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Problems of school history teaching in the current education system of the Czech Republic***

Problemy nauczania historii we współczesnym systemie edukacji szkolnej w Czechach

Streszczenie: Artykuł dotyczy miejsca nauczania historii w szkołach we współczesnym systemie edukacji w Czechach. Autorki prezentują aktualne trendy w teorii nauczania historii – koncepcję historii jako przedmiotu szkolnego mającego na celu kultywowanie świadomości historycznej, europejski wymiar edukacji, zasadę prezentowania wielu perspektyw, pracę ze źródłami historycznymi, wykorzystywanie metod i technik *oral history*. W artykule podjęto też kwestię instytucjonalnego umocowania dydaktyki historii, prezentując przy tym koncepcję studiów doktoranckich w tym zakresie. Autorki prezentują

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różnorodne formy współpracy między ekspertami na poziomie krajowym i międzynarodowym, analizują też aktualny program nauczania historii w gimnazjum i szkole średniej i rozważają program alternatywny. W artykule przedstawiono też część wyników badań empirycznych na temat bieżących problemów w nauczaniu historii w czeskich szkołach.

Abstract: This study focuses on the position of school history teaching within today's Czech education system. The authors delineate current trends in the theory of history teaching – the concept of history as a school subject cultivating historical awareness, the focus on recent history, the European dimension of education, the principle of multiperspectivity, work with historical sources, and the application of oral history methods. The article also explores the institutional framework for history didactics, including the conception of doctoral degree programmes. Authors present various forms of cooperation among experts on the national and international levels, and discuss the history curriculum for secondary education and the alternative version of the curriculum. The article also reports selected results of empirical studies reflecting the current situation of history teaching in Czech schools.

Słowa kluczowe: dydaktyka historii, świadomość historyczna, Ramowe Plany Nauczania, alternatywna wersja programu nauczania historii, badania empiryczne

Keywords: history didactics, historical awareness, Framework Educational Programme, alternative version of the history curriculum, empirical research

In the years following the collapse of communism in 1989 it became essential to transform history teaching at Czech schools in order to remove the ideological bias with which the subject had been burdened. History teaching had to overcome the one-sidedly national perspective which had characterized its narrative, reassess textbook interpretations of history, define key historical topics enabling students to understand the broader Central European context of Czech history, and implement a more modern approach to teaching strategies and methods¹.

¹ The following studies have provided overviews of Czech history didactics: B. Gracová, Z. Beneš, *History Didactics in the Czech Republic*, [in:] *Facing – Mapping – Bridging – Diversity. Foundation of a European. Discourse on History Education. Part 1*, ed. W. Hasberg, Schwalbach/Ts. 2011, p. 139–172; Z. Beneš, B. Gracová, *Didaktika dějepisu: mezi socializací jedince a jeho individuální výchovou*, [in:] *Oborové didaktiky: vývoj – stav – perspektivy*, eds. I. Stuchlíková, T. Janík, Brno 2015, p. 289–326; K. Štěpánek,

In tackling this transformation, Czech history didactics was inspired by trends from abroad – particularly in two neighbouring countries, Germany and Poland. Around the mid-1990s, drawing on the German hermeneutic tradition, there was a shift away from the previously dominant concept of history (advanced by Vratislav Čapek) as a discipline transforming the academic content of history into the educative content of a school subject². Historical awareness began to be considered a central category in history didactics, and the cultivation of historical awareness was identified as the most general goal of history education³.

This central paradigm shift was also associated with other changes in the theory of history teaching. There is now a far stronger emphasis on interdisciplinary links, as history receives and reflects stimuli from other disciplines. One example of this is how history didactics has taken inspiration from the didactics of natural sciences, which – drawing on pedagogical constructivism – prioritizes research-oriented education. In history teaching, “doing research” involves the didactically guided analysis, criticism and interpretation of historical sources – written, iconographic, audiovisual and oral⁴.

Czech history didactics is also guided by Council of Europe recommendations and other concepts developed at the European level. Empirical studies have been carried out focusing on the “European dimension of education”⁵, and a model has been created for its implementation

J. Memminger, *Reine Methodenlehre oder wissenschaftliche Disziplin? Geschichtsdidaktische Entwicklungen in der Tschechischen Republik*, “Zeitschrift für Geschichtsdidaktik” 2013, 12, p. 128–140.

² V. Čapek, *Didaktika dějepisu I, II*, Praha 1985, 1988.

³ Z. Beneš, *Historický text a historická kultura*, Praha 1995.

⁴ D. Labischová, *Badatelsky orientovaná výuka – základní paradigma pro tvorbu moderní učebnice dějepisu*, „Sborník prací Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity. Řada společenských věd” 2014, 28, 2, p. 110–127.

⁵ D. Labischová, “Evropská dimenze ve vzdělávání jako cesta k překonávání národních a etnických stereotypů”, Ph.D. dissertation, Brno 2000; P. Psočková, “Historické vědomí české studující mládeže ve vztahu k evropským národům”, diploma thesis, Ostrava 2004; L. Zádrapová, “Vědomí evropanství u české studující mládeže po vstupu do Evropské unie, diploma thesis”, Ostrava 2011; J. Stejskalíková, “Evropská dimenze v učebnicích dějepisu”, Ph.D. dissertation, Brno 2013.

in school history teaching⁶. In accordance with Europe-wide trends, there is a broad consensus on the need to accentuate recent history⁷, to respect the principle of multi-perspectivity (taking into account various perspectives on historical events and processes⁸), and to move beyond the traditional interpretation of history – dominated by political history – in order to encompass the history of everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte*), social minorities, gender, childhood and sport. There is a preference for experiential and activity-centred teaching methods, excursion-based teaching (drawing on successful recent developments in museum pedagogy), and the application of a broad spectrum of didactic media⁹.

History didactics at Czech universities

Subject-specific didactics forms a central part of teacher training degree programmes at Czech universities, and history didactics plays a major role in Master's-level programmes for future history teachers at faculties of arts/humanities as well as faculties of education in the Czech Republic. Subject-specific didactics generally forms a compulsory part of these Master's programmes, lasting at least two semesters and following on from basic courses in pedagogy, psychology and general didactics. Subject-specific didactics is closely integrated into students' practical teaching placements; these include shadowing experienced teachers at primary and secondary schools as

⁶ D. Labischová, *Současné trendy v dějepisném vyučování: učení o Evropě, z Evropy a pro Evropu*, „Historica“ 2005, 12, p. 321–331.

⁷ R. Stradling, *Jak učit evropské dějiny 20. století*, Praha 2003; D. Hudecová, D. Labischová, *Nebojme se výuky moderních dějin*, Praha 2009; Z. Beneš, *Moderní a soudobé dějiny – jejich výuka a edukace jimi*, [in:] *Základní problémy studia moderních a soudobých dějin*, eds. J. Čechurová, J. Randák et al., Praha 2014, p. 185–202.

⁸ R. Stradling, *Multiperspektivita ve vyučování dějepisu: příručka pro učitele*, Praha 2004; B. Gracová, *Možnosti a meze multiperspektivního přístupu ve výuce dějepisu (Výsledky empirického šetření)*, [in:] *X. sjezd českých historiků. Ostrava 14.–16. 9. 2011*, vol. 3, eds. B. Gracová, D. Labischová, Ostrava 2013, p. 49–73.

⁹ D. Labischová, B. Gracová, *Příručka ke studiu didaktiky dějepisu*, Ostrava 2008; for an overview see: Z. Beneš, *Aktuální stav historické edukace v České republice (Bilance, problémy, naděje II)*, [in:] *X. sjezd českých historiků...*, p. 13–28.

well as students' own practice lessons. Subject-specific didactics also forms part of the state final examination passed by students to gain their teaching qualification.

History didactics faces certain difficulties as an academic discipline. The 1990s brought a general decline in all subject-specific didactics within the Czech Republic (with the exception of mathematics, physics and chemistry didactics), and the continuity of didactic disciplines in post-graduate university studies was interrupted. Many doctoral degree programmes ceased to function when their accreditation period expired, and there were no new appointments to professorships or associate professorships (habilitation). Teaching of subject-specific didactics at Czech universities was narrowed to a purely methodological focus (training students in teaching skills)¹⁰. Most of the academics who now lecture on the theory of history didactics at Czech universities have doctoral degrees in other fields (e.g. Czech history or pedagogy), or – in isolated cases – were able to pursue their doctoral studies in Slovakia. However, the subject is also frequently taught by secondary school teachers whose approach draws primarily on an intuitive reflection of their own teaching experience. The Czech education system thus suffers from widely varying levels of quality in history didactics teaching, exacerbated by the absence of a cogent scientific methodology in the field. This situation brings with it a range of other problems, such as the difficulty of accessing grant funding for research¹¹.

Addressing the need for better pedagogical content knowledge¹² among school teachers, in 2010 the Czech Republic's Accreditation Committee (which issues accreditations for university degree programmes) set up a permanent working group for subject-specific didactics. The purpose of the group is to help restore the status of subject-specific didactics as a set of fully-fledged academic disciplines, to support the creation of doc-

¹⁰ For more details see: *Oborové didaktiky: vývoj – stav – perspektivy...*, p. 11–12.

¹¹ The Czech Science Foundation (GAČR), which allocates funding for basic research projects on an annual basis, does not have a separate evaluation panel for subject-specific didactics; projects of this nature are generally evaluated by the panel for pedagogy and psychology.

¹² T. Janík, *Didaktické znalosti obsahu a jejich význam pro oborové didaktiky, tvorbu kurikula a učitelské vzdělávání*, Brno 2009.

toral degree programmes in the didactics of various subjects, and thus ultimately to improve the overall quality of teacher training¹³.

It is only in the past few years that doctoral programmes in history didactics have been reintroduced at Czech universities; doctoral programmes are currently available at the Faculty of Arts, Charles University, Prague (where the programme is headed by Zdeněk Beneš)¹⁴ and the Faculty of Arts, University of Ostrava (programme head: Blažena Gracová)¹⁵. The Charles University programme focuses primarily on developing the theoretical discourse of history didactics, issues of museum pedagogy and extracurricular activities helping to form historical culture. The Ostrava programme is focused mainly on empirical research performed on selected samples of school students and history teachers. Both departments also carry out research with relevance to the history curriculum, studying Czech and foreign textbooks designed for various types and levels of schools, as well as media-related and intercultural aspects of history education and the application of the regional dimension in history teaching.

Various issues of relevance to history didactics (e.g. didactic elements or the European dimension in history textbooks, drama education in history teaching, and diachronic studies of curricula) also form the subjects of dissertations written as part of doctoral degree programmes in pedagogy – e.g. at the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University, Brno.

Expert cooperation on the national and international levels

The academic community of Czech history didacticians is involved in close cooperative efforts related to the overall conception of school history teaching as well as ongoing discussions on issues of current relevance in history teaching. From 2002 to 2011 history didacticians from Czech and Slovak universities attended regular meetings with representatives of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports in the town of Telč; these discussions led

¹³ <http://www.akreditacnikomise.cz/cs/oborove-didaktiky.html> [viewed 9 X 2015].

¹⁴ The programme was accredited in 2007; as of 2015 it has had one graduate.

¹⁵ The programme was accredited in 2015.

to the formulation of recommendations for history teaching targeted at a range of stakeholders involved in decision-making, creating curricula and textbooks, as well as practising teachers¹⁶. Since 2004 the Faculty of Philosophy at Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem has held annual didactics conferences, recently co-organized by the “PANT” civic association¹⁷.

An important platform for sharing experience among history teachers is represented by a broad range of other institutions besides schools, including non-profit organizations and professional associations. Of particular note are the activities of the Czech Association of History Teachers (Asociace učitelů dějepisu, ASUD)¹⁸, the “PANT” civic association (which runs the “Modern History” internet portal, the most popular resource of its type), the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů)¹⁹, the Institute for Contemporary History (Ústav pro soudobé dějiny) at the Czech Republic Academy of Sciences, and the non-profit organization “People in Need” (Člověk v tísni). With the development of museum pedagogy, high-quality educational programmes are now offered by institutions such as the museums at Terezín (the site of the

¹⁶ *Historie a škola I–VII*, ed. Z. Beneš, Praha 2003–2009.

¹⁷ *Výuka dějin 20. století na českých a slovenských školách*, eds. M. Achenbrenner et al., Ústí nad Labem 2006; *Regionální dějiny v dějepisném vyučování na českých a slovenských školách*, [in:] M. Veselý, M. Hrubá, Ústí nad Labem 2006; *Stereotypy a mýty v dějepisném vyučování na českých a slovenských školách*, „Studia historica“, eds. M. Veselý, J. Märč, Ústí nad Labem 2008; *Dějepisné výzvy mezioborovým vztahům. Stupínek – jeviště – plátno*, „Acta Universitatis Purkynianae, Facultatis Philosophicae, Studia didactica 1“, eds. J. Märč et al., Ústí nad Labem 2010; *Mystifikace dějinami, mystifikace ve výuce dějin*, „Acta Universitatis Purkynianae, Facultatis Philosophicae, Studia didactica 2“, eds. J. Märč, A. Šerberová, Ústí nad Labem 2010; *Žena jako subjekt a objekt dějepisného vyučování. (Genderová tematika ve výuce dějepisu)*, „Acta Universitatis Purkynianae, Facultatis Philosophicae, Studia didactica 3“, eds. J. Märč, et al., Ústí nad Labem 2010; *Brána školního dějepisu otevřená. (Možnosti výuky mimo školu)*, „Acta Universitatis Purkynianae, Facultatis Philosophicae, Studia didactica 4“, eds. J. Märč, H. Lencová, Ústí nad Labem 2012.

¹⁸ Since 1997 the Association has published 14 volumes presenting the experiences of history teachers; other materials are available in electronic form.

¹⁹ In addition to several teaching DVDs there are also books: *Dějiny ve filmu. Film ve výuce dějepisu*, eds. K. Činátl, J. Pinkas et al., Praha 2014; H. Havlůjová, J. Najbert et al., *Paměť a projektové vyučování v dějepise*, Praha 2014.

former Theresienstadt concentration camp) and Lidice (the memorial to a massacre perpetrated by the Nazis), the Jewish Museum in Prague, and the Museum of Romani Culture in Brno.

Unfortunately the Czech Republic does not yet have a peer-reviewed journal dedicated specifically to history didactics; authors of academic studies therefore have to present their work in periodicals devoted to pedagogy, history, or didactics of related fields²⁰. History teachers at primary and secondary schools familiarize themselves with the latest developments in history didactics mainly via articles in journals with a primary focus on broader-based issues in school education²¹, as the journal “Společenskovední předměty” (“Social Sciences Subjects”, a quarterly for teachers at primary and secondary schools) has not been published since 2008²².

International cooperation has been developing with considerable success primarily in the field of research into textbooks. This area of research dates back to the 1960s, when Czech and German historians began to hold regular bilateral meetings to discuss the interpretation of key events presented in both countries’ history textbooks (following the lead already taken by their Polish and German counterparts). The central aim of these discussions was to reach a certain degree of consensus in the approach taken by textbooks in both countries, as well as to combat the most markedly hostile portrayals of the other nation. Despite encouraging beginnings, this form of cooperation was eventually forced to cease, and it was not until 1994, after the fall of the communist regimes, that the meetings resumed, when a Czech-German committee of historians held a colloquium in Braunschweig. Since 2002 the development of cooperation in this area has been driven by the Czech-German Commission for Textbooks

²⁰ “Pedagogika”; “Pedagogická orientace”; “Orbis scholae”; “The New Educational Review”; “Czech-Polish Historical and Pedagogical Journal”; “Sborník praxí Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity, řada společenských věd”; “MEMO. Časopis pro orální historii/Oral history journal”; “Historica. Revue pro historii a příbuzné vědy”; “CIVILIA – odborná revue pro didaktiku společenských věd” etc.

²¹ “Komenský – odborný časopis pro učitele základní školy”; “Moderní vyučování”.

²² Some journals are of partial use, e.g. “Dějiny a současnost”; “Historický obzor” etc.

(*Deutsch-tschechische Schulbuchkommission*)²³. Joint meetings are held annually, with alternating seminars and conferences which give rise to regular academic publications²⁴. The joint conferences have addressed a range of topics: delegates have discussed key milestones in post-war history (1968 and 1989); the relationship between school history teaching and media education (at the 2012 conference); and environmental aspects of history teaching, using the example of the history of uranium mining (at the most recent conference, in 2014)²⁵.

There is also a long tradition of Czech-Polish cooperation in issues related to textbooks. A working group for the analysis of school textbooks was set up as part of the Permanent Joint Czech-Polish Humanities Commission (reporting to the Czech and Polish education ministries) in the mid-1990s. The group's activities continued until 2006, focusing mainly on mutual Czech-Polish stereotypes and ways of overcoming them, especially in history teaching. The results of the group's work were presented at several conferences and seminars and have been published in monographs and proceedings²⁶. Research (by both Czech and Polish experts) continued

²³ The Czech part of the Commission is chaired by Zdeněk Beneš; other members include Blažena Gracová, Dagmar Hudecová and Denisa Labischová. The German part is represented by Manfred Alexander, Robert Maier, Robert Luft, Andreas Michler, Theresa Langer and others.

²⁴ *Tschechen, Deutsche und der Zweite Weltkrieg. Von der Schwere geschichtlicher Erfahrung und der Schwierigkeit ihrer Aufarbeitung*, "Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts", Bd. 94, ed. R. Maier, Hannover 1997; *Zwischen Zählebigkeit und Zerrinnen. Nationalgeschichte im Schulunterricht in Ostmitteleuropa*, "Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts", Bd. 112, ed. R. Maier, Hannover 2004; *Die Tschechen und ihre Nachbarn. Studien zu Schulbuch und Schülerbewusstsein*, "Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts", Bd. 113, eds. H. Doležel, A. Helmedach, Hannover 2006; *Zweierlei 1968? Die Umbruchjahre 1968 und 1989 in deutschen und tschechischen Geschichtsschulbüchern*, "Schriftenreihe des Georg-Eckert-Instituts", Bd. 123, eds. A. Helmedach, R. Maier, Göttingen 2008; *Dvojitý rok 1968? Zlomové roky 1968 a 1989 v českých a německých učebnicích dějepisu*, ed. Z. Beneš, Praha 2010.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Česká polonistika a polská bohemistika*, Praha 1995; *Česká a polská mládež o sobě. Młodzież polska i czeska o sobie*, ed. J. Damborský, Ostrava 1998; B. Gracová, *Obraz Čechů, Poláků a jejich minulosti u studujících mládeže*, Ostrava 1998; *Školní výuka dějepisu a překonávání stereotypních obrazů sousedních národů 1, 2*, eds. B. Gracová, R. Pšík, Ostrava

even after the working group was disbanded²⁷; a new chapter in Czech-Polish cooperation in this area is currently unfolding through the activities of the working group for the analysis of school textbooks at the Polish-Czech Scientific Society²⁸. The group's area of interest – previously focusing on the analysis of Czech and Polish history textbooks – has been expanded to include educational media in other school subjects: Czech and Polish literature, civic education, and geography. In 2013 Ostrava hosted a conference entitled “The Mutual Image of the Neighbour in Polish and Czech School Textbooks”, while this year Prague will be the scene of the conference “The Image of the Socialist Period in Contemporary Polish and Czech School Textbooks”. High-quality presentations are always published after the event²⁹.

The closest Czech-Slovak cooperation is based primarily on personal contacts, though it is also institutionally supported by the Czech-Slovak Commission of Historians. Since 1991 regular seminars on Czech-Slovak relations have been held in Liberec, targeted at history teachers. There are also trilateral contacts focusing on the educational dimension of international relations; Czech-German and Slovak-German commissions of historians are preparing a commented collection of sources on Czechs, Slovaks and Germans in the 20th century, designed for use in school history teaching.

Czech-Slovak initiatives have also stimulated the emergence of projects spanning the whole Central European region. Multi-perspective approaches

1999; *Česká a polská historická tradice a její vztah k současnosti*, ed. D. Hrodek, Praha 2003; *Místo historie a úloha učitele při formování multikulturní společnosti*, eds. J. Vaculík, J. Mihola, Brno 2003; B. Gracová, *Vědomosti a postoje české a polské studující mládeže*, Ostrava 2004; *Česká polonistika a polská bohemistika na přelomu století / Czeska polonistyka i polska bohemistyka na przełomie stuleci*, eds. M. Borák, R. Gladkiewicz, Praha 2009.

²⁷ *Jazyk – Škola – Prostor jako determinanty kulturního vývoje Těšínského Slezska. / Język – Szkoła – Przestrzeń jako determinanty rozwoju kultury Śląska Cieszyńskiego*, ed. M. Bogus, Česki Cieszyn 2012.

²⁸ The Polish part of the group is chaired by D. Konieczka-Śliwińska, the Czech part by B. Gracová.

²⁹ *Vzájemný obraz souseda v polských a českých školních učebnicích*, eds. B. Gracová, D. Labischová, J. Szymeczek, Ostrava 2014. The introduction gives a more detailed outline of the publications by the working group.

to Central European history (e.g. on the topic “The otherness of our shared history”) lie at the heart of international education research projects co-financed by the International Visegrad Fund. Two successive projects under the heading “Central European Universities For The Modern European Dimension Of History Teaching” were implemented in 2006–2012; the key topics of these projects were the Central European legacy of the Second World War, life under socialism and the Cold War, and the Central European heritage after the collapse of the bipolar world – including issues of multiculturalism, multi-perspectivity and the role of history teaching in combating extremism. The annual conferences and workshops³⁰ became a valuable opportunity for experts to share experience; participants included historians, academics specializing in history didactics, practising history teachers, and students of teacher training degree programmes³¹.

Currently underway is a three-year project entitled “Sites of Memory: memory of the heritage – heritage of the memory” (2013–2015), which explores crucial sites of historical memory in the four partner countries involved – Poland, Slovakia, Hungary and the Czech Republic – and seeks to develop scholarly methodologies for research into this phenomenon in historiography, literature and school textbooks³².

The history curriculum for primary schools and gymnázium-type secondary schools

The Czech education system has undergone fundamental changes during the past decade, as schools have come to play a more autonomous role in defining the content of their education provision strategies. A major reform – launched in 2005 – has introduced a two-stage curriculum. At the central (state) level, a set of “Framework Educational Programmes” (in Czech “Rámcové vzdělávací programy” or RVP) were produced for the individual

³⁰ 2006 Trenčianské Teplice (SR), 2007 and 2008 Štúrovo (Slovakia), 2009 Velké Bílovice (Czech Rep.), 2010 Kalisz (Poland) and 2011 Levoča (Slovakia).

³¹ Monothematic issue of “Historie – otázky – problémy” with the title “Jinakost našich společných dějin” (The otherness of our shared history) 2010, 2.

³² <http://www.memory-heritage.amu.edu.pl/?file=news> [viewed 9 X 2015].

levels within the education system. At the school level, teams of teachers then created their school's own curricula, tailored to the specific situation and focus of the school³³.

The new programmes brought several fundamental changes. Firstly, the introductory parts of these documents formulated sets of “key competencies”, which were universal rather than being specific to individual subjects; the development of these competencies was to be the priority goal of all school education, and students were to achieve these competencies by the end of the particular stage in the education system (i.e. primary levels 1 and 2, secondary)³⁴. The range of individual subjects was also restructured to emphasize their mutual integration and interdisciplinary overlaps; this involved the formulation of “educational areas” (in Czech *vzdělávací oblasti*), which grouped together various subjects. An example of such an “educational area” is “People and Society”, which at primary school level incorporates the subjects Civic Education and History, and at gymnázium-type secondary schools (i.e. schools with a more academic than vocational focus) the subjects Basics of Civic Education and Social Sciences, History, and Geography. Individual schools have the opportunity to integrate these subjects either partially or completely. For each subject the central curriculum defines its teaching content (which is not obligatory) and the expected outcomes (which are obligatory).

In an attempt to strengthen the formative component of education (related to attitudes and values), the Framework Programmes incorporated six “cross-cutting themes” (in Czech *průřezová témata*), which respond to current educational needs in society, developing and cultivating students' overall personality³⁵. These themes permeate the entire spectrum of pri-

³³ Rámcový vzdělávací program pro základní vzdělávání (Framework Educational Programme for Primary Education), Rámcový vzdělávací program pro gymnázia (Framework Educational Programme for Gymnázium-type Schools).

³⁴ Competencies for learning, problem-solving, communication, social competencies, personal competencies and citizenship competencies.

³⁵ In primary schools the cross-cutting themes are: Educating Democratic Citizens, Personal and Social Education, Education for Thinking in European and Global Contexts, Media Education, and Multicultural Education. All except the first of these themes also form part of the Framework Educational Programme for Gymnázium-type Schools.

mary and secondary education, cutting across all individual subjects; they can be implemented by either incorporating them into individual subjects, integrating them into the curriculum in the form of new subjects, or via interdisciplinary projects.

The concept for the field of History drew on an analysis of curricula in selected European countries focusing on the time allocated for history teaching, the position of history within the overall system of school subjects, and the goals and content of history education³⁶. A typical feature of Czech history teaching is the use of cyclical (or spiralling) curricula; at gymnázium-type secondary³⁷ schools, and in the higher year-groups (age 16–19) of gymnázium-type combined primary and secondary schools (this type of school is known as a “multi-year gymnázium”), history teaching returns to the prehistoric era (already covered at primary school level) and moves forward again chronologically to the present day, with the aim of expanding students’ existing knowledge and supporting a more systematic level of knowledge. However, this approach is associated with a number of highly negative effects. In practice, the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values acquired by students during their primary education tend not to be developed to a qualitatively higher level; instead they are merely repeated in greater detail³⁸.

Criticism of the existing history curriculum for gymnázium-type schools led to a proposal for an alternative version of the curriculum for these schools³⁹, which was piloted at selected schools from 2011 onwards. This alternative curriculum divides history education into two stages. In Years 1 and 2 of gymnázium-type secondary schools (and the corresponding year-

³⁶ D. Hudecová, *Analýza dějepisných vzdělávacích programů ve vybraných státech Evropy a její výsledky*, Praha 2006.

³⁷ „Gymnázium” is the equivalent of the Polish *liceum*.

³⁸ D. Labischová, *Intercultural dimension of history teaching in today’s Czech secondary education curricula*, “Yearbook – Jahrbuch – Annales, International Society for The Didactic of History” 2013, 34, p. 27–44.

³⁹ *Návrh alternativní verze vyučovacího předmětu Dějepis pro čtyřleté gymnázium a vyšší stupeň víceletého gymnázia* (Proposed alternative version of the subject “History” for gymnázium-type secondary schools and the corresponding year-groups of gymnázium-type combined primary and secondary schools), Praha 2010.

groups of gymnázium-type combined primary and secondary schools), students systematize the knowledge they have already acquired at primary level via a chronologically ordered series of five topics; two of these topics are taken from key periods and milestones in human history up to the First World War, while the remaining three cover 20th- and 21st-century history. This represents a significant strengthening of the coverage devoted to recent history. The second stage (Years 3 and 4 of gymnázium-type secondary schools, and the corresponding year-groups of gymnázium-type combined primary and secondary schools) consists of an optional “Specialization Course”, which is thematically structured and consists of a total of nine topics. The alternative curriculum thus combines chronological and thematic (topic-based) approaches⁴⁰. This topic-based model of history teaching places a greater emphasis on the development of historical thinking competencies, the comprehensive use of various types of historical sources, educational media, and methods based on critical evaluation of historical information. The effectiveness of this alternative version of the curriculum was evaluated by comparing the degree of success achieved by students who had been taught using the standard and alternative curricula. Success was measured using semi-standardized didactic tests which verified a broad range of historical thinking competencies (e.g. skills in analyzing and interpreting photographs and caricatures, orientation on a blank map, and comprehension of a verbal historical text)⁴¹.

The initial findings of the research (from tests carried out in 2011 and 2015) have indicated that there are no marked differences in the degrees of success achieved by students who have been taught according to

⁴⁰ Optional topics are: States and governments; Conflicts and their solution; Equality and inequality in society; Migration – blending and clashing of cultures; Optional topic on local/regional history; Work and everyday life; Expansion, colonization, decolonization; Ideas and ideals (science, art, religion).

⁴¹ B. Gracová, D. Labischová, *Kompetence historického myšlení a jejich testování*, [in:] *X. sjezd českých historiků...*, p. 183–200. The didactic tests were compiled in 2011 by Blažena Gracová, Denisa Labischová and Martin Labisch, with Ivana Slavíková joining the team in 2015; she also collated and evaluated the results. I. Slavíková, “Alternativní verze vzdělávacího oboru dějepisu pro gymnaziální vzdělávání a zkušenosti z jejího pilotního ověřování”, diploma thesis, Ostrava 2015.

the standard curricula and the alternative curricula; both groups achieved approximately the same results in the tests. An interesting finding is that almost half of the gymnázium students who had been taught according to the new curriculum would prefer to return to the traditional history curriculum. Probably the most serious weakness of the alternative version is the lack of systematicity in the conception of historical knowledge, which has resulted from abandoning the traditional chronological approach. Teaching according to the alternative version moreover places considerable demands on teachers' time and expertise, and teachers do not yet have at their disposal adequate methodological materials to support them. A number of other research methods could potentially be used in future studies of this issue – including video studies, in-depth interviews, or focus groups⁴².

In addition to innovative variants of the central educational programme, there have also been proposals for regional curricula in border areas of the Czech Republic. One example is the Czech-Polish regional curriculum, created in 2011–2013 as part of the ESF project “History does not stop at the border / History across borders” (“Historie hranicí nekončí / Historia ponad granicami”), which includes methodological materials and worksheets for teachers of history and local history at primary and secondary schools⁴³.

Discussions on the history curriculum are far from over. Changes to the existing curricula are currently being devised in order to reflect the shifting conception of school history teaching influenced by changes over the past decade. There are also discussions on a possible new format for the secondary school leaving examination (*maturita*) along the lines of the reforms implemented in Poland, and on the need to develop high-quality educational standards (at both primary and secondary levels) which would provide a basis for curriculum documents and would specify in greater detail the goals and expected outputs of teaching activities.

⁴² Ibidem, p. 93–95.

⁴³ <http://www.euregio-teschinensis.eu/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/Historie-hranici-nekonci-Historia-ponad-granicami.pdf> [viewed 9 X 2015].

Textbooks – a basic educational medium

History textbooks are a basic medium in education, and have been systematically used in the Czech lands since the 19th century. However, nowadays traditional textbooks face stiff competition from multimedia course materials, which include not only textual content, but also audio and audiovisual content. A key advantage of multimedia materials lies in the fact that they enable students to work interactively with individual components – in line with the frequently emphasized need for an active approach to learning. However, traditional printed textbooks have nevertheless retained their central place in school lessons – primarily due to their accessibility, accuracy, affordability and ease of use⁴⁴. Textbooks can be viewed as holding up a mirror to the canon of school learning – both the canon of content and the canon of the interpretation of that content. However, the question arises whether this still applies in a situation when the content of textbooks for the same subject, for the same year-group and in the same type of school differs so widely depending on the publisher⁴⁵.

In the Czech Republic, history textbooks must obtain an accreditation from the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports⁴⁶; in order to do so, a textbook must form part of a series of textbooks making up a complete history course for the given level of the education system. In addition, the authors of textbooks are required to take into account the current guidelines issued by the Ministry, which reflect the needs of ethnic and religious minorities. Czech history textbooks, combining narrative and workbook-type content, represent an adequate resource for teaching, especially the textbooks for primary schools and the equivalent year-groups at gymnázium-type combined primary and secondary schools. The au-

⁴⁴ B. Gracová, *Dějepisná učebnice z pohledu empirického výzkumu*, „Sborník prací Pedagogické fakulty Masarykovy univerzity. Řada společenských věd“ 2013, 27, 1, p. 163–172.

⁴⁵ T. Janík, P. Knecht, *Učebnice jako zrcadlo kánonu školního vědění*, [in:] *Kurikulum a učebnice z pohledu pedagogického výzkumu*, eds. M. Nogová, M. Reiterová, Bratislava–Brno 2009, p. 7–12.

⁴⁶ These accreditations are awarded for a period of between 2 and 6 years; the accreditation can be prolonged.

thors of the most recent textbooks have rectified deficiencies in content, including passages on the history of national/ethnic minorities, women and children, characterizing everyday life among various social groups, and incorporating a wealth of didactic features such as accompanying workbooks and (in many cases) methodological guides for teachers⁴⁷. The textbooks also have a strong visual component, in line with the requirement for equal presence of verbal and iconic content. The didactic apparatus of history textbooks is also gradually improving; questions and tasks now move beyond the traditional emphasis on factual knowledge and encourage students to seek out information, as well as emphasizing interconnections with previously covered content and interdisciplinary links. Some series of textbooks are also available in interactive versions⁴⁸.

The current series of textbooks for four-year gymnázium-type schools remains inadequate; the only recently published publication of this type is a textbook of modern history with an accompanying workbook. The absence of secondary-level textbooks is due to a lack of interest among textbook publishers (Fraus, SPN, Albra, Nová škola, Didaktis), who are reluctant to publish textbooks for secondary schools⁴⁹. Czech secondary-level textbooks therefore still lack methodological sections (which are a standard feature of German and Austrian textbooks) setting out the basic principles of research-oriented teaching. As a result, teachers tend to avoid didactically guided work with a range of educational media, preferring to remain anchored in their traditional teaching style. Another area where potential remains unfulfilled (though it is already well-developed in other countries) is that of activities helping students to gain key competencies via sections focusing on interactive group learning, history workshops or projects. Czech textbooks lack case studies, and the tasks do not encourage students to build up portfolios or carry out self-evaluations – activities which would

⁴⁷ There has been a marked shift in the semantic difficulty of the texts; this was a long-term problem affecting Czech textbooks.

⁴⁸ B. Gracová, *Dějepisná učebnice...*

⁴⁹ The relatively small print-runs make such publications uneconomical (there are fewer secondary than primary schools, and many teachers are not interested in using textbooks). Moreover, textbooks at secondary schools are purchased by students, not by the school.

help raise awareness of the learning process and the level of knowledge achieved, stimulating a metacognitive evaluation of the student's progress⁵⁰.

The reflection of school history teaching practice in empirical research

The main tasks of empirical research in this field are to provide an expert diagnosis of the state of history education, to determine the conditions in which history education exists and reveal interconnections among various elements of the education process, to reveal the mechanisms underpinning the perception of historical knowledge, and to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of various approaches to historical education and self-education. Two main streams can be identified in empirical research focusing on history didactics: research of historical awareness, and research into history teaching⁵¹. Previous research on historical awareness has focused on a range of issues: verifying knowledge of key milestones in Czech history and the history of selected other European countries; tracing changes in respondents' knowledge and evaluation of important Czech and international figures from various spheres of life (longitudinal studies exploring changes occurring as a consequence of wider societal changes); identifying interethnic attitudes to members of various European nations (especially neighbouring countries); tracing the role played by historical knowledge and awareness in the development of mutual perceptions among national/ethnic groups (including the influence of school-related and non-school-related factors in the formation of these attitudes); and research into national and European identity⁵². Topics addressed by research into history

⁵⁰ J. Janková, "Komparace didaktické vybavenosti vybraných českých dějepisných učebnic s řadou rakouských učebnic dějepisu", diploma thesis, Ostrava 2012, p. 38–40; J. Janková, "Funkčnost zařazení a míra využívání vybraných komponent současných dějepisných učebnic", diploma thesis, Ostrava 2014, p. 25–26.

⁵¹ The Ostrava team's research covers both streams.

⁵² B. Gracová, *Empirické výzkumy v didaktice dějepisu u nás, jejich potřebnost a význam*, [in:] *IX. sjezd českých historiků. Pardubice 6.–8. 9. 2006*, vol. 1, Pardubice–Praž–Ústí nad Labem 2007, p. 97–114; B. Gracová, D. Labischová, *Současná teorie a praxe*

teaching include lesson content, teachers' conceptions of history teaching (forms and methods of teaching, educational media), information resources used in history teaching, and the needs and requirements of teachers⁵³. The most comprehensive project addressing these issues in 2011 was entitled "Multicultural aspects of education in social sciences/humanities subjects and their reflection in historical awareness among school students"⁵⁴. The following paragraphs outline key findings from the latest research providing an insight into the practical impacts of theoretical approaches.

Empirical research verifying the situation in history teaching at Czech schools carried out between 2005 and 2014 has repeatedly confirmed that textbooks remain an irreplaceable didactic tool – especially at primary schools and in the lower year-groups of gymnázium-type secondary schools. Most teachers at gymnázium-type schools devise their own teaching materials. Over half of primary school teachers work systematically with textbooks in history lessons, but only a quarter of teachers at secondary level do so; most use textbooks only occasionally, while a tenth of secondary school teachers do not use textbooks at all. Half of the teachers make use of workbooks, though three quarters of them consider worksheets to be the best type of teaching material. Surprisingly, around a tenth of teachers make no use of cartographic tools; however, most teachers use such materials in every lesson or at least most of the time – including wall maps, historical atlases, cartograms in textbooks, or demonstrations using data projectors

dějepisného vzdělávání na školách, „Pedagogická orientace“ 2012, 22, 4, p. 516–544; B. Gracová, *Současný stav empirického výzkumu v didaktice dějepisu v České republice*, [in:] „Toruńskie spotkania dydaktyczne X”, *Kierunki badań dydaktycznych. Kierunki zmian edukacji historycznej*, eds. S. Roszak, M. Strzelecka, A. Wiczorek, Ł. Wróbel, Toruń 2013, p. 48–58.

⁵³ B. Gracová, *Poznatky z Výzkumu aktuální podoby výuky dějepisu na základních a středních školách*, „Historie a škola VI” 2008, p. 9–30. Besides many more research projects undertaken by the Ostrava team, another important project focusing on contemporary history teaching was implemented by the Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes (ÚSTR) in 2012: <http://www.ustrcr.cz/cs/vyzkum> [viewed 9 X 2015].

⁵⁴ Coordinator D. Labischová, co-coordinator B. Gracová. The findings are presented in D. Labischová, *Historical Consciousness in School Education*, Ostrava 2013; D. Labischová, B. Gracová, L. Zádrapová, *Changes in European Consciousness within the Context of Education*, Ostrava 2013, as well as in numerous articles in periodicals.

or interactive boards. However, the use of these resources does not have the required impact on students' spatial orientation and awareness.

History teachers admitted that they only worked with other types of materials occasionally. Only a third of these respondents considered the analysis of written sources and photographs to be an essential component of lessons, and a fifth used documentary films on a regular basis. However, just 8% of teachers used caricatures and posters systematically in their lessons, while a third did not use these types of resources at all. Czech teachers have not yet come under external pressure to change their teaching style – unlike Polish teachers in connection with the reforms of the school-leaving examination (the *Nowa matura*). The most frequent method used by teachers remains giving their own account of historical events (sometimes accompanied by PowerPoint presentations), and teachers frequently dictate content which students write down in their exercise books.

Responding to a question on what would help improve history teaching, the most frequent answer (mainly among teachers at gymnázium-type schools and secondary vocational schools) was an increase in the time allocated to the subject⁵⁵. The long-term standard allocation of two teaching periods per week is currently unrealistic at many schools⁵⁶. Some teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the current curriculum and stated that they would welcome changes. They also stated that high-quality workbook-type textbooks could encourage teachers to use such materials regularly in history lessons. Teachers' use of their own materials (in place of textbooks), and their preference for giving their own accounts of events, reduces the opportunity to implement the principle of multi-perspectivity and brings a less systematic approach to historical knowledge. Faced with this teaching style, students at various types of school fail to acquire the necessary competencies for working with verbal and iconic text, and thus also suffer from deficiencies in their learning competencies.

⁵⁵ 56% of secondary school teachers, 26% of primary school teachers. Data are from 2014, J. Janková, *Funkčnost zařízení...*, p. 90–114.

⁵⁶ The number of compulsory periods defined in the curriculum is lower; more periods can be allocated depending on the preferences of the school.

Teachers compensate for some of the weaknesses outlined above by using history portals and educational DVDs. A large majority of history teachers regularly visit the “Modern History” (*Moderní dějiny*) portal⁵⁷, and 80% of them download materials from this portal for use in their own teaching – most frequently lesson presentations, worksheets and methodological sheets. Only a fifth of the respondents are interested in the scholarly articles and studies posted on the portal. Around half of students are aware of the portal, but they are passive users⁵⁸. Teachers’ interest in educational DVDs is considerably lower; around a quarter of teachers use these resources in their lessons⁵⁹. A fifth of primary school teachers (and 7% of secondary school teachers) say they would appreciate a central methodological portal devoted to history teaching, which would make lesson preparation quicker and easier.

Mental maps – graphic representations of historical contexts – were used only occasionally or not at all by 40% of teachers. Oral history methods likewise have not yet found favour with teachers; a third of teachers do not use them, while the remaining two thirds use such methods only occasionally, mostly during project work but also in normal lessons, primarily to demonstrate multi-perspective approaches to historical events.

In order to remain well-informed about the current state of historiographic research, regular reading of scholarly journals is essential. The cultural-historical review “Dějiny a současnost” enjoys the highest long-term popularity⁶⁰; a fifth of teachers (with women forming a significantly higher percentage of this group) take information from “human interest”-type

⁵⁷ 90% of teachers use Wikipedia frequently or occasionally, while three quarters take audiovisual materials from YouTube.

⁵⁸ Nevertheless, a third of students use it as a source of information when preparing presentations and seminar papers.

⁵⁹ A. Josková Abelová, “Současné dějepisné učebnice a další edukační materiály k československým dějinám období 1968–1989. (Obsahová analýza edukačních médií a empirický výzkum)”, diploma thesis, Opava 2014, p. 112–164.

⁶⁰ 19% of teachers work with this journal frequently, 61% occasionally (percentages of male and female respondents were the same).

historical publications such as the magazine “Živá historie”⁶¹, while one tenth of respondents read “Historický obzor”, which used to include articles on history teaching and civic education. The level of interest in new research on recent history does not correspond with the high priority accorded to this historical period in schools. The contemporary history journal “Soudobé dějiny” is read regularly by just three percent of teachers, while under a quarter of respondents read it occasionally.

Conclusion

History education in the Czech Republic has undergone a number of major changes during the past quarter-century, primarily as a consequence of the democratization of Czech society. These changes have been reflected in the content of history teaching; one-sided and ideologically burdened interpretations of history (especially in the presentation of recent history) have been replaced by a multi-perspective approach, while previously neglected topics have come to the fore. Although it has long been clear that the cyclical treatment of history in the Czech curriculum is inadequate and should be replaced by a linear approach, conservative attitudes among the majority of history teachers (and decision-makers) have prevented the implementation of major changes which are required in this area if societal changes in the communication of historical information are to be fully reflected; such communication is no longer primarily (let alone exclusively) the preserve of schools. The alternative versions of the history curriculum have failed to generate the necessary positive response either from teachers or from students, and have not progressed beyond their initial phase. History textbooks have improved, and there now exists a wide range of other educational materials (including electronic resources). History teachers can benefit from courses on content and methodology, as well as special methodological publications; nevertheless, most teachers remain

⁶¹ 43% of teachers do so occasionally. Other magazines of this type (“History and History revue”), are read frequently by 15% and 10% (respectively), and occasionally by approx. one third of respondents.

anchored in traditional teaching models, and activity-based learning methods are not yet widely used. The actual situation is probably worse than the research shows, as the teachers who are willing to provide feedback in research studies tend to be those with a more active approach. The authors of Czech history textbooks present information in a factual way, without emotion, and – commensurate with the age of the target group – they also take account of the principle of multi-perspectivity and help to break down stereotypes. Despite the progress outlined above, however, not all international developments in methodology have yet been fully implemented, and textbooks (still the core educational medium) have not yet made adequate use of structural components which would motivate and encourage students to take an active approach in acquiring the necessary competencies – including historical competencies. A fundamental problem remains the insufficient use of history textbooks – both by teachers and by students. Despite considerable efforts by stakeholders involved in historical education, the results so far have not been satisfactory; neither students' historical knowledge nor their competencies give grounds for optimism. A major improvement to history teaching at schools would undoubtedly be brought by further systematic empirical research – though it would be essential for the findings of such research to be respected both by teachers and by decision-makers. Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that students having special interest in history have at their disposal a good range of information resources, and many such students use these resources successfully, often under the guidance of excellent teachers.