

UDK: 37.091.3::94(497.11)"2018/2020"
37.014.3(497.11)"2018/2020"
37.017(497.11)"2018/2020"

NEW EDUCATIONAL CONCEPTS IN THE REFORMED HISTORY TEACHING IN SERBIA

Original Scientific Article

doi: 10.5281/zenodo.4618390

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Abstract:

History curricula for secondary schools in Serbia were under alteration from 2018 to 2020. The new curricula concept is aiming to change the learning paradigm from content-oriented to outcome/competence-oriented curricula. It was planned that new national history curricula should rest upon the key competences for life-long learning, as well as the specific subject competences, but also on competences for democratic culture (Council of Europe 2016). Curricula developers took into consideration parts of the recently adopted document by the Council of Europe (Principles and guidelines for quality history education in the 21st century, Strasbourg 2018) that could direct education policymakers, history teachers, educators, curricula designers and textbook authors to the possible answers for possible resolutions of different challenges imposed to the contemporary history education. In the paper, it will be explained how the currently existing chronological linear concept is combined with the new one that encloses a thematic

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approach reflecting those historical phenomena that could foster the development of critical and historical thinking skills as well as forenamed competences. Furthermore, this article will examine whether and to what extent teachers are trained to plan and develop educational activities following the needs and aims of this way organized curriculum.

Key words: history teaching, history curriculum, competences, historical thinking concepts, democratic culture

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Historical consciousness presents the way how the past is perceived by an individual or a group. At about the same time two German scholars, Jeismann (1985) and Rösen (1989) have explained the complicated process of its creation. Jeismann has distinguished three phases: “analysis of facts or cases”, “judgements of facts” and “judgements of values”, whereas the Rösen’s taxonomy slightly differs. According to him, there is a “historical perception” that is mainly related to the past and caused by a confrontation with historical primary sources in written, painted or objective form. It is used for “*imagining or recalling the past*”. Another stage is a “historical interpretation” which is found or produced by a mental process of comparison with the present and which gives the meaning to a story – “understanding and narrating the past for the present”. And finally, Rösen determines “historical orientation” which is identified as a continuity to the past or “evaluating and concluding from the past for the future”.

Learning or researching history does not necessarily start with “analysis of facts” or “historical perception”. Overlooking the first usual step deter-

mined by historical methodology in such an integrated process is simply a consequence of the fact that any person investigating history already lives in a society with: historical conventions, cultural traditions, socially preferred answers and points of political correctness while talking about the past. In other words, adults often begin creating historical consciousness with socially pre-given and prescribed “judgements of values” or “historical orientations” (Borries 2001, 272–273).

According to the studies of the French sociologist Maurice Halbwachs, historical consciousness presents the key element of every collective identity. The social frameworks of memory are given by the group where the individual belongs. They help individual approaches reconstructing the past by positioning its memories on the historical timeline of the group. Further influences on the memory of the individual are done through rituals, ceremonies, symbols and language of the group (Halbwachs 2013).

Since the historical dimension serves as a tool for establishing the legitimacy and continuity of the community, it represents a necessary component in the construction of every collective identity. While defining the nation as the imagined community, Benedict Anderson, explains that members of the community probably will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion. One of the pillars of such an image is the “common past” or “shared experiences” (Anderson 1990). Definitions of the other theorists of the nation give the same importance to the historical dimension.

However, decisions about what will be celebrated and what will be suppressed in collective memory are always carefully made at the official level. As Eric Hobsbawm stated – the state secular education is the one that, within the standardization of administration and law, transformed people into a citizen of a specific country (Hobsbawm 1994, 77). Down the same line, Aleida Assmann explains history education in schools as “a secular successor of religion” whose aim is to preserve the past from oblivion (Assman 2002). On the other hand, since the mid-1980s the history curricula and perception

of history as a school subject have been under alterations in many countries. Whilst still acknowledging the important role of history teaching in helping students to acquire historical knowledge, it has been recognized increasingly that students also need to adopt a critical attitude to historical facts and evidence and to develop and apply the thinking processes essential to historical awareness and interpretation. Recently this observation was made by Terry Haydn who also warned about tendencies and expectations that history should be taught as “national canon”, more focused on “national story”, and standpoint according to which “school history should seek to inculcate in pupils...pride and identification with the national past and the national story” (Haydn 2019, 15–16). Robert Stradling underlines that history teaching today is perceived to have political and social purposes as well as educational objectives. It is expected to help to develop a sense of national identity, but also passing on an awareness of the cultural heritage, preparing students for democratic participation and citizenship, developing respect and tolerance for diversity between peoples of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. At the same time, it should also include subject-specific educational aims such as - helping students to understand the present, including the origins of contemporary problems; helping them to develop a sense of history and historical consciousness; introducing them to the distinctive methodology of history and what is involved in understanding and interpreting the past; and arousing their interest in the past. Notwithstanding these significant changes, school history is still considered a public property always followed by a heated debate on its political and social role (Stradling 2001, 30).

Nevertheless, history taught in the classroom is not a sole, sometimes the most influential element of historical culture. As a conveyer of common memories of one group, it goes beyond school and even academic research. Some of the expressions of historical culture are novels, films, cartoons, public political rhetoric, oral history, mass media productions and historical signs in monuments, architecture and popular art. These expressions have a chance to make actual and universally available products that are public,

open and not necessarily historically reliable. Received in this way and reinforced by an aesthetic form, cultural products are likely to impress one's mind more than pragmatically handled school lessons and usually very conservative history textbooks (Ahonen 2001, 96). A constant struggle between school history and other elements of historical culture is ubiquitous everywhere, especially in countries that have been going through state-transitions, such as ex-Yugoslav republics.

Several researches have been done showing how history teaching loses the battle against dominant narrative given in public. One of them was presented by the European Association of History Educators (EUROCLIO) experts within the ePACT project.³ It was supposed to confront history teachers and creators of educational policies with various issues regarding history teaching in general, but especially controversial and sensitive topics. One of the topics covered by this research was the Yugoslav wars and thus the respondents were teachers from the region (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo*, North Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia). Even though the education system in Serbia supports quality history teaching that includes lessons about the break-up of Socialist Yugoslavia, the practice has been facing serious challenges and difficulties. Teachers, in this survey, mostly reflected on dominant national discourses that support narratives about victims and victimhood, which are "observed and discussed through collective, ethnic glasses" (Marić & Jovanović 2016).

Another study entitled *Novosti is prošlosti (Novelties from the past)* was published by the Belgrade Centre for Human Rights in 2010. It was derived from a survey conducted from more than a thousand people of various cultural, social and educational backgrounds. Topics covered included general and national history, identity (Serbs and the "others"), religion, fascism and

3 ePACT: Education Partnership for Advocacy, Capacity-Building and Transformation is a project developed by EUROCLIO in cooperation with the support of Austrian Development Cooperation. More information on the project can be accessed at: <https://www.euroclio.eu/project/epact-education-partnership-advocacy-capacity-building-transformation/>

antifascism, communism, and the Yugoslav Wars (1991–1995). The study showed that although certain myths and misconceptions had been demystified by the academic community almost a century and a half ago, they are still dominant in the mindsets of a majority of the examinees. For instance, 58% of examinees answered the Cyrillic script was invented by the Serbs, 40% thought Serbs to be indigenous to the Balkans, and 29% said that Serbs came before Croats on the Balkan peninsula. None of these distorted facts can be found neither in historiography nor in history textbooks, but the belief in them is widespread and very much alive (Stojanović, Vučetić, Petrović-Todosijević, Manojlović-Pintar & Radić 2010, 136–139).

In the light of the results of the previously mentioned studies, historical consciousness among the people in Serbia has been mostly created outside the classroom and history lessons. In the recent period, this issue has been even worsened due to the disagreement between the Institute for the Improvement of the Education and the National Education Council of the Republic of Serbia. The stumbling rock is again the criteria for selecting curriculum content for history and Serbian language syllabuses. While the experts from the Institute (in charge of writing curricula and giving approval to new textbooks) have been showing intentions to change the learning paradigm from content-oriented to outcome/competence-oriented curricula, the members of the Council has been expressing a tendency of certain “re-traditionalization” of the state education policy. This tendency is strongly supported by the Church, numerous intellectuals, public figures and the pro-state media whose fueling titles and sometimes whole covers are sending a very negative message about any potential novelty in the domain of history or Serbian language curriculum.⁴ Having in mind all of this, history teaching is facing serious obstacles in putting its educational objectives.

4 See *Hovocnu* (20/10/2020.) <https://www.novosti.rs/vesti/drustvo/927589/savet-sad-desankino-ime-nazivu-nacionalno-prosvetno-telo-pokrenulo-inicijativu-dobije-ime-velikoj-pesnikinji> (accessed the site 01/03/2021)

CONCEPTS OF HISTORICAL THINKING, COMPETENCES AND EDUCATIONAL STANDARDS

Concepts of historical thinking

If, according to Lesley Paul Hartley, the past is “a foreign country” where “they do things differently”, then history education has a responsibility to construct bridges that should bring closer to the pupils this unempirical, nontangible “distant” and “strange” world (Lowenthal 2015, 20). The pillars this imaginary educational bridge rests upon are, actually, the concepts of historical thinking. As the crucial cognitive “mechanism” in getting to know the past, these concepts still inspire researchers from different scientific fields to explore the place and relevance of diverse historical methodological benchmarks in the process of teaching and learning history. The most recent testimony of historical thinking scientific topicality is the fact that the last issue of the Yearbook of the International Society for History Didactics was dedicated particularly to the topic of Historical Thinking within the framework of history teaching in European countries (Yearbook of ISHD 40, 2019). Categorizing, classifying and inquiring historical thinking concepts within history education became an extensive research framework not only for historians but even more for cognitive, educational psychologists and pedagogics. In his book *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, psychologist Sam Wineburg (Wineburg 2001) tried to position and epicenter historical thinking concepts as the main course in the process of learning history. He indicated that these concepts should help students to reconstruct and approach the past in a structured and assessable way. Identifying cognitive and thinking processes that initiate meaningful learning which comprises acquiring knowledge, developing certain skills, and attitudes, Wineburg illuminated them from various angles and perspectives of different partic-

ipants in the process of education (Wineburg 2001). At the same time, the Council of Europe published the essential handbook for history educators, *Teaching 20th century European history* (Stradling 2001), in which the author extensively elaborates, among other topics, the development of skills and concepts in history education using examples from the recent European history. Robert Stradling explained that the key concepts, which are essentially general ideas, offer students different approaches to history and its subject of research, e.g. help them to organize historical knowledge and ideas about history; enables them to make generalizations using concrete examples, distinguish similarities and differences of certain events, historical phenomena or processes, etc. (Stradling 2001, 88). In his major division of concepts that are crucial in the process of learning history, Stradling outlined two sets of concepts, i.e., key terms. The first one, named *substantial* or “the first order concepts”, refers to certain historical, but also sociological, cultural, economic, political phenomena and processes that shaped and influenced the history of mankind. These concepts could be understood as referent points, or connecting threads that enable generalization in learning history, and help students “to understand historical trends and patterns as well as specific events” such are revolution, imperialism, total war, civil war, emancipation, independence, colonialism, dictatorship, etc. (Stradling 2001, 89). These substantial concepts are singled out and classified within the category entitled *the key terms of subject/content* as part of the reformed history curricula in Serbia. They are reduced to the single concepts/words within the new structural curricula framework replacing the old, more descriptive and extensively formulated, content of history curricula.

The second group of concepts titled *technical* or “second order concepts” consisted of different stages or elements of the methodology of history as humanity. These concepts reflect “historians’ work” and introduce students to the complex stages of researching and reconstructing the past (Stradling 2001, 91). Concepts belonging to this group, after Stradling, enclose continuity and change, chronology, causation, comparison and evidence. Yet, another classification of concepts has been recently launched by imminent his-

torian and educational theorist Peter Seixas and his colleague Tom Morton that to the large extent relate to Stradling's *technical* concepts. In the handbook *The Big Six Historical Thinking Concepts* (Seixas & Morton 2013) they have diversified six essential aspects and stages in learning history crucial for understanding how history "works" in contemporary educational, but also the social environment. These concepts are: historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, the ethical dimension. The difference between Stradling's and Seixas-Morton's classification is more procedural than substantial. However, Seixas-Morton have put more stress on *historical perspectives* that Stradling included within the concept of *comparison*, and particularly as specific didactical concept of *multiperspectivity* (Stradling 2001, 2003). The sixth itemized Seixas-Morton concept *the ethical dimension*, not included specifically in Stradling's concept list, directs focus on a very important issue. It is constructed on several levels. Among five outlined guideposts of this concept, that epitomize "the big ideas" used by the authors to support or explain the concepts themselves; it is important to emphasize a few of them. The first one encourages pupils to evaluate historical phenomena in order to identify and establish "responsibilities to remember and respond to the contributions, sacrifices and injustices of the past" (Seixas & Morton 2013,168). Another one, very important from the methodological standpoint, is to observe and analyze historical phenomena according to the historical context, according to customs, tradition and values of the period when they had occurred. Historical phenomena, events and processes should not be observed from the contemporary interpretations or societal or cultural standards of the present day. Emphasizing this concept of historical thinking in the process of learning history empowers pupils to identify, filter and channel the influence coming from invasive and overwhelming external public and societal agents which often distort and vulgarize history. Understanding the significance of this, not only chronological, but primarily contextual societal and cultural distance allows pupils to identify historical legacy and diverse impact of history on the present setting.

Competences

Another current educational challenge for pupils, not only in Serbia but in general terms, is how to make learning history meaningful and reflective to the contemporary social and cultural environment. Facing many questions and possible confrontations connected to the phenomena with historical background and strong social impact like collective and individual identity, dealing with various stereotypes, accepting cultural diversity, tolerance of “otherness” and understanding the freedom of expression, young people need to develop competences which are often leaning on certain behavioral and societal patterns imminent to democratic standards of modern 21st century civic society. Having that in mind, the educational system in the Republic of Serbia introduces, through the Law on Education (2017), several levels and categories of competences that pupils should develop during their schooling. Besides the key competences for lifelong learning which are defined at the E.U. level (Literacy competence, Multilingual competence, Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, Digital competence, Personal, social and learning to learn competence, Citizenship competence, Entrepreneurship competence, Cultural awareness and expression competence), the Serbian Law on education specifies competences that are defined on the cross-curricular level and within the scope of particular school subjects schooling (Stojanović 2019). Through the History as the school subject in secondary education (still not defined for the compulsory education) pupils should, besides universal key and cross-curricular competences, develop general subject competence, as well as specific subject competences *Understanding history and developing a critical attitude toward the past and present, Understanding history and contemporary identities as the basis for active participation in modern society*. General and specific competences for the subject *History* comprise, to a large extent, some elements of the key competences for lifelong learning which give them an integrative and correlative dimension. General competence for the subject

History aims at, further than gaining the knowledge about the past, developing different skills of critical thinking, but also acquiring and breeding democratic values that “include the respect of human rights development of intercultural dialogue and responsible attitude toward cultural-historical heritage.” (Standardi za predmet istorija 2015). This competence actually determines the path in learning history that influence pupils to participate proactively in the modern democratic society following the principles of tolerance using different skills e.g., for the debate and dialogue, as well as to explore ways of prevention of future conflicts with historical essence that rest on recent regional experience. Subject competences make a solid ground for further structuring and developing educational steps in learning history. In addition, between the formal adoption of the subject competences on the national level and the beginning of the work on the reform of school curricula, the Council of Europe developed wide-ranging, from common educational perspective important, *Competences for Democratic Culture* (CDC 2016). The great importance of this “educational product” was recognized by experts working on the reform of history curricula in Serbia, as well as the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development of the Republic of Serbia. The Competences of Democratic Culture as a composite educational model became very useful to coordinate in designing new history curricula, but also a creation of educational programs that address the development of democratic culture in schools in Serbia on a general level. The Competences for Democratic Culture are consisted of four general components (knowledge and critical understanding; skills; attitudes; values) that comprise a significant number of different competences. Some of them, if not all, are very important for the development of critical thinking skills, but also for understanding the history and establishment of the framework required for the development of specific concepts of historical thinking. Having in mind new trends in education and adoption of Competences for Democratic Culture on the European level, a team of experts from the History teaching Unit of Council of Europe developed the strategic document *Quality history education in 21st century, principles and guidelines* (Principles and Guidelines

2018) which, at a certain point, became relevant additional working material recognized by experts working on the reform of history curricula in Serbia. The first listed principle relates to the developing of flexible history curricula and the implementation of interactive pedagogies which acknowledge cultural differences. Raising awareness and accepting cultural diversity as a democratic and historical legacy is identified as one of the major aspects of history education. Other principles that were also taken into consideration during the work on new history curricula, were valuing the multiple identities; addressing issues that might be sensitive or controversial.

Educational standards

Educational standards as strictly defined and fixed assessable descriptions of knowledge, skills and abilities that pupils need to achieve within the specific school subject at the end of a particular education cycle, make another important parameter in shaping history curricula within the reform process. Standards are formulated on three levels of difficulty (basic 80%, medium 50% and advanced 20% of achievement) predominantly constructed according to the revised Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson-Krathwol 2001). Educational standards for the subject History are specifically developed for primary as well as secondary education. In primary education, they are divided into two subdomains (Historical knowledge; Research and interpretation of history) that to the large extent include concepts of historical thinking (continuity and change, causation, historical significance, evidence, multiple perspectives), as well as elements of certain key or cross-curricular competences. Each subdomain is consisted of numerous descriptors, which represent concrete knowledge, skills or abilities that pupils should perform or demonstrate at the end of the educational cycle.

44 Since secondary education represents another, upgraded stage of education, it was considered that pupils who entered secondary schools must have

achieved the level imposed by the standards for primary education at the end of the second cycle, i.e., 8th grade of compulsory education. Consequently, the standards for the school subject History in secondary education were not designed as utterly recurring, but on contrary, as advanced and further developed in comparison to the standards for compulsory education. Therefore, the history educational standards for secondary education are divided into three groups/subdomains from which two are partly leaning on subdomains from compulsory education (Historical knowledge; Research, interpretation and presentation of history) and one new subdomain (Historical foundations of modern society). This last-mentioned subdomain rests on the idea that “The past is, therefore, a permanent dimension of the human consciousness, an inevitable component of institutions, values and other patterns of human society” (Hobsbawm 1997, 13) and it should help pupils to understand the historical origins of the major features, phenomena and processes in their close contemporary surrounding. The subdomain *Historical foundations of modern society* also refers to the certain guideposts defined within the historical thinking concept of ethical dimension, like already mentioned one that fosters the culture of remembrance and facing the sensitive issues from the past (Seixas & Morton 2013, 168). It also comprises the assessment of certain attitudes and values that should raise pupil’s awareness for the respect of cultural diversity, inclusion and multicultural nature of society. Several descriptors from this subdomain planned to be assessed on the basic level (for 80% of pupils and more) were particularly important for the structuring of new history curricula. The adequate examples to support forenamed assertions are following descriptors: IS.1.3.3 Pupils should understand and practice responsible attitude toward the cultural-historical heritage of own and other nations; IS.1.3.5 Pupils should identify elements of intercultural relations, and recognize the values of the society that nurtures these values; IS.1.3.6 Pupils compare the historical and contemporary context of the respect of human rights and actively participate in intercultural dialogue; IS.1.3.7 aims at conflict prevention by gaining historical knowledge, developing tolerance, skills of dialogue and sensibility for recognizing the causes and

the effects of conflicts (Istorija standardi 2015). The main challenge in the implementation of educational standards for history in secondary schools is how certain values and attitudes should be assessed. This general challenge has been already perceived by the experts in Council of Europe *Quality history education in 21st century principles and guidelines* manual (Principles and Guidelines 2018), but also in some academic researches (New Directions in Assessing Historical Thinking (Ercikan & Seixas 2015).

REFORMED SERBIAN HISTORY CURRICULA FOR SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Taking into consideration identified prerequisites for the reform of history curricula it is important to stress that improving and reshaping the educational frame in Serbia has certain distinctiveness. It originates from the recent historical flows and processes that were determined by the dissolution of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and the massive bloodshed that followed. Therefore, designing the new curricula in the post-conflict environment, where each reassessment of recent history belongs to the spectrum of controversial and sensitive issues, makes a great challenge. Having that in mind, and leaning on international experiences the process of reform of history curricula in Serbia was to some extent outlined by different recommendations of the Council of Europe, particularly the one on *History teaching in conflict and post-conflict areas*. According to this document, the post-conflict states are advised to invest in the capacity building of history teachers, their constant in-service training, as well as in a “new style of the curriculum”. Recommendation 20.6 of this document advises all states signatories to the European Cultural Convention to “address resistance to a new curriculum or pedagogy change where it exists as a result of deeper political issues”. Another one accentuates the role of “teachers, student teachers and students who want to support the process of change are essential resources.

Teachers should be at the core of curriculum development and resource designing to assist in those materials being age-appropriate and interesting for the students.” (Recommendations 1880 CoE 2009).

According to the already mentioned research on how practitioners in the Western Balkans see the current state of affairs and future developments in history education, within the project ePACT (Marić & Jovanović 2017), history teachers expressed some kind of confused and ambiguous visions of the most favorable history curricula. The research showed that history curricula in the Western Balkans are already very prescriptive, regarding the content. In spite, history teachers expressed a wish to get even more prescriptive curricula (36,1% opted for more prescriptive when it comes to content to be taught; 40,3% wants curriculum to be more regulatory in terms of methods and didactical approaches; 50,5%, and that percentage is the most noteworthy and perturbing, thinks that national history curriculum should be more directive in terms of interpretations (Marić & Jovanović 2017, 30). These results collide with another perspective articulated by the teachers in the same survey, which shows their aspiration to focus more on active learning and historical inquiry than traditional methods of teaching.

Thinking deeply about the results of this analysis it is puzzling what kind of history curricula would actually fit the imagined notion of teachers. Nevertheless, the newly reformed history curricula are structured in a less prescriptive manner and make a part of the complete educational platform consisted of various competences and educational standards. During 2018 and 2019 Institute for the development of education organized a team of experts, including teachers from secondary schools, which designed history curricula for secondary education. Following the common pattern, established for all school subjects, the reformed history curricula introduce some new approaches to teaching history. The traditionally used chronological model is combined with the thematic approach. Focus is put on those historical phenomena that correspond to Stradling’s “first order concepts”. It is important to emphasize that these historical phenomena are organized by the meth-

odological concept of synchrony. The first topic/theme introduced in the 1st grade curricula but implemented in history curricula for three (science and mathematics program) or four grades (general and socio-linguistic program) of learning history is titled *Basics of historical enquiry*. It introduces different aspects of methodology, underpinning some specific concepts of historical thinking in each grade. In the first grade, the focus is put on *evidence* as the concept of historical thinking (i.e. working with historical sources), and it makes a leitmotif which is present in each following grade. Looking at defined outcomes that should be achieved within the learning process during one school year, it is obvious that other concepts like *causation* or *continuity and change* are also enclosed within the history curricula (e.g. pupils would be able to analyze the cause-consequence concept and identify them on concrete examples). The second-grade history curricula emphasize the concept of *continuity and change*, but also instruct teachers to describe and practice elementary historical research and explain the construct of interpretation of the past (e.g. pupils would be able to: use basic terms and concepts of humanities and history in written or oral form; compare sources of different historical significance and estimate their relevance for the research, etc.). In the third grade, besides *evidence*, *causation* and *historical significance*, teachers should focus more on *historical (multiple) perspectives* exercising the didactical concept of *multiperspectivity*. Fourth grade, as the final within this cycle of education, deals with the historical content essential for understanding history and its role in constructing complex collective and individual identities, critical attitude toward contemporary social, political, cultural phenomena and processes with a historical dimension, also raising historical conciseness among pupils as a significant agent in shaping modern society. At age of 18 or 19 pupils become adults and fully responsible for their attitudes that lead to further societal actions. Other topics/themes address the state of different political, social and cultural phenomena within the defined historical timeframe (e.g. institutions, state, society, political and military affairs, everyday life, etc.).

The innovative approach to curricula is represented through the introduction of the selected historical phenomena belonging to the long-term processes or phenomena that belong to the “first order concepts”. Pupils who attend the general and socio-linguistic course in secondary education have four-year opportunity to explore different concepts of historical thinking within these processes and diverse exemplar historical phenomena. Besides historical contextualization and introduction of a diachronic model within this topic, curricula designers used the opportunity to include national history as an integral part of regional and world history at stages of learning where it wasn't present in the previous history curricula. For instance, history curricula for the first grade of secondary schools cover the chronological scope from prehistory to the end of ancient history, i.e., the historical period before the settlement of South Slavic people on the Balkan Peninsula and the beginning of what is understood by national history. The topic/theme of long-term processes was utilized as an adequate educational vehicle to overcome this chronological gap and cover the development of historical phenomena from the early stages of civilization to modern times.

The topic/theme (*Long term*) *historical phenomena* address historical issues with contemporary significance that are easily recognizable in everyday situations or milieu: *Migrations* – focus on the historical dimension, causes and consequences of migrations from the pre-historic times until today with particular focus on the largest migration waves including those related to the migration of Serbs (the first grade); *Myth, Legend and History as humanity* – elucidates the meaning and role of myths and legends in the past, with specific insight into modern political, ethnic, national or racial modern myths that initiated difficult and atrocious historical phenomena and processes. Very important component of this topic relates to drawing demarcation line between history and pseudo-history, between the reconstruction of the past following methodological principles and manipulation or misuse of the past (the second grade); *Communication - before and now* – instructs pupils to explore historical context and significance of communication in the

past, individual and collective/social necessity for establishing multifaceted communication (cultural, economic, political, scientific, etc.) with noteworthy aspect on intercultural relations, geopolitical and economic consequences and transformations, as well as ecological impact (the third grade); *The rights of individuals and groups – before and now* – raises awareness of pupils about the rights of individuals and social groups in different historical periods, with particular emphasis on the development of human rights from 19th century till today including minority rights, violation of human rights, discrimination, international mechanisms of prevention and protection etc. (the fourth grade). The open concept curricula allow teachers to choose the most suitable approach in dealing with each of the entitled phenomena in the classroom. However, pupils should analyze long-term phenomena from different perspectives implementing the concepts of historical thinking (historical significance, causation, continuity and change, evidence, historical perspectives and last but not least ethical dimension).

Following the thought that “History is supposed to be the enemy of facile generalizations, ill-founded stereotypes and lazy analogies” (Terry Haydn 2019, 23) then adequate and comprehensive implementation of historical thinking concepts within the framework outlined by competences in reformed history curricula in Serbia gives history teaching deep functional educational dimension that should help pupils to prepare for the life in a culturally diverse and inclusive democratic society.

REFORMED CURRICULA IN THE CLASSROOM

In 2019 the research was carried out by the master students of history at the Faculty of Philosophy in Belgrade as a mandatory part of their initial teacher training course. They were supposed to interview secondary school teachers about the new history curricula and their practical use in schools.

til today, there are five interviews with the teachers from schools located in different municipalities in Belgrade (The First Belgrade Gymnasium – Stari Grad; the Zemun Gymnasium – Zemun; the X Belgrade Gymnasium – Novi Beograd; the Mladenovac Gymnasium – Mladenovac; Savremena secondary school – Savski venac). A questionnaire was consisted out of eight following questions:

1. How do you evaluate the innovativeness of the new history curricula?
2. Underline the most significant differences in the structure and the content of the new curricula to the previous ones.
3. Which teaching methods and strategies do you use for presenting thematic principles in history teaching?
4. Which challenges have you been facing while achieving the wanted outcomes?
5. How do you use knowledge and skills pupils previously gained in primary school for achieving standards from all three levels?
6. Can you compare the experience with the pupils learning according to the new and old history curricula?
7. What are pupils' reactions to the new approaches and thematic history teaching?
8. To your opinion, which competences have you developed the most?

Analyzing the answers several common ideas are noticeable. The first one is concerning the innovativeness of the reform. The majority of the respondents answered negatively on this question and just one could not give this kind of evaluation. It is believed that the content itself has not changed, but the approach and principles to history teaching. One even stressed that innovativeness is strictly dependent on the teacher and his/her enthusiasm. According to these answers, it has brought to the conclusion that innovativeness is and should always be seen regarding solely the content of the curric-

ulum, but not as the innovative conceptual approach to the development of the historical thinking concepts in history teaching. This can be explained by the nature of the education system that the teachers were part of for a long period. The scope for introducing advanced teaching and learning approaches is also defined by the traditions and pedagogic approaches which prevailed when many of the teachers were undergoing their initial training and when they were experiencing their own history education. Changing the paradigm takes some time and more reliable results will be seen in the foreseeable future.

As for the constraints in applying new curricula, examinees gave almost identical responses. The main problem is considered to be the lack of a pupil's prior knowledge. The new structure and thematic approach anticipate certain standards already achieved through primary schooling. Unfortunately, as the respondents commented, a lot of pupils have problems with the basic historical elements, such as chronology and historical geography. With already crowded syllabuses and the number of hours of history teaching which the students receive per year, teachers have serious problems with fulfilling the knowledge gaps. Another problem that emerges is limited educational resources. More than half of the examined teachers complained about history textbooks. They find them inappropriate and confusing, although one of them made a comment in favor of the new curricula, that now the stress is removed from the textbooks to the learning process and both, pupils and teachers are supposed to look for other materials and sources of various forms. Some interviewed teachers mentioned the issue of technologically not well-equipped schools which really makes the new reform not so practicable and feasible to introduce into teaching. Therefore, they agreed that in order to secure the successful reform, the national or local education authorities need to provide adequate educational and technological resources.

52 | Contrary to the previous answers, on the questions to students' reactions to the new ways of learning and teaching, examinees responded completely differently. While one group of teachers insisted on general disinterest and

indifference among the pupils, the other noticed a positive change that the newly reformed syllabuses could offer. These teachers stressed that the enquiry-based learning combined with active learning (for example collecting oral history, debates, participating in simulations) and opportunities for independent learning was essential for developing critical skills and historical understanding and that the reformed curricula finally outlined.

The general impression after examining the interviews is that traditionally there has tended to be a certain reluctance among the more-experienced teachers, while the younger ones are more eager to see the advantages of the new approaches. Obstacles and challenges that the teachers are facing are very clear and concrete and they need to be solved in order to entirely introduce the new reform into practice. Having in mind that reform has recently ended, more reliable feedbacks are expected in the following years.

CONCLUSION

Through the conceptualization and structure of history education, state education policy plays a pivotal role in the creation of historical consciousness. Thus, the changes, such as redirecting pupil from a passive recipient of pre-digested knowledge to an active participant in the process of learning ready to dive into the past over different didactical strategies and concepts such as multiperspectivity develop historical thinking skills or accept cultural and any other diversity, are of the utmost importance.

The current reform of the school subject History within the alteration of the wider educational context in Serbia is comprehensive and substantial. The educational composite model consisted of competences, educational standards and curricula for the subject History shifts focus from the traditional perception of learning about the past to the innovative, at least for Serbia, approach that fosters historical thinking concepts and different didac-

tical paradigms. Developing historical consciousness and historical culture should enable new generations of pupils to grasp a sense of learning history. This approach should diminish the currently non-existent understanding of the importance of learning history and its role in general education.

The recent research conducted with history teachers has shown the significant gap between proclaimed educational framework, reality and expectations which are limited and influenced by different agents. On the macro level, it could easily be identified two opposed notions. One represents very powerful public discourse that criticizes public schooling attributing its political and ideological connotation. The other, existing in Serbia, as well as in some other countries, is experienced through heavy pressure of conservative social agents on education that is slowing down initiated reform processes. On the micro level, the lack of adequate in-service teacher training; communication breakdown between the state institutions in charge of education, i.e. policymakers and history teachers or their associations, makes another obstacle in understanding the nature of the reformed history education in Serbia. This situation could be one of the major reasons for the omission of the wider dissemination of innovative concepts and strategies in the classrooms. However, this gap could be overbridged with consequent and consistent promotion and implementation of adopted educational documents in the process of education as well as further in-service teacher training that addresses existing challenges.

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NOVI OBRAZOVNI KONCEPTI U REFORMISANOJ NASTAVI ISTORIJE U REPUBLICI SRBIJI

Sažetak:

U periodu između 2018. i 2020. godine izvedena je reforma programa za nastavni predmet istorija u srednjim školama. Osnovna ideja novog kurikulumu jeste promena koncepta učenja koji više ne bi trebalo da bude usmeren na sadržaje, već na obrazovne ishode i kompetencije. Prema planu, nove programe trebalo je oblikovati prema predmetnim i ključnim kompetencijama za celoživotno učenje, ali i prema kompetencijama za demokratsku kulturu (publikovao Savet Evrope 2016. godine). U ovom radu biće objašnjeno kako je već postojeći hronološki koncept nastave istorije uklopljen sa novim tematskim pristupom i na koji način takva kombinacija omogućava razvitak veština kritičkog i istorijskog mišljenja, kao i svih pomenutih kompetencija. Međutim, kako ova reforma ima za cilj poboljšanje same nastave, neophodno je proveriti kakve su posledice u praksi. Stoga, ovaj rad donosi i prve rezultate istraživanja koje se sporovodi sa nastavnicima istorije u srednjim školama po Srbiji sa željom da se ukaže na prednosti, ali i izazove sa kojima se susreće nastava istorije u srednjoškolskom obrazovanju.

Ključne reči: nastava istorije, programi, kompetencije, koncepti istorijskog mišljenja, demokratska kultura

Submitted: 28. VII 2020.

Reviewed: 28. VIII 2020.

Accepted: 29. IX 2020.