

EUROPEAN DIMENSION IN EDUCATION

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Abstract: *This chapter focuses on the issue of European dimension in education which, among others, represents an area of study of the field of comparative pedagogy. The European dimension is at present understood as one of the qualities of modern education in Europe. In this paper it is attempted to indicate an answer to the question what is to be understood under the notion of European dimension in education (chapter 1). Further it is demonstrated that the idea of European dimension is put into effect by a number of practical activities and programmes regarding exchanges of students and teachers, school partnerships, foreign language learning etc. (chapter 2). The key moment seems to be the relationship between the European dimension and the content of school education – establishing of European topics into school curricula (chapter 3). The European dimension thus becomes a “commission” for teachers (chapter 4), introduction of which may face a number of problems.*

1. What is European dimension in education

In literature the European dimension is understood as “*a principle present in education system enhancing understanding of wider European context and educational perspectives, opening horizons of global thinking and intercultural understanding*” (Walterová, Ježková, 1999, s. 26). It involves broadening of perspective, as eloquently expressed in a quotation by V. Havel: “*Sooner or later the Europeans will have to perceive Europe as their homeland, though of a special kind. Or as a common homeland of their homelands.*” Broadening of perspective is apparent in a motto of one of the European projects: “*From identities in Europe to a European identity*”, on which the Faculty of Education MU Brno has been cooperating (Seebauer, Helus, Koliadis, 2004).

As R. Seebauer mentions (2002), the European dimension includes both a dimension of cognition (knowledge of Europe) and a dimension of affection (relationship, attitude, experience and Europe). Rather than in a narrow sense (historical and political context, activities of a society etc.) it is necessary to define the European dimension in a wider sense, which also includes the following aspects: anthropological-existential, cultural, cognitive, emancipation, participation and effective, qualitative, economic, irenic, social, egalitarian, communicative, as well as the aspects of protection, mobility and security (see Seebauer 2002).

2. European activities in the field of education

European cooperation in education has had only a short history. At the beginning of the fifties last century the situation had developed to the point where beside a discussion on mutual recognition of acquired qualification, measures were being prepared to support this cooperation financially. The process of European cooperation in education took its final form in a resolution from 1986, when COMETT and ERASMUS were the first programmes implemented with a financial effect. Since then educational establishments of member states and partly of candidate states have been getting involved in various programmes and schemes of EU and have been taking part in many thematic initiatives (see Holz, Janík, 2004).

2.1 European dimension and programme SOCRATES

There have been efforts for an integration of **European dimension** in education at latest since 1992 ratification of the Maastricht Treaty on European Union. The European dimension

in education is a notion which is extensively discussed, however no practical measures have been proposed for its implementation at preschool, elementary, high school and university level. From the articles 126 and 127 of the Maastricht Treaty it is apparent that the evaluation of European dimension in education includes these aspects:

- promotion of foreign language learning of member and candidate states
- encouragement of student and teacher mobility
- help to acquire recognition of qualification and study programmes
- promotion of cooperation among education establishments
- exchange of information and experience of common problems within educational systems of member states
- promotion of exchange programmes for students and social-pedagogy workers
- encouragement of access to education and part-time study

Since 1996 the programme SOCRATES has been assisting the implementation of the above given objectives. It consists of particular programmes adopted for different target groups. The successfully completed programme SOCRATES is followed by a programme SOCRATES II (2000 – 2006), which includes eight action programmes:

- COMENIUS (school education)
- ERASMUS (higher education)
- GRUNDTVIG (adult education)
- LINGUA (learning and teaching of European languages)
- MINERVA (information and communication technologies in education)
- OBSERVATION AND INNOVATION (issues relating to education systems and policies)
- JOINT ACTIONS
- ACCOMPANYING MEASURES

Information on projects may be obtained in information centres EU – e.g. European Information Centre UK, Mánesova 75, Praha 2; or in SOCRATES OFFICE, U Lužického semináře 13, 118 00 Praha 1. It is also worth to visit the website: <http://www.socrates.cz>

2.2 European dimension and programme SOCRATES COMENIUS

For elementary school teachers there is an interesting programme COMENIUS, objective of which is to promote European dimension in education, language learning and multicultural education. This programme is also further divided (see <http://www.socrates.cz>)

- COMENIUS I focuses on school partnership (school projects, language programmes, school development programmes)
- COMENIUS II offers opportunities for further training of school education staff (transnational cooperation projects, mobility actions)
- COMENIUS III promotes creation of thematic networks (school partnership, lifelong education projects).

Schools are provided with a possibility to set up projects within the programme COMENIUS and gain financial means for their “European activities”.

Excursus 1: Topics of some COMENIUS projects

Learning about pupils' lives in other European countries.

Festivities and traditional activities.

Our town – a town in Europe.

Kommunikation in Europa durch Spielen.

The Cultural Heritage of the Participating Schools.

Holidays – National Traditions.

Together in Europe.

My world – your world – communication with pictures.

Spiele im Jahr, Trachten und Traditionen, Sportfernwettkampf.

Let's go Euro.

Children in Europe get to know each other through correspondence.

Customs and Traditions in our Grandparents' days.

Our European study.

From promotional materials of the COMENIUS programme

2.3 European Schools

The European Union is extending the network of so called European schools, as is further shown on an example of Brno and Vienna.

Excursus 2: European Primary School Brno

Since the academic year 2002 there has been operating a European Primary School Brno (Čejkovická 10, Brno Vinohrady), which provides education for children from abroad in their mother tongue, i.e. mainly English. It is aimed at children of foreign experts, investors and businesspeople staying in Brno. There are children of many nationalities, e.g. from Italy, New Zealand, India, Vietnam, Austria, USA, Canada, Iraq and Libya.

The school is divided into two sections: Czech and international. Not only parents of foreign, but also of bilingual and Czech children are interested in the project. Czech is taught as a foreign language. Music, art and physical education classes are mixed in order to provide contact with Czech pupils.

At the second level there is a subject called European studies which was developed in cooperation with foreign experts and it integrates topics from biology, history, geography and art. Also, education to democracy is taught, based on a study of social models in past and nowadays which involves training of critical thinking.

The project of teaching and learning in international classes was set up in cooperation with foreign experts according to the Research Institute of Education requirements to match our educational model. It was established on 20th June 2000, when the Town Council of Brno approved of the financial support for the experiment European Primary School.

From: <http://www.ezscejkovicka.brno.indos.cz>

Excursus 3: European High School Vienna

European Modelle School presents an implementation of the concept of *Vienna Bilingual Schooling* in the field of education from a nursery school to school-leaving exams.

For multilingual students it is necessary to offer education which guarantees basic education corresponding with Austrian study programmes for grammar schools or Hungarian, Czech or Slovak study programmes and at the same time it provides an opportunity to acquire knowledge of a second or third language.

“European High School” Vienna puts great emphasis on:

- a) following national study programmes (national studies);
- b) reinforcement of language teaching (foreign languages, European studies, creative studies, sports, optional German);
- c) European dimension (European studies).

Lessons of subjects labelled as *national studies* are in accordance with study programmes of the involved countries and are provided by Austrian, Czech, Slovak or Hungarian teachers in their mother tongues. *Sport education* in extent of three classes is at the moment provided by a team composed of two cooperating teachers – one Austrian and the other from one of the neighbouring countries. *Language teaching* is reinforced by English as a “first spoken foreign language” with four lessons a week in the fifth class and three lessons from sixth to eighth class. The aim in the field of *European studies* is natural acquisition of English as a teaching language and six lessons are provided in the fifth, sixth and seventh class and seven classes per week in the eighth class. Within the European studies stress is put also on European awareness building in the following aspects:

- a) historical fundamentals,
- b) geographical and environmental context,
- c) culture and arts.

The classes are, if possible, composed in such a way that there is a half of pupils who live near the school and whose mother tongue is German. Mother tongue of the other half is Slovak, Czech or Hungarian. These are pupils who live either in Vienna or in border regions (80-100 km). Children from the three neighbouring countries can be accommodated in student halls of residence. European High School opened to former candidate countries (Czech Republic, Slovak Republic, Hungary) earlier than Europe itself. Thanks to this fact, “education for Europe” gained a lead. Visitors of the school can see for themselves that EHS has taken a new shape having changed from the original bilingual to multilingual form.

In 2003 in 17 classes there were 418 pupils of 22 nationalities speaking 18 mother tongues and 70 teachers including native speakers from 11 countries. Five days a week there are afternoon activities for pupils. EHS is at the same time a practice school for Vienna pedagogical academies preparing future teachers. Cooperation with partner “gymnasium” (a kind of grammar school) in Bratislava, Brno and Győr is also intensive.

The key concepts of European High School worth mentioning would be e.g. social learning, promotion of democratic awareness (pupil parliament), counselling for pupils, new teaching methods (team learning, project-based education, open learning, heterogeneous learning, integration classes) and European dimension. The school conveys an impression of a cultural fair where rich cultural exchange is taking place. That enables the children develop understanding of coexistence and forms basis for European links. The school declares its Europeanism at first hand in its name. However, if we want to list its features and profile we may as well use adjectives such as *multicultural*, *multilingual* or *open*.

From: www.emsneustiftgasse.at

See also: Seebauer, Janik (2004) and Seebauer (2004)

2.4 Foreign language teaching as a contribution to European dimension

As apparent from the above, foreign languages play a key role in the issue of European dimension. Foreign language learning is at the moment accompanied by a number of slogans such as: *Europe of languages, language diversity, bilingualism, multilingualism, plurilingualism* etc. Educational politics also stresses the importance of foreign language teaching – see e.g. Bílá kniha (White Book) (2001) or Framework Educational Programmes for Primary Education (2004).

E. Walterová (1998/99) points to the fact that number of lessons of foreign language in EU is approximately the same as number of lessons of mother tongue and the first compulsory language is typically English.

The conception of foreign language teaching in our country is undergoing substantial changes. The idea that every European should master his/her mother tongue and two more languages of EU raises an issue how to achieve this aim. In the Czech Republic there is the first compulsory language for all pupils from 4th to 9th class (3 classes a week), in 7th to 9th classes pupils opt for one more compulsory language, taught minimum 6 classes a week (totally). There is a condition that one of these languages is always English.

In contemporary foreign language teaching there is an apparent trend to the communicative concept. Further the trend is to include intercultural dimension (life and institutions, history, social and political life, culture, arts, traditions) and media skills (internet, text handling skills). At the level of particular innovations in foreign language teaching there are also represented the following concepts and topics: early foreign language teaching, CLIL (Content and Learning Integrated Learning – i.e. non-language subjects taught in a foreign language – e.g. geography taught in English), European language portfolio, European language passport etc.

The following table displays changes in number of pupils studying particular languages in the Czech Republic. The recent dominance of English as a main foreign language is apparent.

language	1991/92	1994/95	1997/98	2000/01	2001/02	2002/03
English	263 180	251 144	370 743	432 920	456 423	477 241
German	356 738	315 632	366 050	298 285	274 759	247 035
Russian	30 599	1 484	735	1 035	1 683	1 953

A. Brychová (2004) quotes opinions of our leading experts on why the plurality of foreign languages is not flourishing in our country. Marie Fenclová states: *“The interests of global market are in contradiction with motivation to foreign language learning as a consequence of business correspondence written in English also with companies regionally belonging to francophone or hispanophone area.”* Leoš Houska writes: *“... Nowadays it is indisputable that English is LINGUA FRANCA without which our access to Europe is inconceivable. However, we must recognize the fact that our longest border is shared with German-speaking countries and that historically and economically our country has links with France and Russia.”*

3. European Dimension and Curriculum

How is the issue of European dimension dealt with in Czech educational documents? In *Standard of Primary Education* and educational programmes based on it such as *Obecná škola* (a specific type of primary school), *Primary School* and *National School* the topic of European dimension is not considered very much. There is a different situation in the Framework Educational Programmes for Primary Education (FEP PE). This curriculum document acknowledges European dimension as one of its priorities in education. Orientation to common future in Europe is apparent and there has been an evolution from learning “about Europe“ to “learning from Europe and for Europe“ (see Walterova 1998/99). The topic of “Europe“ has recently been understood in a more complex way. In FEP PE it regards a so called cross section topic, an integrating principle present across the curriculum. European dimension is represented in a number of subjects (history, geography, foreign languages, civics), however the topic extends beyond these subjects and thus seems to be a suitable topic for the implementation of inter-subject relationships.

Excursus 4: European dimension in Framework Educational Programme for Primary Education

In FEP PE the following statements concerning European dimension can be found

“A cross section topic Education for Global and European Thinking puts emphasis on education through the European dimension, which promotes global thinking and international understanding... It develops the awareness of European identity with the respect of national identity... It enhances traditional European values in thinking and conduct of pupils. e.g. humanism, free human will, ethics, enforcing the law and personal responsibility together with rational, critical thinking and creativity“ (FEP PE, 2004, p. 85-86).

What topics associated with European dimension are included in FEP PE?

“1. We are interested in Europe and the world – family stories, experience from Europe and the world; places, events and artefacts in neighbourhood relating to Europe and the world; our neighbours in Europe; life of children in different countries; folk literature, customs and traditions of European nations.

2. We are discovering Europe and the world – our homeland and Europe,; European countries, Europe and the world; International encounters; state and European symbols; the Day of Europe; life of Europeans and lifestyle in European families; lifestyle and education of young Europeans.

3. Periods: We are Europeans – roots and sources of European civilisation; major landmarks of European history; European integration; institutions of EU and their functioning; four liberties and their impact on a life of an individual; what unites and divides Europe; international organisations and their contribution to solving problems of children and youth“ (FEP PE, 2004, p.87)

From FEP PE (2004)

How do school textbooks approach the idea of European dimension? A brief historical excursus (5) provides evidence of the fact that before 1989 the “European dimension“ was presented as a contradiction between “us“ and “the others“.

Excursus 5: From a textbook of national history and geography before 1989



A textbook of national history and geography for the fourth class of primary school (1979) contains this map where Europe is divided into a socialistic and a capitalistic camp (see the bold border with the Federal Republic of Germany and Austria).



A photo from a geography textbook for the sixth class of primary school (1981) points to the problem of unemployment in the Federal Republic of Germany. There is a caption below saying: “In all capitalistic countries there is high unemployment. Youth in FRG demonstrate against unemployment under the slogan Youth without jobs, state without future“.

In contemporary national history and geography textbooks (excursus 6) Europe is presented as an economic-political establishment located in a particular geographic area. Reference to EU appears also in national history and geography and civics textbooks etc. In most books there is an explanation about integration processes, functioning of the European Union, current exchange rate of Euro etc.

Excursus 6: From textbooks of national history and geography after 1989



In contemporary textbooks of national history and geography (2001, 2003) European symbols are presented (Euro, the flag of EU, map of EU etc.).



These pictures accompany written text and illustrate what the European Union is, how it works, integration processes taking place etc.

4. European Dimension as a Commission for Teachers?

Now it is the time to ask a question who will implement the idea of European dimension in education? Is the European dimension a commission for teachers? It seems to be so. The requirements imposed on teachers in this aspect are substantial as apparent from the following list of tasks that a teacher should carry out in Europe and for Europe:

- They should spread knowledge that contributes to the development of European awareness, not only inform pupils about European symbols (flags, anthems, Euro etc.). European identity must be also encouraged by practical experience.
- They should initiate cooperation and communication at all levels of education and get involved in the European school network.
- They should prepare young generation for a responsible, peaceful and emancipated life in Europe that will have high qualitative and quantitative standard for all citizens.
- They should try and eliminate global differences between the North and South, East and West by means of education and corresponding methodology and materials, by the integration of European topics into various contexts etc.
- As we suppose that the level of education in our society will improve, teachers should encourage pupils to learn how to learn independently and encourage lifelong education.
- They should pay attention to how they convey basic values and norms.
- Teachers should not replace their national thinking by supranational ideas but broaden it to the supranational perspective
- Although they are not foreign language teachers, they should encourage pupils to communicate in one or better in two foreign languages. This requirement is formulated in the Maastricht Treaty as an essential condition for removing communication barriers and thus improvement of understanding in Europe.
- Teachers should deal with the topics which are interesting for children and youth in order to spread knowledge of Europe and lead to understanding of integration processes.

5. What problems can European dimension encounter?

The answer to the question how teachers are to fulfil the above mentioned requirements is usually left to themselves. They have no choice but to handle, beside others, also the following problems (from Holz, Janík, 2004):

- Talking about Europe, we experience multidimensional space. To define Europe is difficult due to its complexity and it presents one of the great difficulties in teaching. On the other hand, if there is not one “correct“ and “absolute“ definition of Europe, teachers are offered a chance to work with the concept of Europe in the context of just studied topic and, if possible, across taught subjects.
- The complexity of the topic of “Europe“ presents yet another problem. For most of us the European dimension is not simple to be understood as we have not experienced it in desirable extend. It is difficult to choose from the huge bulk of teaching material about Europe the content that is prior and important for teaching specific groups of pupils.
- Rapid development of Europe requires continuous update of knowledge on Europe in order to confront pupils with the current situation of European integration processes. This update seems to represent a considerable problem. It proves that a number of teachers at the advanced age and after years of practice are not able to acquire this new knowledge and correspondingly mediate it.
- Diversity of attitudes to European integration processes leads to a diversity in target visions of common life in Europe. That is why it is necessary to create common basis of values and norms that should be shared in pedagogical thinking and conduct of teachers.
- As well as the aims of integration processes, the expectations associated with them are understood differently by different groups of people. And so people can also experience disappointment that undermines their openness and motivation. In this context it should be taken into consideration that not only rational “political“ education is at stake but also emotions and empathy.

6. Conclusion

The requirement to promote the topic of Europe as a curricular content, integrate it into textbooks, teacher education and all areas of politics, economy and law presents a demanding task for future. Establishing of European identity is based on growing understanding of processes of European integration. In education the aim is to initiate such teaching processes that would contribute to critical thinking about difficulties and obstacles as a challenge for the common development of Europe. The implementation of the European idea is inconceivable without participation, responsibility and investments from all people involved.

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