

In this section, the editors of Pedagogická orientace aim to provide space for promotion of interesting Czech monographs that might be of interest internationally and might otherwise go unnoticed outside the Czech context. The editors selected seven monographs published in 2012 that represent coherent contributions to topical issues in educational research (and have a representative English summary).

Němec, J. (Ed.). (2012). *Research and education of socially disadvantaged pupils. Roma pupils, refugee children, theory, research, educational strategies.*

[Výzkum a edukace sociálně znevýhodněných žáků. Romští žáci, děti cizinců (uprchlíků), teorie, výzkum, edukační strategie]

Brno: Paido.

The monograph presents the research results of the Department of Social Pedagogy at the Faculty of Education, Masaryk University. The term socially disadvantaged is used for pupils growing up in a different social, cultural or linguistic background, e.g. pupils from minorities or immigrant pupils. Some of these pupils integrate into regular schools, others can face difficulties either due to their language dissimilarities or due to the family influence shaped by cultural differences demonstrated by different behaviour, values, lifestyle, the attitude to education etc. Pupils from families with a low social and economic status are more often endangered with negative social phenomena.

The book opens with a brief overview of social theories introducing a relatively wide variety of concepts describing and explaining the causes of social disadvantage. The overview is followed by a series of chapters on different aspects of education of socially disadvantaged pupils, such as educational barriers as experienced by Roma children, cognitive abilities in intercultural context, communication of pupils with a different mother tongue or the language construction of social reality.

In order not to present empirical findings only, the book also introduces interesting educational strategies indicating the ways we can work with the pupils. The education recommendations are supported by research findings, done e.g. within doctoral theses. The topics include applied drama, simulation games or philosophy for children.

The book thus presents an unusual insight into socially disadvantaged pupils' education and concentrates on topics which have not been sufficiently covered in Czech educational literature yet.

**Starý, K., Dvořák, D., Greger, D., & Duschinská, K. (2012).
*Professional development of teachers:
Professional support for student achievement.***

[Profesní rozvoj učitele: Podpora učitelů pro zlepšování výsledků žáků]

Praha: Karolinum.

The issue of teachers' professional development appears in professional educational literature relatively frequently but in the Czech context there are still few monographs available that would deal with the subject in its entirety. This is not an ambition of this book either. The publication was motivated by a rather dismal state of professional development of teachers in the Czech Republic and its aim is to point out its weaknesses, especially in the light of foreign experience.

The authors were led to the topic of teacher professional development by research focused on the wider concept of professional support of teachers' work. Various forms of support create suitable conditions for professional development to ensure ongoing professional growth. The concept of professional development comprises motivation, initiative, and activity of the teacher; simultaneously it enables us to consider various opportunities and incentives provided to the teachers.

The title and subtitle of the book are deliberately in certain tension. The concept of "development" emphasizes the internal and internalized goal, improvement and growth. On the contrary, the word "support" points to the need for external resources and suitable conditions. One is not possible without the other and both have the same goal – improving the education of children.

The authors can certainly expect agreement on the general statement that the purpose of teacher professional development is to improve students' educational outcomes. Problems occur when this assertion ought to be

proven. In our school environment, it is not very common to assess the actual impact of professional development activities. Moreover, what is missing almost entirely is the measurement of the impact of different forms of further teacher training on students' outcomes. Foreign experience shows that it is not easy at all and one of the aims of the book is to present such cases to Czech readers.

Based on the analysis of secondary and selected primary sources, the book would like to offer some recommendations in the conclusion about what should be emphasized more in teacher professional development and what forms of support would make it possible. The authors believe that the combination of external support together with teachers' sense of responsibility for their own professional development and transfer of their professional experience can improve the quality of Czech schools.

Dvořák, D. (2012). *From syllabi to standards: The development of curricular theory and practice.*

[Od osnov ke standardům: Proměny kurikulární teorie a praxe]

Praha: Charles University, Faculty of Education.

Curriculum is always both a political and a technical problem. This book outlines the complex co-evolution of curricular theory and policy in recent decades. The "pre-history" of the field of curriculum is summarised in the short opening chapter of the book. The second chapter provides an overview and evaluation of the terms related to the structure and quality of planned curriculum. This chapter may contribute to the establishment of a conceptual and terminological framework for the analysis and comparisons of curricular documents.

The third chapter tells the story of Western curricular theory and practice since the reform movement in the 1960s. It shows that recent trends in curricular theory have been influenced heavily by critical theory and post-modern thought. The curricular enquiry has stressed the political and social aspects of curriculum. The main feature of curriculum reconceptualization is a shift from focus on the development of curriculum to the concern for understanding curriculum in all its forms. Politicians, on the other hand, found the panacea in content and evaluation standards. This split between

curriculum theory and practice has negative effects on both the academic field and curricular reforms. Only recently, the traditional question of the optimal scope and sequence of subject matter has attracted the interest of academics again. That may help to overcome the gap between curricular theorists, educational administrators and the developers of learning (or e-learning) materials.

In the Czech Republic, however, the situation is different. The mandatory school-based curriculum development is a key feature of recent reforms of the Czech educational system while the evaluation standards and national monitoring of educational achievement had been missing until recent years. All pre-primary, primary and secondary schools have prepared their own school curricula recently. Nevertheless, little is known about the quality of these school curricula. We know about the relationship between the planned curriculum described in the curricular projects and the implemented curriculum that pupils experience in the classrooms even less.

The fourth chapter portrays several research methods that are used in the analysis and evaluation of the curricular documents. Those methods were used to analyse segments of recent Czech curricula/syllabi. The results revealed the idiosyncrasies that remain relatively stable features of the Czech school curricula. The last chapter shows that neo-institutionalism and public choice theory may explain the results of the analysis.

**Šed'ová, K., Švaříček, R., & Šalamounová, Z. (2012).
*Communication in classroom.***

[Komunikace ve školní třídě]

Praha: Portál.

The aim of this monograph is to examine educational communication between teachers and pupils in Czech secondary schools. The monograph is based on empirical research done by the authors, who observed and video-recorded 16 different teachers teaching real classes. In-depth interviews with the teachers as well as pupil questionnaires were used as supplementary data collection methods.

The study resulted in the following conclusions:

Educational communication is strongly dominated by teachers. Their talking time amounts to three quarters of the overall talking time. Pupils have their say relatively often, yet their responses are very short. Classroom communication is interactive, which means that the communication participants take turns. However, the structure of classroom communication is largely pre-defined. The vast majority of communication sequences are initiated by the teacher, then followed by the pupil's response, and finished by the teacher's feedback (I-R-F structure). There are communication sequences which are initiated by pupils, yet their content is usually only related to organisational matters. Teachers react to comments and questions related to the subject matters both positively and negatively. Pupils' questions which propose a different understanding of the subject matter from the teacher's one are usually commented on negatively.

Teachers tend to ask closed-ended questions of lower cognitive order. By doing so, they test the factual knowledge that pupils should learn by heart. However, teachers' questions are very important as they directly influence the pupils' learning experience. This is caused by the fact that the level of cognitive demand of pupils' responses corresponds to the level of teachers' questions. While pupils attempt to answer teachers' questions correctly, they develop a number of strategies that allow them to do so even without knowing the necessary information.

The teacher's feedback does not provide enough evaluating information; its role is to steer communication rather than comment on pupils' performances. Pupils' answers are only distinguished as either correct or incorrect, and pupils' answers to open-ended questions are not evaluated at all. Teachers are very interested in developing a dialogue with pupils. Teachers believe that it is an optimal method which guarantees effective teaching. Dialogical forms that appear in communication suffer from a lack of emphasis being placed on rational argumentation. Also, communication forms are affected by the presence of semantic noise (i.e. a situation where teachers and pupils use the same terms but give them different meanings). Teachers use communication to control their relationships with pupils. The most common configuration for these relationships involves power play where the teacher is authoritarian and pupils feel distanced from the teacher's request. A distinct symbiosis exists between power play and meticulous preservation of the I-R-F structure.

Pešková, K. (2012). *Visuals for teaching about German speaking countries in German as a foreign language textbooks.*

[Vizuální prostředky pro výuku reálií v učebnicích němčiny]

Brno: Masaryk University.

The book addresses the topic of visuals for teaching about German speaking countries in German as a foreign language textbooks. Visuals can be considered cultural products which present a perspective on the target culture. However, there are some general features which visuals should possess to make learning from textbooks effective. Visuals can be categorized into different types, they can present various sociocultural contents and possess various functions. Based on some theoretical concepts, empirical findings and our own investigations, the book aims to provide a description of selected features of visuals for teaching about German speaking countries in German textbooks.

Theoretical background of the topic is discussed, namely selected curriculum theories, basic terms of the textbook theory, visuals and visual information processing, and context of teaching German at lower secondary schools in terms of teaching culture.

The book describes two interrelated studies – a quantitative and a qualitative analysis. The first one investigates what types, functions and contents of visuals for teaching about German speaking countries are to be identified in German language textbooks used in Czech lower secondary schools. The second one explores how teachers evaluate visuals for teaching about German speaking countries in the textbook they use, which brings another (more practical) perspective to the selected topic.

The book closes with several recommendations for textbook design which build on both the theoretical background introduced and the empirical findings.

Janko, T. (2012). *Visuals in geography textbooks as means of didactic transformation.*

[Nonverbální prvky v učebnicích zeměpisu jako nástroj didaktické transformace]

Brno: Masaryk University.

The book addresses the issue of visuals in geography textbooks and their evaluation with regard to their potential for supporting pupils' understanding. It opens with a brief historical overview of development of visuals in textbooks. The principle of clarity – one of the basic didactic principles – and visual literacy are also addressed. Several theoretical approaches to visuals in textbooks are discussed – their use for evaluation of didactic quality of a textbook, their use for transformation and presentation of educational content, Dewey's concept of psychologizing the subject matter, and the concept of content representations.

Two interconnected empirical studies are described. In the first study, a comparative analysis of Czech lower secondary geography textbooks according to the type and qualities of visuals is presented. It is shown that pictorial visuals are dominant in the analysed textbooks. The visuals in textbooks differ in the level of abstractness and also in the degree of aptness of the caption. The second study aims to investigate pupils' evaluation of the qualities of visuals as well as the learning processes when pupils interact with visuals. The findings suggest that pupils judge more realistic items more positively. On the other hand, pupils express reservations when commenting on items that portray objects and phenomena with abstract symbols or in an infantile way.

The research study brings a number of impulses for further research. More detailed findings about what qualities of visuals pupils notice and what the nature of pupils' learning processes when interacting with visuals is would allow us to design such visuals that would function as didactic means more effectively.

Kostková, K. (2012). *The development of intercultural communicative competence.*

[Rozvoj interkulturní komunikační kompetence]

Brno: Masaryk University.

Living in the continuously changing multicultural world, it is important to realize that it brings new demands into many areas of human existence. In education, they are often related to the key agent in any educational change, the teacher. The book, thus, deals with development and assessment of intercultural communicative competence (ICC) in student teachers of English language. The book is divided into two parts.

The first part introduces the conceptual positions and relevant terminology. The second chapter discusses theoretical and methodological foundations. Relationship between culture and language is viewed from the perspective of hermeneutic philosophy. Consequently, specifics of language use within various social contexts are reflected in the linguistic and didactic foundations through capturing the essential milestones of the communicative competence development. The third chapter deals with the topic of intercultural education and its key aim within the foreign language teaching and learning, i.e. ICC. ICC is conceptualized, including its dimensions: awareness, attitudes, knowledge, skills and foreign language communicative competence. Finally, didactic aspects, i.e. ICC development and assessment, are presented.

The second part of the book presents two research studies. The fifth chapter presents an analysis of school level curricular documents, i.e. *school educational programmes*. Content analysis of expected outcomes (aims) uncovers their focus on various ICC dimensions. Its findings are by no means optimistic. The sixth chapter presents a case study investigating whether students' ICC developed during a university study subject (*Intercultural Communicative Competence*), and if so, in which dimensions and to what extent. Quantitative (YOGA Form) as well as qualitative (focus groups) techniques were used to collect and analyze data. The research findings showed statistically significant development in the dimensions of knowledge and skills, and statistically insignificant development in the dimensions of awareness and attitudes.