inspectors seem

12 Rozbor o škole zvláštní ve Cvikově, p. 2. Collection Zvláštní škola Cvikov, Plány a rozbory výchovně vzdělávacího procesu, inv. No. 86. SOkA Česká Lípa.

to suggest that, even in local special schools, children were treated in line with this received progressive knowledge. However, it is difficult to confirm in what specific form education and upbringing in special schools was actually delivered.

(Un)certainty of State Supervision

Despite the uncertainty about what the educational process in special schools really was like, it will be clear from the following case studies that for some children it meant an opportunity to have a better life, if only temporarily. Among others, special schools taught many children basic hygiene, stood up for them against their parents and served regular hot meals. The family, which the psychologist Linhart counted on as one of the formative milieus, did not always function as it was expected to.

For example, in connection with checks on children's physical cleanliness, representatives of the special school in the North Bohemian town of Varnsdorf complained that parents "take very little care of their children's cleanliness. The children are rarely bathed […], they do not get clean underwear even once a week".[13] Similarly, in the chronicle of the special school in Jílové, the entry for 1955 says that parents "do not always show a sense for the healthy upbringing of their children, their cleanliness and a desire to provide them with everything they need, and develop some attachment to the school, which wants to educate their children and make them valid and equal citizens of the Czech nation". In the case of a pupil from Kralupy in Central Bohemia, it was noted by the school she had originally attended that her family circumstances were "of such a nature as to further exacerbate and aggravate her defects (especially moral ones) rather than at least contain them".[14]

13 Zhodnocení školní práce, chování a prospěchu žactva za šk. r. 1954/55, p. 2. Výroční zprávy o školách, inv. No. 251, Zvláštní škola ve Varnsdorfu. Collection ONV Rumburk. SOkA Děčín.

14 Ředitelství národní školy v Ješíně – Přeřazení žáků do zvláštní školy. Collection Okresní národní výbor (ONV) Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 485. SOkA Mělník.

In October 1953, the teachers of the special school in Mělník discussed in more detail the plight of a pupil "who not only suffers from hunger but has to do all the chores at home (washing and cleaning)".[15] In 1952, a girl became a candidate for the special school in Kralupy nad Vltavou. Abandoned by her father, who had divorced her mother before that, she was now living with a lady, probably a stranger and not related to her.[16] In other cases, grandparents were providing care to children abandoned by their parents.[17] Teachers of the special school in Mělník concluded in February 1955 that certain siblings, who "are motherless, need to be fed" and decided that these children "would take the lunches of two other pupils for the time being" in order "to help the father who is in financial distress".[18]

By contrast, in Jiříkov, North Bohemia, the school management was happy about "the pupils' good upbringing and health and hygiene awareness, due to being led to it at school and in their group in their children's home". The pupils' behaviour was flawless. "Their good behaviour is very much aided by pupils' life in the group and therefore freedom from the external influences that cause bad behaviour in many cases."[19] What do these words of satisfaction express? The fact that the possibilities of educational care were theoretically greater when children lived outside the family in homes specifically intended for children in need of special care, or in dormitories set up at special

15 Zápis o pracovní schůzi učit. sboru zvláštní školy v Mělníku konané 12. října 1953. Collection Základní škola praktická a Základní škola speciální Mělník, Protokoly pedagogické rady 1954–1955. SOkA Mělník.

16 Evidence mládeže vyžadující zvláštní péče, dne 26. listopadu 1952. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 485, Ředitelství národní školy v Nelahozevsi. SOkA Mělník.

17 Evidence žáků vyžadujících zvláštní péči, dne 3. 12. 1951. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 485, Ředitelství národní školy v Úžicích. SOkA Mělník.

18 Zápis o schůzi pedagogické rady konané 7. února 1955. Collection Základní škola praktická a Základní škola speciální Mělník, Protokoly pedagogické rady 1954–1955. SOkA Mělník.

19 Zvláštní škola v Jiříkově, Hodnocení práce školy, p. 1. Collection ONV Rumburk, Výroční zprávy o školách, inv. No. 251. SOkA Děčín.

schools of the kind the headmaster of the Mělník school quoted in the introduction to this paper was sorely missing.

Staying there was of course evaluated positively. Even outside of school hours, the children were involved in appropriate activities, helping to keep their bedrooms, dining room and playground clean and do the gardening and work in the kitchen. They would also be able to attend after-school clubs and suitable workshops. An important component of life in such dormitories was the establishment of a daily routine and moral education (Štejgrle, 1953, p. 111). The fact that the schedule of daily activities could be organised around a regular structure that was beneficial to the child's organism was welcome from the standpoint of school hygiene (Vodička, 1953, p. 405).

The belief in the establishment of dormitories can be seen as an expression of confidence in the role of the community and the social environment in the education of children in need of special care. Or rather, it can be seen as one aspect of rejecting the genetic predetermination of Weissmann-Morganism, in the context of which special children's homes would actually be unnecessary, as nothing could be done to help children burdened by fate (genetics).

Certainly, one could think that through special schools and especially their dormitories, the child was subjected to containing supervision, and interpret it along the lines proposed by Michel Foucault (1926–1984) as the involvement of pupils bodies in the political field, as the immediate hold of power relations upon them, as training and marking them and forcing them to carry out tasks and perform ceremonies (Foucault, 1995, pp. 25–26) and to get accustomed to a timetable and the rhythm of their chores (Foucault, 1995, p. 149).

Indeed, special schools prioritised the cultivation of pupils' work competences as their aim, which seems to confirm the assumption that the political involvement of the body is related to its economic use. Here, the pupils' bodies are also involved as a force of production (Foucault, 1995, pp. 25–26), at least for the future years after completing school. After all, the chronicler of the special school in Mělník reported in 1954 that the school was "educating and teaching the future general labourer". When the teachers of the special school in Cvikov

were drafting a request directed to one of the regional enterprises to provide workshop tools for the manual training of their pupils, they did not forget to stress that thanks to the tools they would be able to prepare the children for life and "thus support the national economy by enabling them to find better and more productive employment in our socialist industry".[20]

But behind the facade of educational control of individual bodies, which is sometimes simplistically imposed on school establishments, something equally important should not be overlooked. It is clear from the examples quoted that special schools *did* in many cases provide the care that some children failed to receive in their own families, for instance because of parental disinterest.

Efforts to educate children, for example, in the sense of helping them develop basic hygiene habits and care for the cleanliness of their bodies and clothing, can therefore be interpreted as reasonable prevention of disease and care for the health of young pupils and, at the same time, as teaching school children the care of themselves in the sense of learning and adopting socially appropriate, *normal* behaviour, that is also in the spirit of inculcating in them the expected norms of a *good* and *proper* life, which they were to live after completing school.

In the case of special school pupils this was not only a matter of subjection, an interpretation that naturally offers itself, but also of self-development linked to the cultivation of their self-esteem, albeit in the context of socialist morals and values. "Our children suffer mostly from a feeling of inferiority, which is magnified in them by ridicule over all their failures in the standard national school. The child lacks confidence, is silent and bitter. In the special school, all of this disappears: the child is in an environment of equals, sees his first successes and gains self-confidence".[21]

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20 Průmyslový kombinát Nový Bor, dopis z 28. srpna 1954. Collection Zvláštní škola Cvikov, Patronáty různých podniků, inv. No. 91. SOkA Česká Lípa.

21 Doplněk ke zprávě o stavu a činnosti školy, p. 1. Collection Městský národní výbor Nový Bor, box No. 93/143, inv. No. 364. SOkA Česká Lípa. Similarly: "Based on professional research, pupils have their abilities put to full use, developed and trained

Special schools and dormitories should not therefore be seen just as spaces where children's bodies and souls are subjected to restrictive socialist disciplining. In fact, in line with the expert knowledge discussed above and given the family situation of some of the children, special schools, including dormitories, could become a place where they made progress as they were lifted from unsuitable conditions in their homes. This is confirmed by a recommendation given in the case of one pupil: "The boy would need to be placed in a children's home so that he can obtain, even outside school, the educational care that he is not receiving at home. The mother has three other young children of pre-school age, the father commutes to work outside the village, and, perhaps they do not really have enough time, but there does not seem to be enough good will to give the boy more attention of the proper kind."[22]

However, there is a catch in this line of argument. Children were assigned to special schools based on decisions of expert committees operating within district national committees (Ludvík, 1954, pp. 41–42), the second-lowest-level state administration institutions. Their verdict was supposed to take into account the benefits of changing the educational environment for special care candidates. However, many of the children remained outside of special schools' educational reach, despite obtaining expert committee recommendation for the transfer. The reason was simple: in the early days of the communist dictatorship, the special school network was not dense enough to cover the

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for practical life in the special school. Under the guidance of professionally trained teachers, small advances are made, their self-confidence rises, their interest in learning and attentiveness is strengthened, and thus slowly even the weakest pupil is enabled to have a productive life." Organisaci KSČ v Markvarticích, p. 1. Zvláštní škola. Collection MěNV Jablonné v Podještědí, inv. No. 308. SOkA Česká Lípa.

22 Evidence mládeže vyžadující zvláštní péče, dne 26. listopadu 1952. Ředitelství národní školy ve Vraňanech. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 485. SOkA Mělník.

actual needs across different regions of the country.[23] Some children were unable to commute to more distant schools due to their age or intellectual disability.[24]

That is why the dissatisfaction expressed by the Mělník special school over the lack of a dormitory, mentioned in the introduction, is of crucial importance: the headmaster pointed out a systemic problem. And he was not alone. Similar voices were heard from elsewhere, for example from Kralupy nad Vltavou, where in 1954 the local special school could be attended "only by children from Kralupy nad Vltavou and the immediate surroundings who are able to get to school every day, as a dormitory (special children's home) could not be set up for the children to be permanently cared for in all respects. The parents of the pupils from further away generally agree to have their children transfer to a special school provided that they are cared for in a dormitory."[25] However, the parents refused "to send their children to the special school even from places relatively close to Kralupy […], because they were afraid that the child would be injured while getting there."[26]

A frequent solution to the commuting issue was keeping the children in their current schools, which essentially resulted in nothing but problems for both pupils and teachers, including the much-criticized increase in the percentage of school failures,[27] or staying home, some-

23 Evidence mládeže vyžadující zvláštní péče získané soupisem v prosinci v roce 1950. Collection KNV Liberec, box No. 404. SOA Litoměřice.

24 Zápis o schůzi odborné komise pro vřadění dětí do zvláštních škol (tříd) v Kralupech nad Vltavou dne 29. června 1951. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 482. SOkA Mělník.

25 Zvláštní škola, Pro radu ONV 4. 2. 1954. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 482. SOkA Mělník.

26 Zpráva k Vašemu vyrozumění zn IV/2-315. 2-11/2-1954-Ši., dne 24. 11. 1954, Zvláštní škola. Collection ONV Kralupy nad Vlt., box No. 482, SOkA Mělník.

27 "There would be almost no failing pupils at all in the standard national schools if it were not for the presence of moronic pupils, of which there are 23 in the district. They make class work very difficult, and eventually they advance to the next grade because of their higher age, as they are often a moral menace to those around them. Despite all efforts, it has not yet been possible to establish a special school with a dormitory for them." Souhrnná inspekční zpráva za školní rok 1948/49, Žac-

times in an unsuitable environment. As the Regional National Committee in Liberec reported to the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare in Prague in March 1951: "Almost all the young people selected for placement in a special school dormitory stayed home, often in a very uncomfortable environment […]."[28]

Things to Think about

In the preceding paragraphs, I have outlined the ambiguous situation of special school pupils and candidates. Not every child eventually managed to enter a special school. Although this text has taken into account a limited number of local voices, it offers some insights for further elaboration.

The psychological-pedagogical complex in Czechoslovakia after the February 1948 communist takeover rejected bourgeois biological determinism, thereby enhancing the role of decision-making bodies and institutions caring for children and youth in need of special care. Building on the foundations of Soviet science, post-February psychology and pedagogy liberated people, including the mentally weak but educationally capable children from the fate of their genes. This also brought them into state custody, which was in some cases lacking in practice as the network of special schools and dormitories was inadequate and left many children beyond the reach of the emancipatory potential of schools for youth in need of special care.

Local sources show that the pressure to make the special school network denser and establish dormitories often came from the bottom, from local institutions and schools. This means that, firstly, the need to enrol youngsters in special schools was not necessarily formulated in the centre, and secondly, that local actors might have adopted different versions of the emancipatory rhetoric (the degree of difference could be the object of further study). The open concept of educational care, along

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tvo. Jilemnice – Stav školství v prvním roce jednotné školy. Collection KNV Liberec, box No. 404. SOA Litoměřice.

28 Evidence mládeže vyžadující zvláštní péče získané soupisem v prosinci v roce 1950. Collection KNV Liberec, box No. 404. SOA Litoměřice.

with the socialist vocabulary of engagement, allowed local representatives to make legitimate demands directed to higher instances, even within a supposedly totalitarian and centralised state. This is apparent in the negotiation of the survival of the special school in Jablonné v Podještědí, North Bohemia, in May 1949, in which the school argued that the standard of living of the state and the nation would be increased "not only through better economic conditions, but also through the education of the people, especially the broad masses. […] We do not wish, especially in a growing socialist society, to see pariahs growing up before our eyes, whom we could not responsibly integrate into industrial and economic life".[29] In Litoměřice, where conditions in which the special school was operating in the early 1950s were unsuitable, the teaching staff resorted to go even further: it illegally occupied one of the suitable and at the time vacant buildings, subsequently asking "the relevant people's authorities to support our efforts. The teachers' justification was that they had done and [were] doing so only for the benefit of children coming from the weakest families, who had suffered the most oppression in the capitalist past".[30] However, both the local and district national committees assigned the building to a kindergarten to help working mothers.[31]

In spite of the rhetoric of departure from biological and genetic determination, making the pupils of special schools responsible for their own existence, there was still control, including in the form of predestination to life roles, as shown by the quote from the Chronicle of the Mělník Special School given in the introduction, which can be supplemented by another quote, the goal as expressed by its headmaster, namely that the school would aim for its pupils to become "skilled,

29 Organisaci KSČ v Markvarticích, p. 2. Zvláštní škola. Collection MěNV Jablonné v Podještědí, inv. No. 308. SOkA Česká Lípa.

30 Souhrnné zprávy o školství v okrese, Memorandum o umístění zvláštní školy v Litoměřicích ze dne 21. ledna 1950, p. 2. Collection ONV Litoměřice 1949–1960, Školské záležitosti, inv. No. 370 –1, box No. 690. SOkA Litoměřice/Lovosice.

31 Souhrnné zprávy o školství v okrese, Umístění zvláštní školy v Litoměřicích. Collection ONV Litoměřice 1949–1960, Školské záležitosti, box No. 690, inv. No. 370–1. SOkA Litoměřice/Lovosice.

healthy general labourers", as it simply "want[ed] to teach more: to live joyfully and work well physically!"

Leaving aside speculations about intellectually weaker children as objects of state supervision vs. subjects co-shaping their own lives, we can for the moment stick to the vision of children for whom being drawn into the special school system was in many cases the proverbial step forward in that they at least obtained momentary security in life by being removed from an unsuitable family. This is where the socialist educational care provided by special schools might have had some real emancipatory potential.

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