

Language History Contents in the Curriculum Concept of Teaching Croatian Language

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Abstract

The paper analyses the scope of educational content pertaining to the history of language in the curriculum of the subject Croatian Language. The context of this examination is the curricular reform in the Republic of Croatia, which is conceived as a turning point of Croatian education away from the traditional didactic concept toward the curriculum concept. The issue of curriculum contents' scope as part of the curriculum teaching concept is concretised by comparing the representation of contents pertaining to the history of Croatian language in the proposal of the *National Curriculum Framework* with the current *Plan and Programme for Primary and Secondary Schools*. The comparison demonstrates that in the proposal of the National Curriculum Framework educational content in the area of the history of Croatian language has been considerably reduced in relation to the current plan and programme. The same document, *National Curriculum Framework*, cites identity building as one of the values of education, emphasizing the construction of a national identity and, in particular, the need to preserve and develop the Croatian language. The question arises of how to attain the stated value of education in the absence of transferring the contents of Croatian linguistic history to pupils. Undoubtedly, students need both – knowledge of language content and communicative competence in the mother tongue. It is therefore necessary to harmonise the relationship between educational content and the acquisition of communication skills in teaching practice and in school documents.

Keywords: history of Croatian language, Croatian educational reform, curriculum

Introduction

Croatian schooling has been faced with the task of questioning, reflecting on and defining guidelines and topics for national education by accepting the curriculum approach to education and training. Since education and upbringing represent areas of general social inclusion, as well as of

private and social interest, the Croatian educational and scientific community and the wider public have been involved with the issues of reform of Croatian education since the mid-90s to the present. There are two fundamental reasons for this, new socio-economic circumstances that require a new educational framework and accession to the European Union with its necessity to align the national educational framework with the European one.

The first reason is based on the fact that education is of ever increasing importance in individuals' lives and that the success of an individual in a modern society, which aspires to be knowledge society, is largely dependent on it. This term, which is widespread in educational, economic and political discourses, has changed semantically when compared with the understanding of its creator Daniel Bell (1999), who conceived of such a society as a civilization in transition from the industrial to the post-industrial era. Industrial economy is replaced by the economy of information, ideas, entrepreneurship and services, while the foundation of development is knowledge. Knowledge society is understood as a community in which knowledge has value in the production of profits. Types of knowledge that drive the expansion of the market, increase competitiveness and economic growth are stimulated. Knowledge is organized according to market criteria, even to the point that demands for productivity is imposed on schools. Emphasis is placed on the educational outcomes and achievements that are expressed quantifiably and objectively. Schools are compared against one another and evaluated according to those outcomes. Standardization of educational products is introduced by emphasizing key competences (2002) which a pupil needs to acquire. It should be noted that this trend in education development is met with numerous critiques, and the question remains whether education and upbringing should be viewed from a market perspective.

The second reason for the necessity to reform the Croatian education system relates to the moment of social, economic and political changes in which Croatian society has been entangled since the 1990s, primarily with respect to preparations for accession to the European Union and since 2013 as a full member of the European Union. It is necessary to bring the national school system closer to the European system of education. In these integration processes it necessarily comes to pass that a smaller society, such as Croatia, feels a kind of fear of possible loss of their own identity in the circumstances of inclusion in the multiethnic community of European peoples. Education and upbringing are thereby posed as the only way to transfer cultural identity. On the other hand, individuals must be educated so that they are prepared for equal life in the wider community, European and the world-community, as well as to know about others and those who are different in order that they may live out acceptance and tolerance as a

fundamental civilization value. An individual should acquire, in addition to knowledge, the necessary skills to become involved in the European labour market by means of their education. The core competences for lifelong learning and the ongoing process of obtaining knowledge need to be acquired. This complex role of education necessitates clear determination of educational content which are of national and identity significance. It is also necessary to wisely measure the ratio of knowledge and skills in education.

Short overview of the educational tradition in Croatia

The practice of organised education in Croatian territory can be traced back to the 9th century, i.e. to the beginning of the Benedictine activity among Croats. In addition to church schools, there were also civic schools, and general education first began to undergo systematisation in the 18th century, at the time of enlightened absolutism of the Habsburg authorities. In the 19th century, schooling would become compulsory for all children, with the Law on Public School and Schools of Education in 1874. State education of teachers, crucial to the development of schooling, was established only in the mid-19th century when a specific teacher-training school was opened in 1849 in Zagreb. Teachers who were educated there, as well as many teachers who were active before them, relied on the Christian European tradition of teaching in their work. This tradition is marked to a significant extent by a number of great European pedagogues, ranging from Jan Amos Komensky (1592-1670), the author of the *Great Didactic (Didactica magna, 1657)* to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi (1746-1823), Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1814), Georges Kerschensteiner (1854-1932) and Ignaz Johann von Felbiger (1724-1788), whose methodological manual for teachers *Methodenbuch für Lehrer der deutschen Schulen in den k. k. Erbländern* was published in 1774 and was used in the entire Habsburg Monarchy area. Croatian educational practice was also based on it until 1849 when pedagogical and didactic manuals were published in Croatian: *Znanost odhranjivanja za porabu učiteljskih sēmeništah; Posebna znanost podučavanja, ili naputak k uspēšnom predavanju pojedinih naukah (Didactica specialis)* and *Obćenita znanost podučavanja (Didactica generalis)*; according to Cuvaj, 1910). In continuity with this practice of schooling and teacher education, the Croatian education system changed and developed further, but it remained grounded in the traditional European manner of organizing and teaching based on teaching plan and programme as the foundational teaching document. The teaching plan is a "school document which prescribes educational areas, i.e. teaching subjects studied in a particular school, followed by the order of study of those areas or subjects by class or semester, and the weekly number of classes for a particular area or subject" (Težak 1996: 192). The teaching programme on the other hand is a "school document that prescribes the

scope, depth, order of educational contents in each subject" (Težak 1996: 192). Changes in teaching took place within traditionally conceived didactics and the German tradition of education.

Contemporary Croatian education – curricular reform

Croatian education has begun to shift from traditional didactics to the curriculum concept of education at the beginning of the 21st century. The concept of the curriculum (according to Matijević 2010, Jukić 2010, Bežen 2008) originates in American education science and is significantly different from the concept of plan and programme for teaching as found in European didactics. In addition to numerous other specifics (cf. Marsh, 2009), the curriculum is mainly understood as an educational concept that places the active pupil and the development of his/her competences in the centre of focus, unlike the concept of teaching plan and programme that focuses on educational content and their transfer to pupils. The curriculum concept is deeply focused on the outcome, the product of education – learning outcomes and pupils' competences of, while the teaching plan and programme approach is focused on content inputs. It is worth pointing out that contemporary understanding of the curriculum views it as far more than a list of educational outcomes. The curriculum is a complex concept that leads participants in the educational process to set goals (see Wiggins, McTighe 2006). Proceeding from the national curriculum level, the concept is concretised in teaching by subject curriculum. Thus, Jack C. Richards (2001) includes the following in the design of the subject curriculum for language learning: planning needs, goals and outcomes of teaching, as well as planning the course of classes, teaching methods, teaching materials and evaluation. In the context of increasingly powerful globalisation forces, the curriculum concept of education has begun to be more widely accepted in Europe since the 1980s. The term enters Croatian pedagogical terminology at the end of the 20th century, but the process of school reform in accordance with the curriculum concept started in the first years of the 21st century. The work on curricular reform in Croatia is ongoing.

The previous section presents a historical overview of the circumstances relevant for education in Croatia, which represents the basis for understanding the slowness and painstaking nature of the contemporary process of reforming Croatian education. The matter of fact is that the didactic and curriculum concept of education are two different, culturally conditioned conceptions (see Westbury 2000, Jukić 2010). The former is Germanic and the other is Anglo-Saxon. Croatian education has been tied to the didactic, German tradition of education since very early ages and prominently so since the late 18th century. Like with every well-trodden path,

it is not simple to redirect Croatian education from the traditional didactic path to a modern curriculum.

The following strategic documents represent the basis for Croatian educational reform is: Strategy of Development of the Republic of Croatia “Croatia in the 21st Century” (2001) and *Education Sector Development Plan 2005-2010* (2005). A new *Teaching Plan and Programme for Primary Education* was adopted in 2006 within the framework of the Croatian National Educational Standard (HNOS) project. The *National Framework Curriculum for Pre-School Education and General Compulsory and Secondary Education* was adopted in 2011. *The National Curriculum Framework: Proposal* was adopted in 2016, as well as the documents supplementing it – national curricula (e.g. the *National Curriculum for Primary Education: Proposal*), subject curricula (e.g. *National Curriculum for Croatian Language: Proposal*). The documents have been appraised as needing further development after public discussion was closed and work on education reform continued.

Croatian linguistic history contents between the traditional and curriculum concept

Croatian is the official language in the Republic of Croatia and the mother tongue for the largest number of pupils. As a teaching subject it is represented in all divisions of all types of elementary and secondary education. It is also a language in which other school subjects are taught, except in foreign language teaching.

By virtue of the legacy of traditional didactics, the Croatian language subject in primary school consists of the following areas: Language, Linguistic Expression, Literature, Media Culture, with Initial Reading and Writing in the first grade of primary school. The subject in secondary vocational schools and grammar schools has three areas: Croatian language, Croatian and world literature, Linguistic expression.

Croatian language in the proposal of the curriculum concept

The subject of Croatian language would be conceptualised in three domains with the proposed curricular reform: communication and language, literature and creativity, culture and media. It is evident from the change in the name of the language field that the proposal of the *National Curriculum for Croatian Language* (2016) emphasises communication and pupils' communication skills. Communication skills are developed in the areas of listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, while the domain of Communication and Language encompasses the development of "self-awareness as a person who builds, respects and expresses their (linguistic)

identity and respects the identity of others within the framework of linguistic and cultural-linguistic community" (ibid.: 5).

The aim of Croatian language teaching is to strengthen the competence in communicating in the mother tongue, which is the first in a series of eight key competences for lifelong learning (2006). In addition, teaching mother tongue also serves the acquisition of knowledge from the sociolinguistic area, knowledge of the historical-linguistic domain and knowledge of the value of identity. It also serves the achievement of the eight competence (2006), cultural awareness and expression. Cultural awareness includes knowledge and awareness of local, national and European cultural heritage and their position in the world. The document states that educating pupils to understand the cultural and linguistic diversity of Europe and the world is of crucial importance for the purpose of protecting said diversity.

The fundamental document of the curriculum reform, *National Curriculum Framework: Proposal*, displays awareness of the aforementioned (2016: 12), stating: „The values which the *National Curriculum Framework* pays particular attention to are: knowledge, solidarity, identity, responsibility. Complementary to these four values, the following are additionally emphasized: integrity, respect, health and entrepreneurship.“ The value of identity is thereby elaborated upon (ibid.):

Nowadays, in the age of globalization in which there is a strong blending of different cultures at work, as well as of worldviews and religions, man should become a citizen of the world while preserving their national identity, culture, moral and spiritual heritage. In particular, it is important to maintain and develop Croatian language and take heed of its proper use. Education and upbringing need to awake, stimulate and develop a personal identity and connect it at the same time with respect for diversity.

The values of education which are framed in this way can be realised by making contents of the sociolinguistic area and the contents of Croatian cultural and linguistic heritage more familiar and accessible to pupils. Namely, the use of three scripts (historical use of Glagolitic, Cyrillic and Latin) and three dialects (Chakavian, Kajkavian, and Shtokavian dialect) are identity components of Croatian language (cf. Pranjković 2007). In addition, the Glagolitic script as a constituent of Croatian language identity enters into all of the other identity aspects with which the language is related, either as a means of expressing other identities or as an indispensable part of cultural identity which also includes linguistic identity. Furthermore, the heritage of scrip is also a part of supranational and European culture.

Given the fact that the framework curriculum document set out the cited mode of the value of education and the goals of education, we would

expect that contents which realise these are represented in the subject curriculum. However, insight into the contents of the proposal for the *National Curriculum for Croatian Language* (2016) does not confirm that expectation.

Representation of historical-linguistic contents in the proposal of the subject curriculum

Analysis of the *Proposal of the National Curriculum for Croatian Language* (2016) demonstrated minimal representation of content pertaining to the history of Croatian language and linguistic heritage.

There are designated contents from the history of Croatian language only in the 8th grade of primary school and at the following level of knowledge (ibid. 16): "The pupil explores information on texts and events, of their own choosing, which are relevant for the development of Croatian language." The elaboration of the outcome A.8.7. (ibid. 114), pertaining to the selection of texts that are important for the history of the Croatian language, does not recognise the criterion of choice. Any text from the Cyrillic corpus is excluded, although it is cited that as an outcome pupils will be able to independently explain the three-scripts and three languages in relation to Croatian language. Among important events for the history of Croatian language, only the Illyrian movement (19th century) is mentioned.

In secondary school education, the history of Croatian language is represented only in the 3rd grade of grammar school, with an emphasis on the dynamics of language change in inter-linguistic relations. Three-year secondary schools, which usually function as the end of formal education for their pupils, are completely devoid of contents representing the history of Croatian language and Croatian linguistic heritage.

Conclusion

The curricular reform presents Croatian society with another occasion for examination of educational values and contents, didactic procedures and the purpose and the goal of education. The proposal of the *National Curriculum Framework* (2016), the basic document of curricular reform, emphasises the value of building pupils' cultural and national identity, as well as the value of preserving cultural heritage. These values, goals and the development of cultural awareness open up the possibility for contents pertaining to the history of Croatian language and linguistic heritage in education at primary and secondary levels. However, the proposal of the *National Curriculum for Croatian Language* (2016) virtually neglects any representation of contents which would realise those values. Compared to current plans and programmes for primary and secondary education, contents from the history of Croatian language and linguistic heritage have been

significantly reduced in curriculum documents, even completely excluded from three-year vocational education. Therefore, it is an open question as to whether or not the minimal presence, even absence, of language-historical content can achieve the goals and values stipulated by the *National Curriculum Framework* (2016). The background of the problem is actually the skill of aligning the content that pupils should be presented with (in order to build stipulated values) and dedication to the acquisition of communication skills. Undoubtedly, pupils need both, communication skills and knowledge of language. The challenge for schools and the curriculum is how to harmonise content mastery and skills mastery, without ignoring either of these.

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