

Conceptions of education in the current curricular discussion: 20th annual conference of the Czech Pedagogical Society

The conference took place from 21st to 22nd March 2013 in Liberec. It was organized by the Department of Education and Psychology of Faculty of Sciences, Humanities and Education of Technical University in Liberec in cooperation with the Liberec centre of the Czech Pedagogical Society.

The conference was opened by the dean of the Faculty of Sciences, Humanities and Education of Technical University in Liberec, Miroslav Brzezina, who highlighted the importance of meetings of academics and also the necessity for transfer of knowledge and experience, which are the driving forces behind the development of academia in the Czech Republic. His opening was followed by a speech by Tomáš Čech, who revered the fact that Czech academics could meet this way for the 20th time already thank to the effort made by members of the Czech Pedagogical Society. The third speech was given by the head of the Department of Education and Psychology of the Faculty of Sciences, Humanities and Education of Technical University in Liberec, Tomáš Kasper, who appreciated the opportunity to organize such a conference in Liberec. The last to speak was the chairman of the Liberec centre of the Czech Pedagogical Society and the main organizer of the conference, Oto Dymokurský, who introduced the program of the conference.

The opening speeches were followed by four keynote speakers. Stanislav Štech presented a paper entitled *Concept of education in the current curricular reform*. He analyzed problems associated with the curricular reform in the Czech Republic that is represented by the implementation of Framework education programmes. He focused mainly on the lack of coherence between the curricular reform and the concept of education and its theoretical background as well as the concept of teaching profession itself. He also mentioned the issue of broad social discussion on the curricular reform, mainly its reflection by different participants in the educational process and the way education is presented by media. The following paper *Implementation of curricular reform must be accompanied by common understanding of its aims* by Jana Straková drew attention to the need for discussion about necessary changes in education. This discussion should encompass all those participating in education, i.e. researchers, teachers, parents, students, pupils and the representatives of the executive part of the educational system. The author regards the consensus on the need for changes in educational system

in the Czech Republic as a key requirement. This consensus should enable the participants to identify themselves with the aims of the curricular reform, which should lead to a much more efficient implementation of the proposed changes into practice. The third plenary speech was given by Tomáš Janík. In his paper *(Un)productive culture of teaching and learning as a result of a (non)reform?* he introduced observable changes that curricular reform has made possible since its start. He also pointed out that it was the pure formalistic understanding of the reform that made us forget what is essential in education – namely the teaching and learning in classrooms. He proposes to shift from curricular reform to productive culture of teaching and learning. The last plenary paper entitled *Strategy of educational policy of the Czech Republic until the year 2020* was presented by a representative of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, Michaela Kleňhová. As the title implies, the attention was focused on the presentation of the newly prepared strategy of educational policy. It also aimed to invite academics to debate over particular parts of the strategy at planned round tables.

Plenary speeches were followed by themed paper sessions. The themed session *Where the path leads – reflection on the curricular reform* provided a broad perspective on the conceptual aspects of the curricular reform – analysis of the concept of competence, of the concept of teacher standards and of the quality of pre-service teacher education. It also addressed issues concerning educational expectations in contemporary education and the concept of preschool education. Papers dealing with issues of educational content and outcomes were presented in the themed session *What can I do – educational contents and literacy*. The topics ranged from environmental education issues and civic competencies to partial aspects of physical and music education. There was a specific session dedicated to language competencies and literacy skills only – *Language as a building stone – language and reading literacy*. The papers focused on the concept of literacy skills in the context of the framework education programmes as well as on ways to help students develop them. The issue of development of skills of those who have to support literacy skills acquisition in education was also discussed.

The topic of pre-service education was presented in the session *Towards teaching – pre-service teacher education*. Numerous papers were dedicated to pre-school education, such as reflection of undergraduate studies by students themselves, international comparison of selected models of early childhood education and the role of faculty nursery schools in the future pre-school teachers education. Other papers focused on learners or areas of their

development in the context of elementary education. The issue of further forms of education was discussed in the themed session *School is not the end – informal and lifelong learning*. One group of papers focused on maintaining mental health by teachers. Another group focused on the contemporary approach to lifelong learning in the Czech Republic. Furthermore, one of the papers looked into informal education in school clubs and leisure time activities.

Reflection of curricular reform by teachers and pupils was given space in the session *Views from the blackboard, views from the school desks – how teachers and pupils perceive the curricular reform*. The papers offered a general view on the role of teachers in the ongoing implementation of the curricular reform and their opinions of the applied changes. Moreover, very specific issues from the field of language and science education were presented. The session *We cannot make it without family – cooperation between family and school* provided space for discussion on the role of families in education.

Conceptual issues of providing counselling services in schools and in counselling institutions were addressed in the session *Help in need – counselling services in schools*. The first two papers focused on the approach towards counselling services in schools. The following two papers focused on primary prevention in schools, in particular on its potential sources and the role of pre-service teacher education in this area. In the session entitled *Becoming a better person – development of pupils' personalities*, educational aspects related to the development of pupils' values, attitudes, and personalities were in the foreground.

The conference enabled almost sixty presenters and other forty listeners from among the professional public to discuss the current situation in education. The organizers of the conference saw another significant contribution of the conference: the involvement of organizing university students in the audience. It gave them an opportunity not only to become familiar with the contemporary knowledge of educational science and research, but also with the important figures of the academia.

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Methodological issues in schoolbook and educational media research

This year's conference of the *International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Schoolbooks* was held at Masaryk University in Brno (Czech Republic). The conference focused on research methods that are currently used in research on schoolbooks and other educational media. Conference organisers provided a platform for presenting reviews of methods currently used in schoolbook and educational media research, examples of successful application of traditional or innovative methodological approaches in schoolbook and educational media research, critical analyses of research methods applied in schoolbooks and educational media research, evaluation and quality criteria of schoolbooks, and elaboration of theoretical concepts, dimensions and categories which are methodologically relevant in schoolbook and educational media research.

Conference presentations were divided into six thematic sessions: historical content analysis, schoolbook analysis from a subject-related didactical perspective, linguistic and discourse analysis, evaluation research, research on the use of textbooks and research on the effects of textbooks. Majority of conference papers was thematically dedicated to the insight into historical schoolbook research, discourse analyses of textbooks and subject-specific analyses of schoolbooks (e.g. science textbooks, biology textbooks, geography textbooks, and German-as-a-second-language textbooks).

The conference also included several plenary presentations. For this report we chose two presentations that provide a convincing idea of the conference. In the opening presentation Peter Menck (University of Siegen) discussed preliminary deliberations about schoolbook research concerning its methodology. In textbook research a theoretical framework is needed which provides language and concepts for defining a research problem precisely. Suggestions for using a particular conceptual framework were proposed. Peter Menck also questioned research techniques and the issue of generalisation of results. Finally, he proposed what pedagogical perspectives in schoolbook research could look like on the examples of several conference participants' presentations.

In the closing presentation Kira Mahamud (National Distance Education, University of Madrid) talked about representativeness, contexts and textual

units which represent three basic methodological approaches in schoolbook research. Her methodological approach typically comprises three subsequent steps: (1) selection of analysed textbooks, (2) authorship of a textbook and (3) internal organization of a textbook. These steps should bring forward a rationale for studies of representative and relevant textbooks within their contexts of production and reception as well as a new conception of their content organized in textual units. The selection of manuals must include a number of criteria of representativeness. The combination of sources allows for an analysis of association or dissociation between texts and contexts, combination of textbooks leads to examination of inter-textual coherence or incoherence and the study of the structure of textbooks addresses the question of intra-textual (in)coherence. Such methodological approach enables researchers to analyse didactical quality of textbooks, to detect its connection to (possible) ideological influences and draw near the context of reception.

Generally speaking, the conference offered a deep and comprehensive insight into methods currently used in schoolbook and educational media research and it also served as a productive forum for almost 60 experts from the field of schoolbook research. The conference showed explicitly that textbook researchers use a wide array of methodological approaches, not only content analysis, which is a common presumption. Publication of selected conference papers is due to be published by Klinkardt Verlag in 2014 in Schoolbook Research Series. Next conference of the *International Society for Historical and Systematic Research on Schoolbooks* will be held from September 26 to 28, 2014, in Berlin. More information is available at <http://www.schulbuchgesellschaft.de>

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