

Skills Development Tasks and the Development of Historical Thinking

INTRODUCTION

The social and intellectual changes that occurred in the second half of the 20th century called for a re-interpretation of history – a scientific concept – which sheds light on the fact that “history is not only seeing, but also entails thinking over what is seen. And, in some sense or another, thinking is always interpretation.” (Lukacs, 2005. 57–58.) The concepts of the building blocks of processing the past, that is, sources have also changed: “historical data, sources, texts and facts are not self-evident. It will not suffice to put them together; they are more like witnesses of bygone ages that will not talk unless we ask them. It is sensitivity to problems and the ability to formulate questions that distinguishes [...] a good historian from a bad one.” (Gyurgyák – Kisantal, 2006. 32.) Memory, which is life itself, carried within by living groups, and thus is in continuous development (Nora, 2009), is the version of past preserved in individual or communal memories, either in written or unwritten forms, although what we call history draws on the individual or communal memory or relies on memory. It follows that the concepts of the past, memory and history cannot be regarded as one and the same thing, even if in everyday discourse they are often used as synonyms. This is all the more true since what we call history has evolved/is evolving through historiography, which means that it is a construct or narrative with subjective elements.

All this raises a fundamental question: what should we teach when teaching history? Most probably, we cannot teach anything else than that which was recorded of the history of millennia by some people at some point in time, and, being accepted by the community, has become historical fact (Carr, 2006) or a part of accepted scripts or frameworks/patterns of interpretation; in other words, it was incorporated in “the intellectual form in which a culture gives an account of its

own past (see: Lukacs, 2005). A key issue of teaching history, recognized by all, is the issue of preparing students for historical thinking – a phenomenon that was most probably recognized as early as at the birth of the individual cultures and civilizations. The myths that deal with the history of individual communities or people – beside creating a community identity and handing down the common set of social norms to the future generations – gave a framework of interpretation, as “history is not only seeing, but also entails thinking over what is seen. And, in some sense or another, thinking is always interpretation” (Lukacs, 2005). In other words, the dimension of interpretation and thinking, past and future is organically linked to processing the story of the past. Historical thinking is a part or basis of the historical mind that is created within the framework of life experience and formal school settings. Major building blocks of the evolving historical mind include getting to know and applying the dimensions of time and space, discovering the relationship between the actors and the story – skills that can be acquired after the age of 12 years – which then can become the basis of the so-called narrative understanding (Csapó, 2002/B). In the process, the ability to distinguish reality from fiction – an ability to be developed on a continuous basis – is of key importance (Kratochvíl, 2014. 205–209.). In higher grades – and, quite often, in the course of understanding the background of stories – a system of concepts can be established which, among others, consists of identifiable social categories, of understanding the basic structures of the specific social and economic interrelations of a given period and of the recognition of various historical points of view or perspectives.

Most probably, with regard to the evolution or the creation of historical thinking it is very significant whether during their studies students understand how an “everyday” event becomes an inevitable historical fact in the course of the working of collective memory, historical interpretation and processing and, in this system of interrelations, what causes and effects can be attributed to a specific historical fact. It is equally important for them to understand that it matters on what basis or from which sources (e.g. original documents, contemporary or later historiography) we get to know all that we know about the past (that is, history) and to what extent that which we know is confirmed by other types of evidence, processing or interpretations – in other words, how a given point of view can be identified. Among others, this is why it is of great importance to show students a multi-perspective approach. During their historical studies, students must realize a paradox, namely, that the events which take place in a historical time and space reflect, on the one hand, the ongoing presence or continuity of the past (e.g. in life conditions, ways of thinking and general approach to life and, on the other hand, the continuous change of the past (e.g. in technological devices or attitudes towards nature).

OPPORTUNITIES TO DEVELOP THE HISTORICAL MIND

The paradigm shift that has taken place in the fields of history and education in recent years basically re-interpreted the process of understanding history. Now it is widely accepted that historical learning does not only – and not primarily – comprise absorbing information related to history, but means the acquisition of a differentiated historical thinking.

It was decades ago that professional public opinion came to the conclusion that a basis of historical thinking is narrative competence which enables students to identify various schemes or scripts. This entails the acquisition of a differentiated historical thinking which enables students “to flexibly adapt, in the triple dimension of the past, present and future, the constructs (schemes) offered by history and to use the examination methods of history (identification and formulation a historical problem; criticism; interpretation” (F. Dárdai, 2006. 95–105.).

Due to narrative structures (time, story, characters, perspective, motivations) and story schemes or scripts that students learn about, teaching history is suitable for helping them acquire an adequate technique of learning and information processing. At the same time, as evidenced by research in social psychology, a narrative approach – through its stories that individuals can emotionally relate to and through shedding light on a common cultural code system – plays a key role in the creation of individual and community identity (Pataki, 2003).

The new approach to teaching history enables students to see and understand why people in the past felt, thought and acted differently from their descendants, the people today. History-related occupations help students understand that which is historically or culturally different. This requires the acquisition of a certain type of critical thinking so that in historical sources (written material or images) they can detect the authors’ motivations, partiality, subjectivism, etc. This interpretation of studying history, then, corroborates the understanding that people’s thoughts and actions depend on time, space and interests and that changes in history do not occur by themselves but through human action.

SKILLS DEVELOPMENT TASKS

The “development-type tasks” were introduced in mainstream research and development and the general Hungarian approach to learning and teaching in the mid-2000s. It was at that time that criteria were defined which set new development-type tasks clearly apart from tasks intended to measure students’ performance. Such criteria include, for example, setting up a motivating task situation, the use of “a structure of task sets”, the organization of students’ activities that are mainly

based on cooperation, and the concept which prioritizes learning experience gained during trying or looking for a solution over results that are quantifiable and can be transformed into grades.

However, as evidenced by the trials and the practical application of development-types tasks, everyday pedagogical practice is not yet adequately open towards the widespread application of such sets of tasks. In Hungary, current educational practice uses curricular/textbook content as a starting point instead of competences that develop general learning abilities. This holds especially true for education in social science. The demand for everyday practical application brought about the understanding that within (or without the general category of development tasks, tasks of a new type need to be developed which, as far as their general system of objectives and criteria is concerned, basically meet the requirements for development-type tasks, yet, to a greater or lesser extent, do differ from them. Such tasks focus on intellectual and methodological competences, and, as rule, do not emphasize the prioritized development of personal and social competences. Consequently, they do not necessarily require a “set of tasks” structure, cooperation-based group work or verbal presentation. Consequently, these tasks do not take a whole lesson to complete, only certain sections of it. These points were taken into consideration for the preparation of skills development tasks that focus on the improvement of key historical competences.

The process of the preparation of skills development tasks was significantly affected by the fact that learning and teaching history have undergone major changes in the last 25 years, especially in Western Europe (Strandling, 2001). The key competences related to history, identified in the course of the paradigm shift, fundamentally necessitated the acquisition of basic abilities that are required for processing and interpreting historical documents (written, unwritten, primary, secondary, texts, images, etc.) and for the evolution of critical thinking, as well the application of such abilities in problematic situations (Strandling, 2001). By now, it has become a major responsibility of teaching history to serve as a basis for the development of historical literacy which, being an adaptable framework of interpretation, makes it possible “for the events or processes dealt with or understood during history lessons to become well structured knowledge that can be effectively used and easily recalled in new situations” (Peter Lee, 2004; cit. Kojanitz, 2013. 36–37).

With regard to the preparation of tasks, another consideration was the understanding that it is worth processing historical content “in a manner that make students emotionally involved. This may not only provide motivation – a precondition of success – but, through “emotionality”, it also may become a bridge that connects the student with historical content (events, structures, processes) emotionally, and help him or her acquire historical thinking.” (Uffelmann, 1999)

Skills development tasks are intended to develop transversal skills (critical thinking, problem solving, cooperation) and, at the same time, they are suitable for the development of methodological, intellectual, personal/social and communication competences, depending on the nature of the processing activities that derive from the relevant sources. The solution of the tasks is greatly based on involving students in activities, interactivity and productivity. As far as the cognitive dimension is concerned, the tasks require students to do meaningful learning and use competences that play a key role in the development of historical processes and interpretive scripts, as well as in the building up of templates that refer to background processes and in using such templates in other situations. With regard to the emotional dimension, the tasks – through “evoking involvement” and through the recognition of trying as a solution or result – attempt to create flow experience. The professional and educational significance of skills development tasks may be attributed to the fact that they apply methodological solutions which foster students’ interest and motivation and, at the same time, due to involvement and novel problem situations, require challenging intellectual effort. In addition, while good solutions carry an emotional quality, the process of learning itself also brings about emotional enrichment.

It is a key feature that – as opposed to conventional practical tasks – skills development tasks do not only require the application of an already known phenomenon or rule in order to facilitate practice, but they also entail organically interlinked information processing and skills development elements, and their solution requires an application-level intellectual move, along with the extra emotional quality entailed by a possibly successful solution. In other words, skills development tasks basically do not contribute to practicing an already known “routine”, but enable students to recognize a new element of knowledge or interrelation.

The content of skills development tasks is not necessarily linked to conventional subject content; rather, it is related to fields of specialization or cross-curricular and special development fields. As a rule, the application of such tasks requires novel methods of learning organization (drama pedagogy, project, etc.) and does not entail summative assessment. In this context, the primary objective is not to offer a successful solution of the task, but to engage in attempts, observation, experimentation and planning, to recognize analogies and to consider alternatives. This means that objectives of application include the acquisition of the language and tools of learning, the further development of thinking, the development of problems solving skills that can be used in everyday life and the function of boosting self-confidence. It is of particular importance to ensure that subject teachers take part in motivating students as actively and diversely as possible and help students recognize the problem situation that is reflected in the task. In the course of

processing or looking for a solution, it is recommended that students should be invited to consider how the problems entailed in the tasks is reflected in the context of the relevant historical period and in the approach of those who solve the task. The former excludes anachronistic solutions, while the latter creates the opportunity to reflect on one's own life (personal involvement).

Skills development tasks may be based on elements of drama pedagogy or novel learning methods, and they may focus on a “code change”, the inductive/deductive/analogy-based modelling of the process of historical cognition or complex problem solutions. The point of tasks based on drama pedagogy is that students enter a specific historical situation and imagine what they would do among the given conditions. Thus, the processing of the material requires not only a higher-level cognitive activity but a certain level of emotional identification as well. This is how knowledge finally becomes personal. The key concepts are *role* and *identification*. The application of drama pedagogy tasks may be linked to deepening the knowledge of the material already acquired, and, in many cases, they are suitable for being the first steps in introducing the features of a historical age or understanding a historical situation still unknown to students (Annex).

A NEW PEDAGOGICAL APPROACH AND TEACHER TRAINING

In recent decades, due to the major changes that have occurred in the general approach to learning, a competence-based, output-focussed teaching paradigm – concentrating on learning outcomes – has become a determining factor. The paradigm shift in the field of the learning process significantly affected the actors of the process, as in the new pedagogical approach (Adam, 2008; Kennedy, 2007) teachers' role changes: from individuals sharing knowledge they become supporters of the learning process. A key point in the changes of teachers' role is that, instead of knowledge transfer, the role to orient, explain, transmit and counterbalance (the role of a facilitator) comes into the fore, to ensure that teaching content and processes becomes more realistic and practical and their processing more experiential. In other words, a gradual change of pedagogical cultures is taking place. In a certain sense, conventional discipline-based knowledge is devalued, while those pedagogical competences are emphasized which “make up the professional knowledge of how teachers can support their students' learning process as effectively as possible.” (Halász, 2007)

Consequently, teachers need to perform well in a new world of education that has features different from those of the previous one. Meanwhile, the increase of the value of knowledge and a more direct link between education and economy call for the efficient work of teachers more markedly than ever. European thought sees

the teacher's profession in a complex manner, as a career path based on continuous development. The phases of a teacher's career form a coherent system based on teachers' competences. In other words, the initial phase of teacher training, the system of in-service training, the regulations on public education, teacher training, employment, accreditation and quality assurance, along with the systems of remuneration, promotion and incentives make up a unified system (Stéger, 2012).

The process of and demand for a shift of pedagogical culture can be identified in the field of teaching history as well, and it reflects (beside the general trends) several specific features as well. One of such features worth emphasizing is the fact that the content, formerly almost exclusively focussing on political history, has undergone a major change, while the history of society, lifestyle and cultural history has come to the fore (Szebenyi, 2012). At the same time, the practice of the study of depth has become more and more accepted. The basic idea of the approach is that it processes a significantly smaller amount of conventional knowledge, yet processing takes place at much greater levels. In addition, curricula and requirements contain more and more content related to the contemporary historical age and the intention to educate students about democracy (Halász – Lannert, 2003), and are augmented with a novel practice that requires activity on the part of the students.

However, the Hungarian setting of teaching history were also influenced by historical factors other than international trends. History identified several political changeovers during Hungary's history in the 20th century. It seems that the process of "political transitions" is still ongoing, which means that the interpretation and re-interpretation of the past is a part of our present" (Romsics, 2002). Consequently, the new ideas of teaching history which appeared in international technical literature and in practice from the 1970s and 1980s onwards had to be and still need to be incorporated among ongoing debates on the historical canon.

Despite such difficulties, several favourable processes have commenced in the field of teaching history. These changes are clearly shown by the official tools of content regulation (NCC, requirements of the secondary school leaving examination). Changes to be highlighted include the competence-focussed approach reflected in documents prescribed by state bodies (e.g. acquiring and processing knowledge; communication; critical thinking), the growth of the importance of content related to the history of the 19th and 20th centuries, and a source-based processing of the study material and assessment (Kaposi, 2010). These changes are clearly reflected by recently published textbooks. This field, however, is marked by a controversial situation, as the market-based choice of textbooks made it possible to ensure (as opposed to the newly defined principles) the dominance of a focus on knowledge, which is evidenced by the fact that in the first half of the 2000s the quantity of data published in the textbooks grew (Kojanitz, 2005).

Experience of the last decade has shown that it was the new type of secondary school leaving examination (a strong output requirement introduced in 2005) that exercised an influence in terms of content and methods right down to the level of classroom processes (Kaposi, 2010). The practice of teaching history is highly differentiated, too. In numerous schools and in the everyday work of some teachers, a process of a major attitudinal change is seen. This holds especially true for the last ten years. As a result, in teachers' work the rate of activities limited to sharing information has decreased, while the rate of teaching practices focussed on sources and activities, coupled with novel interactive methods of learning organization (e.g. projects, activities in pairs, drama pedagogy) has increased (Kaposi, 2010). Obviously, the shift of pedagogical culture discussed above has not been fully applied in everyday teaching practice yet. This means that, as evidenced by recent surveys, the dominant method used in classrooms remains frontal instruction where teachers dictate and students record information. Data show that there is a difference of more than 44 percentage points between an enjoyable, awareness-raising and motivating way of teaching (as demanded by students) and the actual everyday classroom practice (Sági, 2015).

In an attempt to identify the reasons for the controversies that are detected in the system-level renewal of content and methodology required in public education, reference needs to be made to the role of Hungarian higher education. With regard to the training of teachers of history, it is probable that conventional university education and system of subjects were not prepared for a situation where the National Core Curriculum – during the relevant debates in the 1990s and onwards – reflected the demand for a training which focuses on complex competences of social science and a general learning competence and which is based on fields of specialization and requirements of development. Basically, the new approach of NCC ignored the traditional department structures of the universities (a factor that defined the content-related framework of teaching) and the general and specific competences of subject teachers. To some extent, the way universities responded to new content and methods was due to the fact that in the same period they faced the challenges of a complex extension (of degree courses and the number of students), institutional integration and the change of quality attributable to massification and to the introduction of the two-cycle university education. The processes were – and are – hindered by the fact that, in general, that the didactics of teaching history is a factor that is not prioritized properly in higher education. This is evidenced, among others, by the fact that at some universities this field forms a part of a discipline-related preparatory phase, while at others it belongs to pedagogical training (F. Dárdai, 2010).

On the other hand, numerous favourable processes are detected in teacher training. For example, in training and exit requirements (in 2008 and 2013 alike) new

elements were introduced that are required for a content-related and methodological change that falls in line with the current processes in public education. Moreover, several institutions of higher education accredited degree courses that give the qualification “teacher of ethics and anthropology” and where students prepare for teaching not only history, but also social and contemporary studies and ethics.

In this field, there is still work to be done. A survey of 2015 (Gál, 2015), focussed on the field of training of teachers of history and performed for ten institutions of higher education, examined to what extent the courses offered in higher education cover the development fields (educational goals, and the contents and requirements of the fields of specialization) specified in the National Core Curriculum. The research shed light, among others, on the fact that almost none of the higher education programmes contain elements of raising media awareness, developing a financial or economic culture or introducing the world of employment as obligatory elements, in spite of the fact that these contents are a part of the framework curricula of grades 5–8 and 9–12 alike.

The fact that these subjects offered by bachelor programmes of teacher training means that, as of now, the abilities required for teaching the new contents specified in the NCC and in framework curricula need to be acquired within the framework of the in-service training of teachers; all the more so as teaching such content requires competences and learning organization methods that differ from those used in teaching history (e.g. sociology and civic studies). Unfortunately, the gaps in preparation can be filled in only partially by the system of counselling and subject supervision (currently being built up), as in the training programme of counsellors and subject supervisors the share of subject-level knowledge is relatively low (out of the 45 contact hours, only 8 are dedicated to the purpose) and the new fields are hardly reflected in the documents of training (SROP 3.1.5, 2014). It is to be hoped that, at a later point, general counselling competences become routinely used and, thus, the novel and interactive activities of teachers of history will be made widely known within the framework of the system of subject-related counselling.

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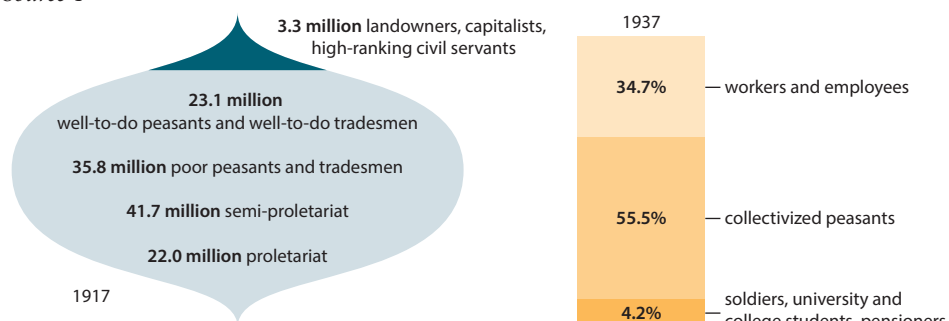
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ANNEX

The “Soviet miracle”		Grade 12																																																					
<div>▪ Goal ~ The students should be able to apply their skills to gather information from a variety of sources as a routine, and should recognize the characteristics, advantages and drawbacks of the comparative method. Another goal of the task is to enable students to interpret and evaluate a historical process in a comprehensive fashion, and to prepare them for the data collection and structuring required for essay writing.</div>																																																							
<div>▪ Organisation ~ Tools required: paper and pen.</div>		<div>Work form and time: pair work ~ The first part of the task plus report: about 10 minutes, the second part of the task plus report: 5 minutes each, the third part: 5 minutes each. conclusion about 2 minutes.</div>																																																					
<div>▪ Document</div> <div>Source 1</div> <div>“Those who don’t stride with big steps will be left behind. Those who are left behind are doomed to failure. We don’t want to be vanquished. No! We don’t want that. [...] Let me remind you of the poet’s words before the Revolution: ‘You are poor, Mother Russia, yet you are full of plenty. You are a giant, yet powerless, Mother Russia.’ [...] We are trailing fifty, a hundred years behind the developed peoples of the Earth. We must make up for this in ten years. Either we manage to make up for our delay or we will be shattered to pieces.” (Stalin’s speech in 1931)</div> <div>“...over them all, in 1929-1930, billowed and gushed the multimillion wave of dispossessed kulaks. It was the forced resettlement of a whole people, an ethnic catastrophe [...] no one fussed about with taking the head of the family first and then working out what to do with the rest of the family. On the contrary, in this wave they burned out whole nests, whole families, from the start [...] to the last scrapings, all had to go down the same road, to the same common destruction.” (Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn: The A Gulag Archipelago 1919–1945. In Hungarian: Európa Könyvkiadó, Budapest, 1993, pp. 72–73)</div> <div>Source 2</div> <table><tr><td></td><td>1913</td><td>1917</td><td>1928</td><td>1932</td><td>1937</td></tr><tr><td>Coal (mn tons)</td><td>29.1</td><td>31.3</td><td>35.5</td><td>64.4</td><td>128.0</td></tr><tr><td>Steel (mn tons)</td><td>4.2</td><td>3.1</td><td>4.3</td><td>5.9</td><td>17.7</td></tr><tr><td>Electric energy (bn kW)</td><td>1.9</td><td>2.6</td><td>5.0</td><td>13.5</td><td>36.2</td></tr></table> <table><tr><td></td><td>1913</td><td>1940</td></tr><tr><td>Iron (mn tons)</td><td>4.2</td><td>14.9</td></tr><tr><td>Steel (mn tons)</td><td>4.3</td><td>18.3</td></tr><tr><td>Rolled sheet (mn tons)</td><td>3.5</td><td>13.1</td></tr></table> <div>Source 3</div> <table><tr><th colspan="4">Type of settlement and number of inhabitants</th></tr><tr><td></td><td>1913</td><td>1939</td><td>1959</td></tr><tr><td>Village</td><td>130</td><td>130</td><td>110</td></tr><tr><td>Town</td><td>30</td><td>60</td><td>100</td></tr></table>					1913	1917	1928	1932	1937	Coal (mn tons)	29.1	31.3	35.5	64.4	128.0	Steel (mn tons)	4.2	3.1	4.3	5.9	17.7	Electric energy (bn kW)	1.9	2.6	5.0	13.5	36.2		1913	1940	Iron (mn tons)	4.2	14.9	Steel (mn tons)	4.3	18.3	Rolled sheet (mn tons)	3.5	13.1	Type of settlement and number of inhabitants					1913	1939	1959	Village	130	130	110	Town	30	60	100
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Source 4



Source 5

“In accordance with the changes that have taken place in the Soviet economy the class breakdown of our society has also changed. As it is commonly known, the landed class had been liquidated with the victorious ending of the Civil War. As for the other exploiters, they shared the fate of landowners. The capitalist class has disappeared from agriculture. Gone are the traders and speculators from turnover of goods. We thus have eradicated the exploiter classes. But we have the working class. We have the peasants’ class. As well as the intelligentsia. However, it would be a mistake to think that these societal groups have not changed over time [...]” (*Stalin’s analysis in 1936*)

Preparation stage	Motivation In the Soviet Union changes of a tremendous scale took place in social and economic life from the mid-1920s until the end of the 1930s. It could be argued that these changes reformed the Russia image of the Bolshevik dictatorship. This process occurred by the application of different forms of violence. Examine the process. Explore in which areas violence was manifested and by what means. Evaluate the changes that resulted.		
	Tasks	Operations (understanding, processing and carrying out instructions)	Competences
Pair work			
Solution state	Task 1 Based on the sources related to the groups, formulate five statements each consisting of a finding and an explanation.	Systematization <i>Finding the key information in the text. Understanding; finding analogies.</i>	Personal competences – Decision making ability
	Source	Fact recognized	Explanation
	1		
	2		
	3		
	4		
	5		

	Task 2 Based on the sources and the solution of Task 1 write a summary, in two or three sentences, of the goals, ways and results of the social and economic transformation in the Soviet Union.	Application Supporting the statement by examples <i>Formulation of conclusions supported by reasoned arguments.</i>	Personal competences – Problem solving skills
	Summary:		
	Task 3 Write an evaluation, in two or three sentences, of the social and economic processes that took place, based on facts.	Evaluation <i>Comparison, text formulation</i>	Methodology: application of the network of analogic and transfer thinking.
	Evaluation:		
Presentation			
Follow-up stage	At home prepare posters about the Soviet miracle from opposite perspectives. Follow the style of the period. Groups 2 and 3 should emphasize the positive aspects of changes, and Groups 1, 4 and 5 should focus on the negative aspects.	Understanding and presenting historical and moral contents.	Interpretation of sources and descriptions/reports. Methodology: application of comparative skills.