

Chapter 3

Education as a Source of Control

ABSTRACT

This chapter examines the role of education in political socialization – particularly whether people politically socialized under communism truly understand democracy and its principles. Education policy in the Czech Republic and Hungary is examined, along with how the education system worked under communism. Specific attention is paid to how socioeconomics and party loyalty affected people’s educational opportunities. The role of more informal education such as participation in the pioneers program is also examined. It is concluded that civic education is vital for a country to be a fully functioning democracy.

INTRODUCTION

Education was a main method of socializing children to grow up and support communism. Even schools were designed and decorated with that aim in mind. Remembering her school experience, a middle-aged Czech woman said even the décor was ideological. She said the color red was dominant, pictures of the Czechoslovakian president and communist leaders were on the walls along with other communist symbols, and the flags of Czechoslovakia and the Soviet Union were flown together. In addition to the décor, students were expected to call their teachers “Comrade Teacher.” These components, along with course curriculum and pedagogy, an emphasis on nationalism,

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-4291-0.ch003

and extracurricular activities such as pioneers all combined to help socialize children towards communism.

This chapter examines the role of education in political socialization. The Communist Party in Hungary and Czechoslovakia tried to structure their educational systems to promote a Marxist-Leninist worldview. Specific content was emphasized while another subject matter was excluded or altered in an effort to influence the feelings students would have about government and politics as adults. A variety of personal examples illustrate the ways students responded to this content and its long-term impact.

Additionally, Communists were particular about who was admitted to secondary school and higher education institutions and also what topics students could study. Students who came from working-class backgrounds were typically advantaged over those from wealthier or more intellectual backgrounds. Party loyalty also played a role, with the children of party members receiving preferential treatment. Alternatively, many people were not allowed to study at all or forced to study subjects they were not interested in either because of their social class or lack of party loyalty.

Finally, this chapter examines other means of indoctrination, such as the pioneers program and forced celebration of certain holidays. For example, most people interviewed participated in pioneers and really enjoyed it, but did it have any impact on their feelings ideologically? After thoroughly analyzing different components of the education systems in Hungary and Czechoslovakia during communism, it is discussed whether people civically educated under communism can ever fully adhere to democratic principles.

EDUCATION AS A TOOL OF THE STATE

There have been varied findings regarding the role of education in creating and maintaining democracies. Even though Almond and Verba (1963) long-established the connection between education and democracy, some scholars expressed skepticism saying that early life experiences were what shaped feelings towards democracy. However, more recent literature has suggested that while early life experiences can have an impact on attitudes towards democracy in adulthood, attitudes can also be affected by short-term political, economic, and experiential factors (Finkel, 2003). “Variables such as the individual’s perceptions of current economic conditions, assessment

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