

Teachers, ICT and Power in Class

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The paper is an output of the first stage of research project “Information and Communication Technologies in Everyday Work of Teachers” (Czech Science Foundation, Ref. No. 406/06/1022).

The central topic of the research is information and communication technologies (ICT) with respect to teachers and their everyday work in primary school. The goal of the project is to explore and describe the ways in which ICT is becoming part of everyday work of teachers as the key agents in formal education. We will study relevant processes, at the level of individual teaching careers on the one hand and at the level of everyday decisions concerning the use of ICT, implementation of this use and its reflection on the other.

The empirical research is structured into two stages. The first stage is qualitative, based on the grounded theory. This stage will consist in in-depth interviews with primary school teachers (ISCED 1 and 2) and qualitative observation of ICT use in class. Collected data are coded, classified and grounded in the so-called pragmatic model. The output of this stage is a theory at the level of hypotheses.

The second stage will consist in quantitative testing of this theory. The basic method used for data collection will be a questionnaire administered to teachers, construed based on hypotheses formulated as an output of the first stage of the research. We aim at high validity, to be guaranteed by qualitative data analysis, as well as high reliability and generalization potential, to be achieved through quantitative methods. Qualitative methods, which are given the main emphasis in the project, will mediate insights into the significance assigned by teachers to ICT and their use of it. It is this subjective significance that plays the key role in determining whether and how an individual teacher uses ICT in practice.

The paper presents some of the main results of the first stage of the research project – qualitative analysis of in-depth interviews with primary school teachers and class observations (video recordings). The title of this paper merges two topics. The first one is “power in class”, i.e. the issue of the interpersonal influence teachers use in class. The other one is the entry of information and communication technologies into school environment and its consequences for the process of education and upbringing. It is at the intersection of these two issues where the question arises whether (and how) integrating ICT into teaching affects power relations between the teacher and the pupils.

The research questions we concentrate on in the present paper are: **In which ways do ICT affect power relations between the teacher and the pupils? Which strategies do teachers develop in the transformed situation to strengthen their position of power?**

Conclusion

Our paper has pointed out the “blind spot” of the educationalist discourse on ICT integration in schools as it is pursued in the Czech Republic. Technologies are not only a didactic tool promising better teaching/learning efficiency, but can interfere with relations of power between the teacher and the pupils, too. Transformations of patterns of power can thus be regarded as one of the unintended consequences of ICT integration in school.

An important point: although the change is a systemic one, the ultimate implementation of this change is up to individual teachers. Teachers decide autonomously whether they are going to use technologies or whether they will attend the compulsory PC training but take a defensive position as far as their teaching methods are concerned. Depending on this initial decision they make a series of subsequent decisions and actively develop their own strategies of coping with the change brought by technologies to school.

Our aim in this paper was to describe this change and how it is coped with it in a single specific dimension of teacher work, the power dimension, using a qualitative survey developed based on grounded theory. In the future, we will attempt to integrate these findings with findings about how ICT affect the didactic dimension – in an effort to build grounded theory providing a comprehensive account of how teachers integrate technologies in their professional activities.