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Civics education's recovery in Czech secondary schools after 1989

Introduction

The contribution deals with the historical progress of a school subject called civics/civic education/basics of social sciences (in the text referred to as civics) in secondary schools in the Czech Republic and its recovery after 1989. It shortly refers to the transformation of the subject in the school curriculum during socialism and after 1990. The contribution also briefly outlines a theory of philosophy in the Czech curriculum in the context of civics.¹

The aim of the text is to describe the historical and contemporary development of one of the key subject of school education in the Czech state and in the context of philosophy as one of the sub-disciplines of the subject called civics. For this purpose, the text is divided into four main parts. The first part describes the origin and development of the subject (History of civics), the next part deals with the transformation of the subject in the period of socialism (see Transformation of the subject's curriculum since the era of socialism), the renewal of its concept based on democratic values after 1989 (Recovery and transformation after 1989) and the subject situation until 1995 (The situation of the curriculum in 1990–1995), including the distribution in each school

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year and the hourly allowance. The third main section describes the subject's textbooks issue and precursors to the current curriculum documents (see parts Textbooks for Basics of Social Sciences 1990–1995 and Predecessors of the current curriculum). The last main part is devoted to the current state (see Present) and role of philosophy in curriculum and education (The role of philosophy in the curriculum), and more detailed and elaborated information of this character will be included in the author's dissertation thesis.

History of civics

In this chapter, the historical development of the subject itself will be briefly outlined, first in elementary schools since this subject was not introduced in secondary (grammar) schools, and its changing character during the 20th century.

The development of civic education/basics of social sciences more or less copies the development of our country. However, its roots date long before the establishment of the independent Czechoslovak state in 1918. The need to educate in the field of society, ethics or citizenship was already anchored in the *Great Didactics* written by Jan Amos Comenius, who emphasized the need for knowledge, and religious and moral education. The first modern point of view on civic education penetrated school policy during the reign of Maria Theresa. At that time, however, no such subject existed; related moral education was part of religion [Staněk 2007]. During the 19th and 20th centuries, social and political ideology were reflected in civic education content. At the time of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, emphasis was placed on patriotism, after the establishment of Czechoslovakia on democracy, in the period of Nazism and Communism, there was pressure to maintain its distinctiveness, with the fact that education was centralized, nationalized and subjected to the needs of the Communist Party, which was reflected, for example, in changes in the length of compulsory school attendance [Vaničková 2017]. All changes and reforms were driven primarily by the situation in administration or politics, not by an effort to innovate the education system. It is appropriate to mention the *Říšský zákon školský (Reich Education Act)* from 1869, which, for the first time, said essential content elements, such as the homeland and its constitution, which are to be emphasized in education, but so far as a part of other school subjects. An interesting fact is that a subject called homeland and constitution studies was taught in teachers' institutes for future male teachers. In contrast, no such subject was taught in institutions for female teachers. As a result, after the outbreak of World War I, skilled forces went into military service and were replaced by powers with much less experience [Staněk 2007].

After the proclamation of the independent Czechoslovak state, new citizens were needed – republicans, who were now supposed to participate actively in building a democratic society. The representatives of the new state knew very well how crucial targeted citizenship education is, because that is the only way to positively affect culture and all social events by citizens. The need for citizenship education and its urgency is emphasized in the document *Výnos ministerstva školství a národní osvěty (Decree of the Ministry of Education and National Enlightenment) of January 15, 1919*,

No. 3303 *O výchovném významu naší doby* (*About the Educational Significance of Our Time*), a document that for the first time speaks of citizenship education as a school subject [Staněk 2007]. The year 1922 became crucial for the subject, because in this year it was introduced by the so-called "malý školský zákon" (*small education act*) as a separate and compulsory subject in schools, where it began to be taught from September 1923 under the name *Občanská nauka a výchova* (*Civics and Education*). At that time, however, it was not taught in secondary schools or grammar schools, where its topics were included such as geography, introduction to philosophy and history. The content is the basic knowledge about the newly established state, about state forms and establishments, it should lead to an understanding of civil rights and duties, democracy, tolerance, to love of the nation, but also to love and respect in general.

The content was introduced into the new curriculum divided into three levels according to the age of the pupils. The lower level was intended for pupils of the 1st up to 3rd school year and was focused most practically. An important element was teaching by example, with older pupils being to set an example for younger pupils, e.g. through discussions. The curriculum included topics like school, village, surroundings and home. For the 4th and 5th school year, the curriculum for the middle grade was determined, the main goal was to lay the foundations for the development of a noble and direct nature. At this stage, inter-subject relations with homeland studies could be used, specifically the curriculum about home and homeland, as well as walks in nature and local businesses and institutions. The upper-level curriculum was designed for the 6th to 8th school years, when individuals' personal and social aspects of individuals were developed. That is, virtues were implanted in them, introduced into social life, and emphasized the education of a citizen of a democratic republic. In all grades, civics and education were given a two-hour grant, which testifies to the importance that was attributed to the subject [Staněk 2007].

In era of the state the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia the main feature of the curriculum was that everything that would contradict the newly established state system had to be omitted, and at the end of this period the subject was completely cancelled and replaced by the German language lessons.

After the war, the whole school system had to be cleansed of fascism and provided to as many people as possible. The year 1948 can be described as another important milestone. Not only the subject was reintroduced as a compulsory subject and renamed, but also its educational content changed, in favor of the Leninist-Marxist ideology to which it was once subordinated. In secondary schools it was taught in all grades – in the first two years 1 hour per week, in the remaining two years 2 hours a week. High school students should have been systematically instructed about cooperation, even within various physical education and sports organisations (e.g. *Junák, Sokol*). Furthermore, they should have been instructed about the class struggle, nationalization, changes in agriculture, etc. The aim, especially since the 1950s, was to educate socialist all-round developed citizens. *Školský zákon* (*Education Act*) from 1953 changed the school system – general education schools were introduced and, as a result, the curriculum was prepared, the content served, among other things, for ideologically political and moral education [Staněk 2007].

Since 1960, when the new socialist constitution was issued, education was definitively subordinated to the ideology and the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia. This meant educating pupils to patriotism and the joy of building communism. Of all the school subjects, Marxist ideology hit citizenship education the hardest. Thus, throughout the period of socialism, that is, until 1989, civic education teachers should have become the “extension arm of the regime” and the subject itself served as an important link in implementing communist education. This feature practically did not change until 1989.

Transformation of the subject’s curriculum since the era of socialism

The character of the subject changed during the times of socialism. At that time, it served as a means of indoctrination. Through civics, society should have learned how to behave in a proper socialist society. The curriculum was based primarily on the philosophical conception of Marxism-Leninism, historical and dialectical materialism. Education to discipline, patriotism, will, and relationship to work became the essential components of socialist moral education [Jůva 1980].

In the case of the 1978 curriculum, grammar schools and secondary vocational schools did not differ, nor did the number of hours per week [*Učební osnovy pro gymnázia, odborné a střední odborné školy*: Občanská nauka 1984]. The educational content in the first year was focused on socialist society, the political functioning of Czechoslovakia, the Communist Party, the planned economy and other topics that we could call political science. In the second year, the content was devoted to law, morality, psychological issues such as behavior and experience, the functioning of the family, relationships in the workplace and other groups, the characteristics of a person. The third year was more or less economical – class struggle, productive forces and relations, capitalism, building a socialist society. In the last year, philosophy came into play, which was explicitly focused on the struggle of materialism with idealism, the works of Marx, Lenin and Engels, Marxist-Leninist philosophy and associated theories and criticism of religion. In addition, teachers had extra classes in each year where they could devote to the curriculum that they considered relevant [*Učební osnovy pro gymnázia, odborné a střední odborné školy*: Občanská nauka 1984].

Between years 1984 and 1989, it was the last curriculum before the regime transition. In secondary schools, the hourly allowance was divided according to the type of a school. In grammar schools, civics was taught only in the 3rd and 4th grades, which also meant reducing and condensing topics [*Učební osnovy pro gymnázia: Povinné předměty ...* 1986]. In the third year, the educational content consisted of the following topics: socialist production, the building of a socialist society and the transition to a communist society, the capitalist mode of production, the simultaneous struggle of two world systems and the personality of a person developed socialistically. The fourth year did not notice any change from the previous curriculum and thus it remains purely philosophically oriented.

The experimental curriculum from 1978 is followed by practical teaching texts for the 3rd and 4th year of grammar school, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic in the same year [Bauer 1982]. The teaching text

for the 4th grade focused on philosophical topics viewed in the spirit of ideology. The text provided information on philosophers and philosophical theories from antiquity through scholasticism, the enlightenment to Marxism-Leninism.

In secondary vocational schools, the hourly allowance was not different, and civics was taught one hour a week in all grades. The topics of educational content did not differ from grammar schools; they were only divided into four stages [*Občanská nauka. Výchova k rodičovství: ...* 1986].

The transformation from the socialist form of civics can be perceived from the second half of the 1980s. At this time, Gorbachev's ideas about new thinking and so-called perestroika (reconstruction) came to the attention and actions of people. A new touch of thinking process began to get into the subject of civics [Sokolová 2018]. In the pedagogically oriented press, the contributions contained comments on the shortcomings of teaching social science subjects. There was criticism of the vast scope of the curriculum, the public demanded more concise and specific definitions, a different style of teaching, supporting discussion and the development of students' thinking. Civics was also supposed to follow world development and update its content. These requirements should have been taken into account by future textbook creators.

Recovery and transformation after 1989

After 1989, Czech pedagogy generally faced the problem of lagging behind Western Europe and North America, because during the previous regime all research and contacts with those changes were muted [Průcha 1992]. Teachers therefore faced a considerable challenge to renew and transform education, to issue new curricula and plans that would align with the reviving democracy. It was not until 1991 that hope dawned again for civic education – completely new curricula were created, which thoroughly cleansed the subject and its contents of ideological drifts and returned to the ideals of the “first republic,” to the democratic tradition. The concept of citizenship education has also changed, it should have educated people for life, not citizens for the state, as before. The starting point for the new concept of civic education after 1989 were the years between 1918 and 1938 and the short period in the 1960s of the 20th century which was democratically manifested. The inspiration for the revision of the new curriculum of the 1990s was also the interpretation of Christian holidays, the concept of family and folk traditions [Staněk 2007]. The subject was multidisciplinary and consisted of six components: anthropological, ecological, economic, homeland science, political science and law [Pit'ha et al. 1992].

Civics and history became the main goal of the transformation in education throughout Central and Eastern Europe. However, the situation was challenging, because after almost fifty years of totalitarianism, democratic ideals had to be implemented into the curriculum of the social sciences.

We know that the year 1948 marks the beginning of its misuse for political and ideological indoctrination, especially in secondary schools. After 1989, removing this subject from this state is desirable, thus being de-ideologized and depoliticized. The basics of social sciences aim to restore a democratic society, to acquaint with its values

and to educate creativity in the spirit of humanity. The curriculum and textbooks are inspired by the civics and education of the “first republic” [Piřha et al. 1992]. By the end of 1989, teachers could speak openly about the problems associated with the former regime. They had to reflect all the facts in their interpretation. Still, it was recommended to talk about neutral and universal human values, such as values, morality, honesty, morality, tolerance and dialogue. Not only the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic was aware of the complexity and power of political change. Therefore, the subject was not classified in the first half of 1989 [Čapek 1990].

Civics was changed to Basics of Social Sciences, and there was a question how to carry out the second semester. The Ministry proposed that in the 3rd year, the subject should have been focused on the psychological area, and in the 4th year, on the philosophy – its history and issues of ethics, humanity, democracy and morality [Čapek 1990]. In the same document, it is recommended to change the title to Basics of Social Sciences and also to teach the subject in all four grades, with the following layout of topics:

- 1st year: psychology and ethical topics;
- 2nd year: state law topics;
- 3rd year: sociology and economics;
- 4th year: philosophy.

Hořejřová [1990] writes that the subject should be approached more critically, its content should be constantly updated, and more playful methods should be chosen. However, after such long time, teachers were not ready to change the style of their teaching at all, they did not know how to work with independence and creativity. In addition, they were not supported by any textbooks, so their time to prepare the lessons was much longer. In the case of secondary schools, this has also been made more difficult by the fact that secondary education is beginning to differentiate quite a bit. Concerning grammar schools, a difference among humanities, natural sciences and general orientations was made, and in the field of secondary vocational schools, curricula are created separately for each study area.

The situation of the curriculum in 1990–1995

From the hourly allowance point of view, it is necessary to distinguish the type of schools. In grammar schools, they were determined according to the mentioned specialization; in the humanities sector, in the 2nd year there was a set hourly subsidy of 66 hours, in the 3rd to 64 hours and in the 4th to 60 hours. Hourly allowance in both 3rd and 4th years was identical for the other two branches, only in the 2nd year it differed in the field of natural sciences – 33 hours and in general-oriented grammar schools the subject was taught only in the 3rd and 4th grade [*Učební osnovy čtyřletého gymnázia* 1991]. All the mentioned types of secondary schools also agreed on the thematic focus of teaching – the development of philosophy, selected philosophical issues and ethical topics in the 4th year.

The teaching content in secondary vocational schools depended on the length of study. For two-year courses, the subject was taught 1 hour per week and the thematic areas were determined as follows:

- 1st year: ethics, aesthetics, family life, health care, human culture,
- 2nd year: psychology, global problems including their social and economic aspects and state law issues.

For three-year courses, sociology and political science were added in the last year of study. The four-year courses were enriched with the basics of philosophy in the 4th year [*Nové osnovy pro občanskou nauku a dějepis v SOU* 1990].

The curriculum published in 1991, marked a cleansing of ideology and a returned to a democratic conception of the subject. The concept of the curriculum itself has also changed; under totalitarianism, there was a strict regulation and coincided with textbooks. Whereas, in the case of the first curriculum of social sciences, we can observe that it has represented only a framework and that the final lesson form rests on the teacher's decision.

Textbooks for Basics of Social Sciences 1990–1995

All textbooks used until 1989 were discarded and the subject found itself in a situation without any textbook support, although teachers were allowed to at least draw on the previous ones. Several competitions (e.g. *Pedagogická tvořivost*) and research were announced that would lead to the creation of helpful and valuable texts for teaching the subject. The analysis of secondary school textbooks from that time is precisely described in Sokolová [2018] who set several criteria for their evaluation and summarizes their compliance with the curriculum and other characteristics.

Predecessors of the current curriculum

The initial documents for the current curriculum (at the state level) for secondary education created and approved after 2000 were the *Standard vzdělávání ve čtyřletém gymnáziu* and *Standard středoškolského odborného vzdělávání*.

The individual educational areas are elaborated in the *Standard vzdělávání ve čtyřletém gymnáziu* [MŠMT 1996]. For the purpose of this study, it is desirable to analyze field of social sciences which consists of the basics of social sciences and history. Within this part, students are introduced to various aspects of current life (economic, social, political, cultural) and the development of countries, nations and individual regions in the past, thereby enriching their knowledge of the connections among the goals, principles, mechanisms of democracy and the multicultural nature of the present time. Already set out in this document that through this educational area not only the personal but also the civic profile of the individual is formed. Pupils reflect and view the solution of problems they might encounter in everyday life practice. The subject Basics of Social Sciences is then defined by its specific objectives and areas of core the curriculum. Specific objectives include, for instance, to orient oneself in the problems of the contemporary world, to critically evaluate and perceive one's actions and the actions of others, the ability to take responsibility for one's actions and the ability to adequately express oneself and defend one's own opinions and interests. The core curriculum is divided into eight areas: psychology, sociology, legal issues, political science,

issues of state law, economics, global problems, ethics, informal logic, theory of science, philosophy. Compared to current curricular documents, the *Standard* used to be more extensive, as we could not find areas related to logic in the currently valid documents.

The *Standard středoškolského odborného vzdělávání* – the predecessor of the curriculum document for secondary vocational schools, released in 1997, contained a list of components of general education and vocational education. One of the components of general education is also social science education whose main aim is the cultivation of personality in terms of personality and social aspects. For the second level of education (this level of education corresponds to secondary vocational education), content areas are defined, which are focused on the following areas from the relevant social science disciplines: psychology of personality, social psychology and communication, national, state and European issues, democracy, morality, morality and legal relations, economic conditions and their influence on the meaning of a human. In the third level (complete secondary vocational education), these areas are identical, moreover, there is history (a curriculum on general and Czechoslovak/Czech history with an emphasis on the development of skills to search for information in various sources, to sort and process it, to prepare for discussion) and an area called Philosophical-Ethical Foundations of the Search for the Meaning of Life. The range is based on practical ethics, thanks to which students are familiar with the issues of truth, freedom, human values, happiness, order and meaning of life [*Standard středoškolského odborného vzdělávání* 1997].

Present

In 2004, efforts and tendencies to unify teaching in the Czech education system culminated in the publication of various educational programmes. In the case of secondary education, a distinction is made between vocational education and general education. These documents replace the previous and there is contrast: instead of the emphasis on the curriculum and the cognitive level, there is an emphasis on the level of affective side, teaching methods, activities, students' evaluation, development of vital competences and achievement of goals. The schools are then autonomous and responsible for the implementation of teaching, based on their school educational programmes, which they create on the basis of their specific needs, conditions and possibilities and the students' needs.

At present, education stands at two levels – state and school. The state level provides for educational requirements that are more general, and these are adjusted by individual schools in their own school educational programs in order to suit their specifics and needs. There are eight types of framework educational programmes – for each level of education (pre-primary, primary, special primary school, grammar school, grammar school with sports training, secondary vocational, basic art and language school education). Seven of them were created by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports, the document for vocational education was created by the Národní ústav odborného vzdělávání. These documents contain a new strategy of education, which primarily focuses on key competences and the related application of acquired knowledge and developed skills in practical life [MŠMT 2021].

The role of philosophy in the curriculum

From the previous text, it is obvious that philosophy has always had its place in the curriculum. Since the beginning of the independent Czechoslovak state, she also had her own subject in secondary schools, namely *Introduction to Philosophy*. Until the regime change in 1948, the content was the historical development of philosophy and philosophical problems. During the period of socialism and communism until 1989, philosophical thematic areas served to clarify the philosophy of thinkers such as Engels, Marx, Hegel, etc. In particular, Marx's and Engels' philosophy were crucial to that period, and everything was adapted to it, based on its foundations. Therefore, it had to be clarified in these intentions. After 1989, the content of philosophy returned to the democratic tradition, the subject should serve for the possibility of discussing morality, human values and knowledge. However, nowadays we can feel that philosophy loses its meaning in schools, because it is often conducted as a lecture on the life of a philosopher without any context with the times, and philosophical problems are not sufficiently clarified and analyzed. Philosophy should develop creative and critical thinking, but we can think that many teachers cannot realize such teaching. The changes in the curriculum of philosophy and its role from the establishment of Czechoslovakia to the present day will be dealt with in more detail in the part of the dissertation thesis.

Conclusions

To sum up, civic education has developed together with the Czech Republic and Czech society. In this article, the main milestones of this subject and the main characteristics at the time were laid out. Those are partial findings that will be more or less elaborated in the author's dissertation, with regard to the state, development and current situation of philosophy as a sub-discipline and an integral part of the basics of social sciences.

The text's aim set out in the introduction part has been fulfilled, as the development of civics, its current state, its perspectives and the challenges it has had to face during its existence have been fully described. Furthermore, a section dealing with the role of philosophy in the curriculum and school education is outlined, which is the part that the author will devote to in more detail in her dissertation thesis. This article has fulfilled its descriptive character, which will change as the dissertation has been completing.

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Abstract

The article concerns the historical progress of the school subject called civics in secondary schools in the Czech Republic and its recovery and its scheme after 1989. It briefly refers to the important characteristics due to its transformation in the school curriculum during the socialism, and then, after 1990. Short part of the text is devoted to textbooks and former curriculum documents. The article also briefly presents the role of philosophy in the Czech curriculum in a civics context. The article is financed from the funds of the project "PROM – International scholarship exchange of doctoral students and academic staff" under the Operational Programme Knowledge Education Development, co-financed by the European Social Fund; project no. POWR.03.03.00-00-PN13/18.

Keywords: civics, history of social sciences, philosophy, curriculum