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Eliška Vojtěchová

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**The educational system of the US in and out of the country
with a comparison to the Czech republic**

Eliška Vojtěchová

Vedoucí práce:

Kobylak Skyland Václav, Bc.

Katedra anglického jazyka a literatury

Fakulta filozofická Západočeské univerzity v Plzni

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Prohlašuji, že jsem bakalářskou práci vypracovala samostatně s využitím uvedených pramenů a literatury.

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Podpis autora práce

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Abstract

This bachelor thesis gives a detailed depiction of the educational system of the United States of America and the educational system in the Czech Republic. It is divided in two major parts. The first major part is theoretical, describing tertiary educational system of both the United States and the Czech Republic. The systems are analyzed on the basis of relevant literature. The historical development of both systems is depicted. Throughout the text as well as in a special chapter at the end of the theoretical part, summary and comparison of both systems is given. The second part is the practical part which emphasises individual personal experience acquired during study stay in the institution of american secondary education. This part of the bachelor thesis is focused on the secondary education in the overseas territories of the United States of America. Analogicaly, summary and comparison to the Czech Republic is given throughout the text as well as in the last chapter of the practical part.

Introduction

The main target of this bachelor thesis is to describe in detail the educational system of the United States of America and that of the Czech Republic with a focus on the comparison of both of them. Attention will be given especially to secondary education (high school education) and tertiary education (higher university education).

Elementary education will be mentioned as well eventhough it will not be analysed throughoutly. Each type of school will be analysed in a different approach, secondary education will be analysed on basis of personal experience, whereas tertiary education according to relevant literature.

Similarly, the practical part of the thesis will focus on overseas educational system while the theoretical part will target the system directly in the country of the United States of America. At the end of each of these main chapters, a summary and comparison to the Czech republic will be given.

The areas of interest will be the educational system in the United States of America in general, describing no special area of the country. Core part of the thesis will target the description of the educational system in countries overseas that do not fall entirely within the US authority but are founded in the spirit of American education. The educational system overseas will be analysed in two specified areas – military bases in the Kingdom of the Netherlands and in the Kingdom of Belgium.

The first main part of the following bachelor thesis, the theoretical one, will be depicting the history and development of the tertiary education in the United States lapped into the present period. It will discuss in detail the educational system directly in the country. The first main part will also describe the whole educational system in general.

The second major part of the thesis, the practical one, will be dedicated not only to the high school system in overseas areas but also to elementary education in areas overseas. This section will be produced only on the basis of personal experience during a total of a five year personal participation in the educational system of the United States overseas at two military bases.

At the end of each main chapter or throughout the chapters, a brief summary and comparison of the systems will appear. Highlighted will be differences as well as similarities to the educational system of the Czech Republic.

There are several questions that the thesis is trying to answer. How does the educational structure of both countries look like? In what ways are the systems similar and how are they different? What are the types of schools and from which sources are they financed? Which are the most prestigious schools and how were they formed over the years? Apart from these basic questions, interesting facts about the US system will be provided.

Strengths as well as weaknesses of both the educational systems of the United States of America and of the Czech Republic will be discussed in the final parts of the bachelor thesis.

1. Introduction to the Structure of the Education in the USA

The following chapter will describe the current structure of the educational system in the United States and it will also give brief depiction of each of the three main levels of the system.

The educational system of the United States is structured in primary education, secondary education, and post-secondary education¹. Regarding the basic division of schools, they are either private or public. A majority of public institutions is government sponsored whereas private institutions are established by private groups or persons and financed directly by students' sponsors.

The very first step in education in the US called preschool education is a nursery school, closely followed by pre-kindergarten. Nursery and pre-kindergarten schools are for children between the age of 3 and 5 years and each of them lasts for only a year.

As for the next step, there is an elementary (or primary) school. It is mandatory for all American children. Differently from the Czech Republic, the primary education includes kindergarten, which is a year-long educational step that prepares small children for next education. The five grade years that follow kindergarten are the same as first five years of czech primary education where children learn basic facts in basic subjects. Grades 6-8 however belong to the middle school, eventhough there is no real difference between the education of elementary schools and between middle schools.

When middle school is over, children are ready to take the next step – high school education. The main goal of a high school is to obtain a high school diploma and enter college or university where students choose their specialisation. Students receive a high school diploma after 12 years of formal education. Before college enrollement, students can also apply for scholarships, which are given on the basis of PSAT test results (US Department of Education 2008). High school education is mandatory as well, eventhough in some states, it is possible to end school before entering high school or before turning 16.

¹ in some sources referred to as the “tertiary education“

Students who have completed high school, apply for post-secondary education. They can choose between applying for university or applying for college. Analogically to the Czech Republic, post-secondary education is segmented into Undergraduate Programmes, where students obtain Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree Studies, where students obtain a Master's Degree, Doctoral Studies, and Postdoctoral Study associated with Research.

The structure of both czech and american universities is divided into faculties, departments, and different areas of study.

2. Higher Education in USA

2.1. Historical developement

This section will closely outline the history of American higher education in the United States of America. It will be concerned by its origins as well as by each period of time which represent considerable milestones in the formation of this type of education. The developement of the most prestigious and best known universities will be described. Individual parts of this section will focus in detail on each period.

Each chapter providing detailed facts about each important milestone of higher education development will contain information about the developement, significant changes, and also financing facts.

Various authors present different opinions when depicting which milestones are more important and therefore how the education has been formed.

The process of higher education formation can be divided up into several periods and when forming their approaches different authors give importance to different events eventhough the main framework remains the same within each.

In light of this thesis, the most exact appears to be the division by A. M. Cohen: The first momentous period of time is the establishment of higher education institutions in colonial America. The very historical milestone period stretches all the way back to year 1636 when the first university was founded (Ripková 2006: 18).

According to Cohen, the next step in the development of the education is the

enlargement of small “colleges“ after the emergence of the new nation, therefore the period of time between 1790 and 1869. The significant trait of this period of time is that a great number of new institutions was founded and they were also more diverse due to the fact that various immigrant groups came to the United States.

The third level of formation is known as the transformation of universities in the times of the industrialization (between the years 1870 and 1869). During this period of time the universities in the United States were transformed into a more present day way throughout many social and territorial changes.

The fourth important milestone according to Cohen is the Mass higher education. It began in the year 1945 and continued until 1975. This period of university development is associated with the historical milestones – World War 2 and the Cold War. Both of these wars stood behind the evolution and improvement of American tertiary education, mainly on the financial level.

The fifth step in development goes by the name of The current form of the American higher education depicting the years following 1976 and continuing into present times with a focus on the current appearance of the educational system.

2.2. The Establishment of Higher Education Institutions in Colonial America (1636 – 1789)

The analysis of higher education history in the United States extends all the way back until the year 1636. All authors involved in the historical development of education agree that this is the first step in the forming of American higher education.

Even the first settlers of the New World contributed to the foundation of universities. In the year 1636, which is only 16 years after debarkation in Massachusetts Bay, first university was established by puritans in current United States.

This oldest institution of higher learning is in present times one of the most prestigious universities bearing the name Harvard University, however, in the past times she was called Harvard College. This university was named after John Harvard

from Charlestown who has been the greatest sponsor and had bequeathed to the university a half of his property and also donated his library (Ripková 2006: 20).

From the most notable institutions next came Yale College, present day Yale University in the year of 1701, College of New Jersey, today known by the name of Princeton University in 1746, and King's College today called Columbia University in the year 1754. Various christian offshoots stood behind the establishment of these institutions. The basic goal of these institutions was to educate young clergy as well as future generation of state office holders. Due to the puritan belief that stressed the ability of individual Bible reading over the church authority, emphasis was placed on general literacy as well.

The term college was used to denominate present day universities in the period of time until the year 1869. First university that bears the traits of present day universities was the Cornell University with its structure divided in faculties, different study areas and the presence of scientific research.

2.2.1. Financing in the Colonial Period

Universities from their beginnings were financed from many different sources. Money were donated from private sponsors, via indirect state contributions, or from church communities. From the very beginning of university founding, the system was trying to be independent from direct state financing so as to remain independent in its decision-making and free from any kind of influence (Spring 1994: 223). In connection with the topic of university financing, a tradition of fund-raising commenced, meaning that one of the functions of the college president was to obtain needed sum of money (Ripková 2006: 22).

2.3. The Enlargement of small colleges after the Emergence of the New Nation (1790 – 1869)

Not long after declaring the new nation, the trend of university establishment expanded westward. The British restriction of colonizing regions west from the

original territories had ceased to exist and the number of inhabitants has increased dramatically. Hand in hand with the gaining more territory came the idea of founding new institutions of higher learning. Eventhough this newly emerged freedom of territory acquisition brought many opportunities, many new immigrants, especially the Irish, had to deal with a great amount of discrimination (Ripková 2006: 25).

The fact that the institution of slavery was still strong these past days did not help either and the African American people were naturally excluded from university participation. So eventhough present day standard is that education opportunities should be equal, it was not always like this back in the days when minority discrimination and racial prejudice played a key role in the society (Spring 1994: 109).

During this period of time, both women and free African Americans appealed for higher education, but their admittance to the schools has been denied in most cases. It was not until the 1830s that women were able to get enrolled in university programmes.

The first college that has admitted women was the Oberlin College in the year 1833 but the number of women that applied has been very low (Ripková 2006: 31). The situation of African Americans population has been even more complicated than the situation of women.

In the Southern states it has been a criminal act to teach former slaves to read and write at that time, even in the Northern states it was not widely common to educate the black population.

The first African American college graduate has obtained his bachelor's degree in 1826. Not long after that, African American colleges emerged. Amongst those belong the Cheyney University founded in 1837 and Lincoln University founded in 1854, both are located in the state of Pennsylvania (Ripková 2006: 31).

In the period between 1790 and 1869, many new schools emerged, known by the definition of "college", those schools were back then compared to nowadays universities eventhough the level of education was liken to specialized centers for professionals in certain fields, for example technicians.

The religious diversity was projected into college establishment, each group mainly focused on building its own institution since the governance by another would

be impermissible. With each new immigrant group coming, new cities are being founded. This factor goes hand in hand with the idea of giving more prestige to it by founding an institution of higher learning and increasing its status as a whole.

Due to the fresh possibility of westward expansion, the potential of the area had grown and options seemed endless. A great deal of new schools had been built, sometimes the number of it being endlessly high and pointless in purpose. At the same time the number of students was surprisingly low and therefore the fact of such a hasty and uncoordinated school establishment was quite absurd.

At that time, higher education in USA has been neither controlled nor regulated by any legal authority. No means of quality surveillance were established eventhough American presidents proposed university control measures, no act was passed by the Congress during this period of time (Ripková 2006: 33).

Another significant change of this important time interval was that the subjects taught at universities were more diversified. The early 19th century was a time of great study subject enhancement, where apart from traditional subjects such as philosophy, history, religion, and classic languages, new ones emerged.

Among those new study subjects for example agricultural chemistry, discrete geometry, and cartography can be found (Ripková 2006: 32). More and more people called for a broader variety of subjects as years passed and society evolved, so as to meet their needs.

2.4. The Transformation of Universities in the Times of the Industrialization (1870 – 1944)

The end of the Civil War meant a new beginning in further development of higher education as well as the evolution of the United States. The society kept changing rapidly with the huge increase of population. The national infrastructure has been build, the territory expansion has finished with the Alaska Purchase and all these factors contributed to an even greater university establishment.

Tertiary education and its financing was highly influenced by the Morrill Land Grant Act which consisted of progressive taxing of the richest population and laid ground rules for later massive grants for research and education.

Not only the Civil War end but also World War 1 helped the United States regarding funding. The enormous exports during the great war increased by billions the money income into the country.

In the times of industrialization, changes which have occurred contributed to the diversity of newly established colleges and transformation of the current ones into a model that could be compared to universities how we know them in our times.

The following factors have made it possible to achieve such transformation and improvement. The influence of the church has been diminished whereas the relations with professional groups has been heightened. Emphasis on natural sciences was accentuated meaning the role of humanities was reduced. Apart from these changes, a system of elective subjects was newly established and even new degrees were defined, among these the doctorate and master's degree (Ripková 2006: 34).

The modified version of a university was not to be a mere place to learn but more importantly it was a place where scientific research played an important role of everyday life. At the turn of the century, institutions of present day university structure emerged.

The Association of American Universities was founded in 1900 and it combined 15 universities that defined basic standards that were looked up to by universities that were established after this period of time. Among those universities there were five state institutions of higher education – California, Michigan, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin; five universities established during the colonial times – Yale, Harvard, Princeton, Pennsylvania, and Columbia; and at last five newly established universities – Chicago, Cornell, Johns Hopkins, MIT, Stanford and later even CalTech (Ripková 2006: 35).

2.5. Mass Higher Education (1945 – 1975)

Both the end of the World War 2 and the Cold War contributed to the development of higher education. The years following both of these wars were the years of stable economic growth that reflected on the tertiary educational system in many ways.

During the Cold War years, particular focus was targeted at scientific research programmes as well as in other industrial sectors of education. The research was aimed at military equipment improvement and the study of techniques used in the American army (Ripková 2006: 44).

The race between the United States and the Soviet Union led into greater investment to research programmes and the number of involved people rapidly increased as well. The interest in acquiring a tertiary education degree reached almost massive numbers. This development goes hand in hand with desegregation of American universities and also a greater women involvement has been registered as well (Ripková 2006: 45). Eventhough the desegregation process was quite successfull, tendencies to maintain so called “historically black colleges“ is still pretty high even in the present period.

A significant trait of the Massive Higher Education is that financial accessibility has gotten acquired more easily and student loans were widely expanded and common among a majority of university students (Ripková 2006: 45).

The government funded the university education and therefore the institutions had the necessary resources to spread their study areas and develop new programmes, especially programmes in doctorate studies.

A major development during this period of time was the establishment of community colleges with their two year long educational programmes. They were founded at the beginning of the twentieth century and they usually had the word “college“ included in their titles. As an example of these institutions there are the Junior College, City College, People’s College, and Democracy’s College (Ripková 2006: 46). These community colleges experienced the biggest development in comparison to other institutions of higher learning.

During the period of time preceding the World War 2, a majority of these two-year colleges appertained to the secondary educational system and functioned as a programme following graduation to enhance students' abilities in certain domains.

Among courses that were proposed by these institutions there were practical classes in general subjects as well as in specialised courses. Later on, two-year colleges were established at a greater basis and they functioned as independent institutions in the 1950s.

The participants of this type of learning are not only students who have just graduated from high school, they are also people who are already working but wish to continue their studies and acquire additional certificated education (Ripková 2006: 46).

Another major trait of this period of the Mass higher education is that in the years following World War 2, the number of students dramatically increased. The interest shifted from private to public schools.

2.6. The Current Form of the American Higher Education (1976 – 2005)

Post-secondary education consists of either college studies or university studies. As well as in the case of secondary education, the years of higher education are known by terms freshmen, sophomore, junior, and senior years.

Regarding the current form of the tertiary education, individual states are responsible for its own formation and the central government does not influence their decision-making.

The higher education institutions are being monitored so as to find out if the quality and prestige is still maintained. Changes in financing also occurred during the last decades. The golden age of American education and science was over and specialists draw attention to the insufficient financing of tertiary education in the United States.

This problem results from the decentralisation of school financing due to low central government involvement and even the permanent increase in tuition fees does not help the situation (Ripková 2006: 57).

A majority of graduate students leave their studies and enter into their professional lives in serious debt and pay them back for many years after their university graduation. That is one of the major problems of the contemporary higher education in the United States. In comparison to the Czech Republic where fees have not been established yet and the education is still free that problem is unimaginable.

2.7. Basic Characteristics of American Tertiary Education

According to Cohen, ten basic characteristics of the American tertiary education could depict present day universities. Those characteristics reflect the current status of American universities and give various statistics.

The first of these principles is that the author is convinced in the usefulness of the tertiary system, that is due to the fact that two thirds of the population enter any kind of tertiary education, thus a majority of the population does not end their studies with high school education (Ripková 2006: 60).

The second significant trait of the tertiary school system is the importance of private sector in tertiary education meaning that eventhough about 75% of students study at a state university, private schools still have an essential importance. The highest quality of education is given through the private universities, those are at the same time the most prestigious (Spring 1994: 5).

The third characteristic of the tertiary education deals with the general education in the undergraduate level of learning. During the first years of education students are able to study whatever they wish to study and they pick their specialization all throughout the programme, sometimes even after graduating.

Next feature of the higher education is the credit and modul programme. The basic unit of each university programme is a modul with its sub-units which consist of credits. Each modul has a predefined number of credits which must be acquired in order to pass it sufficiently (Ripková 2006: 60).

The following attribute of university education is the career growth of academic professionals has a fixed set of rules and is less hierarchized the same time. This

means that university teachers assume to obtain a professor status within the years of his functioning. The hierarchy is quality-based.

The sixth characteristic deals with the fact that no federal ministry of education exists to deal with universities. The central government functions only in setting the conditions on which students are able to receive loans from federal funds.

An important trait of the tertiary system is that the president of the university has a great variety of competences. He answers only to the school board and meanwhile he has chief administrative function. He also has the status of the highest academical professional (Ripková 2006: 60).

Another attribute deals with the duty of the school board to ensure responsibility to its community.

Two-year colleges are a part of the tertiary educational system in the United States. They either have a specific status within the higher education community or they are a part of the secondary educational system.

The last characteristic of the higher education is that it has responsibilities towards the public. Universities ensure that the students graduating from them are able to come across a job after finishing the university.

3. Higher Education in the Czech Republic

3.1. Establishment of Universities

The roots of higher education in the Czech Republic are found in the medieval times. Charles University, the first university in the Czech Republic, was established 3 centuries before the first institution of higher learning in the United States, more precisely in the year 1348 (Šebková 2006: 19). Even in this period of time was this university known in other present day European countries for its quality education that continues into the current period.

Similar to the development in the United States, this first institution of tertiary education was designed to teach new clergymen and this university was financed as well by the church who had a complete control over the institution.

3.2. Development of the Second Half of the Twentieth Century

During both the German and communist rule of the country, the university education in the Czech Republic has changed due to drastic political and social development. All institutions of the tertiary education were closed down in the times of the German occupation, plenty of teachers as well as students were persecuted (Šebková 2006: 19).

A similar situation occurred since the year 1968 known for the communist takeover of the Czech nation by the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union had almost complete control over all areas of life, naturally over the tertiary education too. The university at this time served the purposes of the communist regime and any opposition was suppressed drastically. The takeover was followed by a great wave of emigration and student demonstration, teacher persecution, imprisonment of intelligence, and violence against them of all kind (Šebková 2006: 19).

3.3. Characteristic Features and Major Changes After the Year 1989

As a result of the social and political changes following the communist regime, the Higher Education Act was passed in May 1990. This act restored academic freedom together with self-governance of the institutions of higher learning even though they still fell under the control of the state (Šebková 2006: 19).

The Academic Senates were introduced and participated in the governing mechanism of universities. After the changes brought by the year 1989, many new institutions were built, many new faculties were established and a great number of new degree programmes were introduced or advanced, the number of university students increased. Meanwhile, the Accreditation Commission has been developed as a new body with its responsibilities of a curriculum development (Šebková 2006: 20).

Current higher educational system of the Czech Republic is well known for its free education of public schools as well as for their quality education. Meanwhile, the tuition fees for private schools are a lot smaller than those paid in the United States.

In comparison with the United States, where private schools provide students with more quality education, the situation in the Czech Republic is reversed. In the

Czech Republic a rule applies that the public education which is cheaper is of a higher quality than the education provided by private schools.

The current statistic in the number of schools also proves that state universities have a much greater position than the private ones. The number of public universities at present times is 25, whereas private universities have 40 higher learning institutions. Nowadays, there are only two state higher education institutions – the University of Defense in Brno and the Police Academy (Šebková 2006: 24). In comparison with the number of universities in the United States, the number in the Czech Republic is well balanced, showing that public universities carry a greater significance throughout the population.

The current educational system also focuses on international relations with other European schools. This is done by the means of student erasmus programmes where students live in a different country and attend a particular foreign institution of higher learning. The European Union is funding these study stays in order to increase the intellectual potential of students and also to increase a sense of united Europe. According to the European Union, the educated population is a pillar of economic prosperity (Brdek, Vychová 2004: 27).

3.4. Overall Structure of the Educational System of the Czech Republic

The system of education of the Czech Republic consists of primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. Primary education is composed of a nine-year study plan and the attendance is mandatory for all children by the government. For some children, the primary education can end in their 5th year of study after entering into a grammar school.

After completing basic education, a student may attend a grammar school, secondary professional school, or secondary vocational school depending on the individual area of interest (Šebková 2006: 150).

After high school graduation, there are also several options for the students. They can choose between tertiary professional schools and bachelor's studies. Both of these studies last up to 4 years. Among other tertiary school options are long-cycle

master's studies which are attended for a maximum of 6 years. An example of such studies is the law or medicine school.

A follow-up to the bachelor's studies are master's studies that are usually completed after two years of study. When master's studies are completed and a degree is obtained, a student can apply for a doctoral studies programme (Šebková 2006: 150).

Higher education institutions are classified as public, private, or state (military and police establishments) institutions. The initial difference in these types of institutions is whom they are subordinated to. State institutions are subjects of control to the Ministry of Defense or the Ministry of the Interior. Private institutions answer to legal entities who had received a permission from the Ministry to establish it (Šebková 2006: 22). Public universities are depended on the state government but at the same time has a wide range of its own policy-making.

4. Comparison of Higher Education of Both Countries

Both the United States and the Czech Republic have a very long tradition of universities, eventhough that of the Czech Republic is 3 centuries older. Similarly, the intention of establishing such institutions came on the behalf of the church representatives and thus the first faculties comprised rather theological teachings.

The main focus of education in those early times was to teach new clergy who would continue in the footsteps of their predecessors and carry on handing down their knowledge to younger churchmen.

Each university system had to deal with the changing social, economic, and political environment and along with these changes, the focus of university teachings stopped being influenced by the church.

The curriculums shifted from humanities and theological subjects to more scientific and professional studies and the institutions were more in the hands of the nonclerical population. The number of universities also increased and still continues to increase nowadays in both countries. Over the years of university formation, research became one of the essential activities of each university.

Whereas the Czech university education was storm-beaten by chaos during the second half of the twentieth century, the tertiary education in the USA was untouched by dictatorships of foreign countries and its evolution was stable and continuous without interruptions of any kind.

5. Overseas Education of the United States of America

Having lived at two American military bases, I have visited several institutions of learning. The topic of the first chapter in this section will be the first school I have attended which is called AFNORTH International School and on the basis of this experience I will describe the elementary school system of the United States overseas.

The second chapter of the practical part section will contain the depiction of the secondary education system, this time concerning the experience obtained through the period of time spent at the SHAPE American High School.

5.1. Elementary School Education

The first institution of education I have attended is called AFNORTH International School. It is located in the Kingdom of the Netherlands, in the province of Limburg, city of Brunssum. This region is well known for its continuous long-term NATO military presence, meaning the school is as old as the tradition of relations with this region itself.

This school meets the American education requirements and is inspected regularly by the American Department of Defense Education Authority. Due to the fact that this school was an international one, there were four main sections – The American Section, the Canadian Section, British Section, and German Section with each of them having its own curriculum. The following text is written on the basis of the American Section experience.

The elementary school system begins with the kindergarten year. This one-year long education is a sort of a pre-school preparation for American children. When children pass the kindergarten study programme, they enroll in for primary education

as we know it in the Czech Republic. Up until grade 5, children attend the elementary school and when they advance to sixth grade, they are referred to as middle schoolers.

The middle school period lasts for only two years and that is different from the Czech Republic where there is no such thing as the middle school, but primary education continues all through to 9th grade.

Another essential difference is that the American school hours differ from the Czech Republic, depending on the age of the student and the national section in which he or she is enrolled. The school day normally starts at 9:00 am and ends at 2:00 pm. Whereas in the Czech Republic, school days start at 8:00 am and they last in the afternoon in accordance with the schedule that differs each day.

All overseas education institutions of the United States are financed from the army budget as well as from individual members of the army who pay a certain percentage of fees.

The United States does not have a system of grammar schools like the Czech Republic has, therefore the student cannot leave the school at fifth grade in order to enter the secondary education.

5.2. High School System in the United States

The focus of this chapter is the detailed description on the SHAPE American High School, SAHS in the abbreviated form, and its educational structure. For a period of two years this has been the educational institution that I have been visiting on a daily basis, having been one of the most remarkable experiences of my life at the same time. This school is located in Casteau, Belgium near the city called Mons. There I have lived between the years 2008 and 2010.

This high school is a part of a whole network of schools that educate the children of American soldiers as well as other non-American kids whose parents work at the military base. This network of schools is known by the name of The Department of Defense Dependents Schools (DoDDS). The whole school system is located in countries other than the United States, being the tenth biggest American school system at the same time.

SAHS is attended by children under sponsorships of their military active parents, meaning they are employees of the NATO military base Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. The American High School provides children with a typical United States curricular and extracurricular programme.

It has a tradition since the year 1967 due to the fact that the headquarters moved from french Paris to belgian Mons (SAHS 2013). This school is a great example of a multicultural environment with participants from various european as well as none-european countries, were people from many cultures and people speaking different languages find a place to learn.

5.3. High School Structure and Description of the System

The high school system in the American section begins at grade 9, which is the first year of high school in the Czech Republic. Similarly to czech grammar schools or secondary professional schools, the students are preparing themselves for colleges and universities during a four year period before taking their final exams (before graduation).

At the beginning of the school year, the school day is assigned. There are 7 different classes throughtout the day but the same subjects occur at the same time every day of the week. So for example if a student is due to take class in mathematics 7th period, he will have to take it every school day for the rest of the year and that is a little bit disastrous when it is taken into account that a great deal of concentration is needed for this subject but the hour in which it takes place is not suitable.

There is a special terminology for each grade. The 9th graders are referred to as “freshmen“, a 10th grader usually answers to the term “sophomore“, 11th graders are called “juniors“ and students of the final year of high school are known as “seniors“. This denomination for students is typical for US overseas high schools as well as in the country, it is used by students themselves, teachers and even parents.

The structure of secondary education is similar to the university education structure in the Czech republic. At the beginning of each semester, each student has an arranged meeting with the school’s counselor.

With the help of the counselor, the student enrolls mandatory courses as well as courses he is interested in or would like to specialise in.

The mandatory courses include every subject at the very easiest level and they must be taken and passed successfully by every student. Subjects from all fields must be passed at least at the basic level, thus the easiest, therefore the student has basic knowledge of all sectors – in mathematics, physics, etc. In comparison with the czech educational system, those subjects can be referred to as “A courses“.

Once the counselor and the student agree upon the A subjects, they try to fill in the remaining gaps in the schedule, if there are any. Such gaps intend to fulfill student's interest or simply a favorite “leisure“ subject such as Physical Education (P.E.) or maybe Art, Music, or Drama.

It is possible to receive a half of a credit or one credit for each course, depending on whether the course is occurring for only a semester or for two semesters. In order to graduate, a certain number of credits must be achieved as well as attendance requirements.

The important part of each semester is dedicated to exams, once again a similarity to the czech university education system. Exams are scheduled during a specific period of time at the end of the winter semester as well as at the end of the summer semester.

Eventhough smaller tests are written all throughout the semester, essays and homework assignments are submitted, the exams must be taken and students must all pass them, otherwise they have to enroll in the course again. Differently to the czech university system, even when the student does not pass the course the second time he is enrolled in it, he is still able to attend the school next year.

When a student manages to complete all his A subjects, he has plenty of space for making decisions so as to what study next. The student really chooses the subjects where he expects to deepen his knowledge in a certain area of interest that is crucial in the means of passing entrance exams for college and later university.

If the student does not repeat any subjects, it is possible that at the beginning of the junior year he has this kind of opportunity. At this exact moment, another consultation with the counselor is needed.

Options for schedule arrangement are discussed as well as each individual student's wish in what he would like to specialise in. Still, there are A subjects even in junior and senior years, but those make up only about 3 courses per year, some of them being only half-semester ones.

Another important part of the senior year are SAT exams. These are exams which can be compared to the czech "SCIO" tests. During a predetermined week in the semester, students who wish to take those exams, take them. The exams are divided into mathematics, language, and sciences.

The successfulness is evaluated in percentage received and the result is compared to all students even in the United States. Students are admitted to college on the basis of these results as well as their GPA (Grade Point Average), their entrance essays, and even by their certificates obtained after passing their AP courses.

Advanced Proficiency courses also known by the abbreviation AP courses are un compulsory subjects that were much harder than those that were mandatory and the major purpose of those classes is to help students with college preparation.

During the first three years of high school study – freshmen, sophomore, and junior year – students prepare themselves to take the SAT exam via PSAT exams, which are mandatory to take and students obtain approximate knowledge of the structure and content of the future SAT exams. SAT exam results are also taken into account when students apply for scholarships which is a huge topic for American children since quality university education and life expenses are both quite expensive.

When the students passed all their mandatory and selective objects being in the last moments of the senior year, the last event that remains is graduation. The graduation begins by prom, which is the last school dance, analogical to the czech graduation ball.

Different to the Czech Republic, Americans do not prepare a special programme like czech students. The graduation ball in the United States consists of a dinner as well as dancing, but contrary to the czech graduation balls, parents do not

have permission to attend the ball, nor did the students who were younger than the junior and senior students. The graduation ball in the Czech Republic is thought-out during a semester long period of time and have a special topic on the basis of which the students are dressed according to the theme. The only requirement for an American prom was full dress code, no theme costumes were necessary.

The topic of race and segregation was very frequent during the development of the educational system in the United States, but in the present period no such prejudice and discrimination occurs, and in case there were some, the school would intervene. During my studies I have never seen even any slight glimpse of such a thing because any act of discrimination was to be severely punished.

In the Czech Republic this issue is not as sensitive as in America, where schools (especially higher education institutions) have quotas as in what percentage of students can be of a certain race. Differently to the United States, I have never come across anything like this in the Czech Republic.

5.4. Enumeration of Mandatory Courses

As already mentioned, some subjects of the American High School are of a similar nature as the subjects in the Czech Republic. Eventhough in the Czech Republic the course name is simply "Mathematics", in the American educational system there is a number of courses corresponding to the one in the Czech secondary educational system. On this example I would like to illustrate the American approach to this subject.

In accordance with the target focus of the subject and difficulty, the American high school system differentiates 6 types of mathematics classes. Among those that are mandatory are: Algebra 1, Geometry, Discrete Maths, and Algebra 2. Each subject is taken at a different grade level as students advance in their studies.

If a student is interested in math and would like to pursue a career in it, he can choose to enroll in advanced courses, firstly in a Pre-Calculus class and later on in AP Calculus which is the most difficult level of math he can take in high school.

Another difference when comparing the two systems is the approach to computer science. Whereas in the Czech Republic students get a general overview of different applications and they learn basic facts about each, the computer studies at an American high school is taught in a more practical way.

There are one semester courses that are aimed directly at one particular application. On a daily basis, students learn basic as well as advanced features of each application – excell, word, and power point – and get a more detailed education in each. Those courses end in certificate exams where students receive certificates directly from Microsoft after passing them. That way they can enhance their CVs and also get additional points when applying for higher education.

Economics is also a course that the Czech Republic does not include in high school curriculum plans, but is regularly taught at American high schools.

Similarly to the Czech Republic, there were courses that are the same in both countries – for example chemistry, history, and physics.

Thanks to having attended Masaryk's Grammar School for the first two years of high school, before moving to Belgium, I have received credits for a majority of mandatory objects, for example Physics, Biology, Math, and some others. But even though I already received those credits, I had to take other mandatory and above that voluntary courses.

Among mandatory subjects, there was the ESL4 course. This was mandatory for all students, whose mother tongue was not English even though the level of this language met the requirements for not having to have to take the course and even though they have had English in their past education, no credits were received from it.

The knowledge of the English language was evaluated by an entrance test, on the basis of which the particular student was placed between ESL1 and ESL4 courses. Those who had none or minimal knowledge of English were automatically placed into the ESL1 course.

At the end of the year, exams had to be taken in order to pass to the next level or to be declared as a "English native speaker" and when they obtained such status, the

teachers would not excuse them in other subjects for not understanding. They treated them equally with the Americans, no excuses whatsoever were taken into account.

Along with the ESL courses, Americans as well as other international students had to take LA (Language Arts) courses. They did not depend on the English level, but on the grade level. For me, that meant starting with LA11 course and then continuing in LA12 course.

Those were analogical to the czech language courses at Masaryk's Grammar school targeting literature education. But apart from the czech system, we did not learn about a great number of authors along with the enumeration of their works. Here in Belgium, main focus was at specific works. In practise, the course was about reading approximately 4 books per year in class and elaborating handouts, homework excercises and essays each week. Attention was aimed at individual reading as well as reading in groups, the majot goal of this course was to enhance vocabulary at a mother tongue level of English.

5.5. Special Courses

Then, there are courses that do not have any tradition whatsoever in the high school education of the Czech republic. First of these is for example a one-semester course called "US Government" or "Model United Nations". Both of these courses were aimed at learning through mock situations created in the classrooms. In the US Government class, various laws, jurisdiction, and the American Constitution were studied as well as its ammendments. Through mock tribunals, the students studied major law cases.

Model United Nations was another course that is not taught at a high school level in the Czech Republic. The major idea of this course was to act out the General Assembly of the United Nations Organisation, where each day a student had to represent the ideas of a country he or she picked at the beginning of class. The aim was to discuss UN resolutions and act out the interest of that particular country on the specific topic.

Yearbook Production is another special course that is not common within the country of the Czech Republic but in the United States plays an important role due to longterm tradition. This two semester course was targeted at putting together the yearbook of a particular year.

Students enrolled in this class were preparing the yearbook for other students during both semesters, in general that means they were working on graphic design, they were going to various school sport competitions, trips, school dances, and other events in order to take pictures which they would later on add in the book. The final document was sold to other students and teachers at the end of the school year.

The last of special courses that are not common in the Czech Republic is a subject called JROTC. It is a course where students wishing to pursue and continue in the military footsteps of their parents take. It is part of only overseas study programmes.

5.6. High School Sports

Sports play a very important part of everyday life of a great number of students. With this aspect, I found interesting that all sports were performed on a daily basis but only seasonally, meaning for a period of time of only two months. Also, if a student was active in one sport of the season, he was not permitted to participate in another, because it would coincide with the membership of the first one.

Among available and most favorite sports there was cross country, American football, volleyball, tennis, cheerleading, swimming, basketball, wrestling, track and field, soccer, baseball, and softball.

When a student was active in one sport during one season, he performed other sports as well the next, thus enhancing his abilities in a variety of activities. Each weekend, competitions were organized with other schools of the region or in neighbourhood countries.

These competitions were taken very seriously. Contrary to the Czech Republic, even if a high school had its own team, it was not as connected to the school as it was

in the SHAPE American High School. As a curiosity, the girls basketball team won the European Championship in the year 2012.

Student results remain the main interest of a school eventhough the sport tradition in american high schools is high. When a student had poor school results, he was denied participation in school competitions no matter how great a sportsman he was up untill he improved his work.

5.7. Comparison of the High School Systems

In comparison to the Czech Republic, the high school education was more about practise than about learning study materials by heart. Also I see a great advantage in the ways that some courses were taught. The number of students in each classroom was smaller (usually about 8-10 students per class) than it is in the Czech Republic, thus giving more opportunities to discussion.

Also due to the low number of students per classroom, teachers had more time to address individual students and help them with their difficulties more than it is in the czech high schools. The number of students in a typical czech classroom is sometimes three time bigger than in an american classroom, therefore there is almost none or very limited space to address individual issues and problems with the study materials.

Also, the goal of the education was to fullfill mandatory courses in the first two years of education so as to acquire general knowledge, but later on pick out the major subjects of interest. That way a student participates only in courses he would like to pursue in later studies. In the Czech Republic, all subjects are taught throughout the whole period of education eventhough the student knows that he will not pursue a career in majority of the subjects, but he has to learn them anyway.

Another major difference of the two systems is that there are not many universities that admit student only on the base of their entrance exam results or SCIO testing results. In the American high schools, emphasis is put on the four years of education as a whole. The student submits his whole high school education results

along with his university application, therefore the student is not evaluated on the basis of one test, but attention is given to all his study years.

Although great significance is given to homework assignments and the work is graded as a part of the final grade of the subject, it enhances the students' competences. Whereas homework assignments are not graded in the Czech Republic and only responsible students complete them, they do not play a key role for all students.

Same rule applies when receiving grade for their subjects. The system of grading is complex. It includes homework assignments completion that makes 10% of final grade as well as smaller tests and final exams. That way, if the student is hardworking, it is more important than if he passes only few tests throughout the semester.

Special attention was given to individual discussions with students and that reflected in the subjects they were studying. Some of the subjects were even aimed at the development of debate abilities. No subject of this kind is studied in the high school educational level in the Czech Republic.

A major difference between the two countries is the schedule and time management. Whereas the school week in the Czech Republic is very diversified, the American high school schedule seems rather dull. That would probably be one of the disadvantages and maybe the biggest weakness of the US system overseas worth mentioning.

In my opinion, the structure of the American high school system is better and well thought out even though one major weakness was mentioned, that of the schedule being the same every day, the system would be better if the hours of the classes rotated.

Overall I find many weaknesses in the secondary educational system of the Czech Republic. Although being a country with a long-term quality education, it should modernize and change the approaches to learning.

Students at grammar schools are taught a great amount of information in each course, but the point is that all of them forget the knowledge obtained in the courses they do not continue with in their university studies and the extent to which they learn in each subject therefore loses its meaning and is somewhat pointless.

An important difference between the czech and american high school system is that the final exams on the basis of which a student obtains high school diploma were not the same nature.

Whereas in the Czech Republic four subjects are chosen by each student and from these subject he need to pass the final exam having learned the knowledge, in the system of the United States the exam was of a completely different nature.

The final exams in the american high school consisted of regular end of semester exams. Also the student had to have all the credits needed for high school ending, but no special exam had to be taken in order to receive the diploma.

Both of the educational systems have their strenghts as well as weaknesses and additional attention should be given in the process of modernisation of each.

Conclusion

The core chapters of the thesis answered the questions asked in the introduction. The bachelor thesis depicted in detail both the educational system of the Czech Republic and the educational system of the United States of America. Special attention was paid in the structure of each educational system, with a more detailed explanation of the elementary school system, high school system, and university school system referred to as the primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education. The thesis also described the ways how school financing has changed over the years from private sponsors to various state benefits and gave a brief summary in each chapter.

A major part of the theoretical part of the bachelor thesis was dedicated to the historical development of the tertiary education both in the United States of America and in the Czech Republic. Outlined were the most important historical milestones that have had an impact of the formation of the university systems as they are known nowadays.

Within these milestones, the very beginning of tertiary education is mentioned, followed by the enlargement of small colleges. The following parts led to another transformation until the present times. Mentioned was the transformation of tertiary education during the times of the industrial revolution, the mass higher education, and also the current form of the American higher education.

In both the theoretical and practical part special attention was given to the significant differences as well as similarities of the educational systems of high schools. The practical chapter has been written on the basis of personal experience that was used to describe both school systems.

Both the strengths as well as weaknesses were mentioned throughout the bachelor thesis either at the end of each chapter as a summary or directly in the chapters. Considerable part of the practical chapter of the bachelor thesis was dedicated to the enumeration of the subjects that are taught at the secondary level of education, highlighted were interesting facts about some of them. The subjects at the American high school were compared to those in the Czech high school.

Various aspects that are related to education were analysed as well. Among these, the question of racial discrimination and the development of this issue was discussed. Also minor topics such as sport in secondary education found its place.

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