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MACHÁČEK, Ladislav¹ – KROŠLÁK, Stanislav²: Two Schools of Democracy. Civil Education – School Self-Government

Olomouc, UPOL, 2012, 81 p. ISBN 978-80-244-3429-2

In the present developing democratic society with suitable conditions to demonstrate active participation of citizens in public affairs, the opposite phenomenon can be currently observed. The absent signs of democracy reflected by increasing apathy of the population can be seen, especially among young people reluctant to participate in social affairs. Outlining the possible solution would imply more effective and stronger youth participation where the authors of reviewed publication offer the possibility of youth activation through employing the elementary schools teachers, which are treated as a platform for conversion of young people into the active members of school self-governance. The relatively new institute offers structural opportunities to strengthen the links between "learning democracy" and "doing democracy" ("learning by doing"). It should be pointed out that Slovak young people have relatively strong legislative support for their participation in school and public affairs. It should be also noted that this year its been ten years since the law on school administration and school self-government has been adopted. This publication, which aim is to review the situation and level of development of civil youth movement, bent on new possibilities of participation in decision-making process through school's self-government, thus allowing to confront theoretical and formal aspects with the real status. The name itself emphasizes professionally profiled and well determined topic, analysed on following 80 pages. The title and subtitle of this publication serve as an apparent reference of both authors used to stress not only symbolic, but moreover logical connection and mutual conditionality between following terms – democracy – civil education – school self-government.

The content of publication is conceived into four thematic areas, each related to a different chapter. The introductory part briefly describes formal and informal civil education of youth population emphasizing their mutual dependency in pursue of democratic citizenship. A greater emphasis is conceptually put to informal education, which creates space for youngsters' self-determination of youngsters that informally acquire new knowledge, create individual opinions and attitudes, thus increasing their civil literacy. However, based on stagnation of young people's interest in civil and political activation, the authors consider „relatively new

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institute of informal education – the Pupils' School Councils (ŽŠR)” (p. 4) as a feasible tool in changing their civil and political mindsets. The first chapter plays the role of elaborated introduction to some general issues while ŽŠRs are thoroughly analyzed in the final chapter.

The second topic is entirely devoted to formal education and offers detailed look at changes occurring in the civic education process in Slovakia. The authors' perception is not oriented to theoretical aspects of this topic, but with the help of scientific tools they are able to use systematic evaluation of selected issues, related to important aspects of educational methods used in civic education. This mainly concerns the presentation of partial results of ICCS 2009 research (International Civic and Citizenship Study), processed by prof. L. Macháček as the expert for NUCEM in Bratislava. In the presented conclusions, the authors pointed out that acquired knowledge and general understanding democracy within the traditional subjects such as History are less effective than the subjects of Civic Education as these have not only significant impact on knowledge but also on the actual conduct of pupils. Surprisingly, school head teachers (mainly of secondary grammar schools) consider preparation for the school self-governance as less important than the other topics taught in the courses.

A particular part of this chapter is also devoted to a pedagogical experiment in teaching Civics at secondary schools, implemented by S. Krošlák – PhD. student tutored by prof. L. Macháček. The experiment is based on the practical comparison of effectiveness in traditional and non-traditional forms of teaching with selected students divided into an experimental and a control groups. In general, it can be expected that applied non-traditional forms will be more effective in terms of achieving better results from the students. This has been ultimately confirmed, although it was not possible to demonstrate the ability to ensure better knowledge. Similar results are achieved by students in the second group. The author points out that permanent application of the experiential methods become "ordinary and tiresome" (p. 30) for all, therefore it is necessary to emphasize its combination with the classical method of teaching.

Empirical evidence of the civil level of knowledge among secondary schools students in Slovakia, gained in the research in 2011 are analyzed in the third chapter. The main objective of the research was to find out by means of individual knowledge tests, how can students effectively handle the commonly known information regarding civil education, and how they are able to understand not only the functioning of civil society, but also politics in its wider context. The obtained data became an important component of summary rating scale, which enabled broader comparison with the results of international research ICCS 2009. The results of the research demonstrate that Slovak students aged 14 achieved superior results in the civil knowledge. The comparison of results from 2009 and 2011 shows constant positive values in 3 years horizon what proves the effectiveness of formal civic education in maintaining the identical level of civic literacy of Slovak students.

The most extensive part of this publication is the final chapter, which pays particular attention to pupils' school councils in secondary schools and treats it as a potential means of increasing the students' participation in the school self-government. It is emphasized that school is an important subject, which constitutes "informed, responsible, participatory citizens" (p. 44) not only through formal but also through informal education. Moreover, educational institutions have not only a possibility, but also a legal obligation to create environment and suitable conditions for students to take their own responsibility for decision-making and contribution to development of the young generation education for democratic citizenship. For this purpose, an expert group was set up with a central objective to realize exploratory probe (with the support of IUVENTA, under the authority of the section for youth of the Slovak Ministry of Education), monitoring the participation of young people in school self-government. Results, presented in publication in the form of spreadsheets and authentic interviews reflecting the views of individual members of pupils' school councils – coordinators and students – refer to creation, functioning, activities and of course the achieved results.

Overall, it should be noted that the activities and problems of students in ŽŠR are not well known, despite the fact, that the institute of pupils' school councils has great educational potential. The publication also highlights two contradictory trends. From one side, we observe an increasing trend in number of Pupils school councils established at Slovak schools. On the other hand, the authors demonstrate a lot of research signs that the existence remains more at official than formal terms. Establishment of ŽŠR is in many cases initiated primarily by teachers, starting with the fundamental ideas and subsequently continuing with dependant processes of management, control, implementation activities, and decision-making in students' recruitment for the council. Described status is the result and consequence of even worse trend, concerning the method and content of civic subject, which is according to the authors the lack of motivation in the way of getting students to be familiar with the essence of functioning the mechanisms of self-governing at schools and the benefits of such participation at overall administration of the school environment affecting them on everyday basis.. For this reason, the acquisition of knowledge and inculcation of democratic principles among pupils, their subsequent civic consciousness and development of responsibility for shaping the immediate impact on surroundings in which they are located, are accepted by the authors as fundamental one relation to meaningful functioning of pupils' school councils.

Using the authors comprehensive assessment the publication provides precise combination of theoretical and practical (empirical) knowledge as well as the inspiring information regarding civil education and school self-government. It is necessary to highlight systematic and logical continuity of each chapter in addition to interesting, exact and information-saturated presentation of research results, but also the form (focus groups and authentic responses), which obtains and then presents the results of the pupils' school councils. These highlights undoubtedly

make the study more valuable, making it relevant, but also an inspiring source, suitable for the professional reader who is interested in such topic. Moreover, this study can serve as a helpful guidance tool for methodological and conceptual works, which is aimed at stabilization and reinforcement of students position in the school self-government.

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