

Textbooks as the means for an individual teaching strategy

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Abstract

Contemporary teaching puts emphasis primarily on the subject matter, teacher, instructional objectives, and textbook as well as on instructional strategies and teaching methodology. At present, the frequently criticized issue is particularly the way in which the educational content is mediated to students (in a ready-made/processed form) and the role the students play within the educational/instructional process (often they do not have to apply critical thinking, evaluate information, interlink them and find interrelations). The topic of textbooks and their relevance to contemporary educational/instructional practices also dominates expert discussions. This paper focuses on the role and analysis of textbooks for the subject of history and also on various instructional strategies.

Keywords:

psychodidactics
textbook
strategy
extra-text components

1 Introduction

Textbooks are considered as a text that allows quite quick acquisition of new information by students and concurrently is the fundamental point and support for teachers in presenting the teaching unit. For that reason, we cannot imagine a traditional school without textbooks.

Textbooks, as the most disseminated kind of didactic text, were defined by Průcha, Walterová, Mareš (2003, p. 258) as follows: “the text that was constructed to carry didactic information”.

We, in terms of psychodidactics, perceive textbooks as a tool for development of thinking in students. Our opinion is that textbooks should not be just fact-oriented but, and above all, they should mediate to the students the meaning of what they are learning, meaning the positive and negative points of respective phenomena, develop reading with comprehension, working with text and, last but not least, critical thinking in students. The subchapters of this paper present the structure and function of textbooks in the educational/instructional process, taking into account that textbooks are a standing part of education in schools even though gradually new electronic data carriers have been gradually coming to the forefront.

2 Didactic functions and structure of textbooks

According to P. Gavora (1992, p. 10), textbooks fulfil several fundamental didactic functions: to help review and practice the subject matter, systematize and integrate knowledge, as tools for students' self-learning, to have educational effects and to didactically transform scientific knowledge into the subject matter.

As stated by J. Maňák (2008), under the influence of the contemporary world with its technological innovation and over-saturation with information that keeps penetrating the contemporary education system,

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the functions need to be complemented by coordinating, systematizing and integrating functions. This author made critical observations concerning the contemporary way of development and acceptance of textbooks that, in his view, overflow with neologisms and excessively specialized terminology or are drafted by amateurs who do not possess knowledge of didactic construction of texts.

Our opinion is that, taking account of the content strategy of textbooks specific requirements are applied to drafting these kinds of books. The important aspects include the text structure, didactic structure/design of the text, adequacy of the assignments, inviting and simulating text, use of images, technical parameters and more.

Structural analysis as well as its theoretical drawing points was empirically underpinned in the 1970s. Experts M. Řešátko, J. Doleček and Z. Skoupil from the Vocational School Research Institute in Prague called the structural components the so-called text components.

Table 1 Text components in textbooks

Text components	Component functions
Motivational text	Introducing the subject matter, drawing the students' interest, active activities, following up to the already covered subject matter.
Explanatory text	Presenting facts, knowledge, models and theories.
Regulatory text	Activating the students in reading the text. Includes instructions for exercises.
Samples and examples	Authors did not define this function.
Exercises	Deliberate revision and repetition of an activity.
Questions	Activating the students and deliberately reviewing the activities.
Feedback tools	Acquiring information about the teaching/learning procedure.

This paper focuses on analyses of textbooks for the subject of history and for that reason the authors drew primarily from analyses of textbooks by V. Michovsky (1980) who identified 42 structural components in history textbooks. Subsequently he categorized the components into three main subsystems, namely: apparatus for subject matter presentation; apparatus managing the acquisition of the subject matter; and orientation apparatus.

2.1 Parameters of operationalization of qualitative analyses of textbooks

One of the essential overview publications dedicated to curriculum, Understanding Curriculum (Pinar et al., 2004), defined curriculum as political, phenomenological, historical, hermeneutical, racial, international, institutionalized, gender-related, aesthetic, biographical, theological, and post-structural depending on whether it is examined and understood from the cognitive, behavioural, hermeneutical, post-modern or ethnographic view.

The role of textbooks is as a bridge, a kind of a mediator between the curriculum and implementation of the teaching process. For that reason, textbooks not only present the curriculum content but also interpretation of the contents. In other words, textbooks significantly determine the structuring, content and sequencing of teaching. Textbooks are the essential didactic aid for teachers of history. History textbooks should assist teachers as well as students to accomplish the set instructional/educational objectives.

As mentioned by B. Gracová – D. Labischová (2008), the fundamental functions of teaching history at schools include: creating the socially needed factual knowledge; developing logical thinking in students; ethical and political orientation; elimination of societal stereotypes; and co-creating the system of values in students. The other functions that, in our opinion, should be developed through history instruction include socializing and acculturation functions, self-identification and identification functions.

In 1989, following the November democratization events in Slovakia, a broad platform arose for development of alternatively-comprehended textbooks just like for establishment of numerous new private publishers that resulted in thematic but albeit qualitatively-diverse teaching texts. There were a multitude of un-coordinated texts that failed to systematize the knowledge and parameters for textbook quality that did not and still do not exist.

The contemporary history textbooks are rather structurally-complex pieces that combine and vary iconic texts with diverse kinds of verbal texts. A generally accepted and recognized standard-setting model for history textbooks does not exist. Z. Beneš (2009, p. 13) defined a history textbook as: “a specific type of historical literature, a didactic and historical text that is primarily intended for specific receivers such as pupils and students of all kinds and types of schools where history is taught”.

In conducting our qualitative analysis, we focused our attention on the contemporary history textbook for year 1 of secondary schools, *Dejepis pre 1. ročník gymnázií a středných škôl*. Our objective was to analyse the thematically-relevant textbook texts, evaluate the contemporary standard of how the matter of the respective subject matter items were covered and processed and to point attention at positive and negative aspects of the concerned coverage.

For practical reasons we divided the didactic analysis of the textbook into two basic sub-scales where we focused on specific operationalization parameters:

- a) *Factographic aspect* (within the subscale we analysed the content of respective subject matter items, whether the textbook includes themes that were processed mostly factographically, without descriptions and explanations of the presented information, or whether it contains texts over-saturated with vast amounts of information, including irrelevant ones for the covered subject matter. We focused on whether the subject matter is processed superficially or in depth).
- b) *Other text components* (within the subscale we focused on extra-text components in relation to the respective subject matter items and the proposed questions and assignments).

The qualitative analysis of the textbook was focused on teaching texts concerning the Classical Era, specifically the thematic area of Classical Antiquity. The entire chapter in the textbook is divided into main topics: Formation of the Aegean Region, The Rise of Greek States, Classical Greece, Hellenism, Rome on its Way to Fame, Problems of the Roman Republic, Rise of the Roman Empire, The Power of the Roman Empire Is Shaking, The Ancient Roman Heritage.

After summarizing the acquired information from our qualitative analysis of the history textbook for year 1 of secondary schools, *Dejepis pre 1. ročník gymnázií a středných škôl*, we arrived at the conclusion that this textbook fulfils the functions (for teaching history) that we had defined in the introduction to this paper. Our opinion is that respective subject matter items of the concerned thematic unit were designed in a rather demanding way, including unreasonably presenting too much factographic data that are not sufficiently interpreted. Moreover, there is not (at least) a hint of the interrelations between/among respective information items.

We think that the textbook unreasonably presents too many terms and concepts to students within its separate subject matter items that may lead to cramming and empty verbalism. Examples of such concepts are: ephori, gerousia, apella, archonate, aeropagus, archonti, tyranny, phylia, prytanos, ostracism, colonies, hegemony, congress, strategist, dominate, tetrarchy, edict, council, Goths, Gepids, Vandals, Alamani, Sarmati. The subject matter also includes several inaccuracies. It is striking that city states of the *polis* type are not discerned at all from the city states of the Mycenaean and Minoan civilizations. The textbook refers to the concept of a citizen in relation to the beginnings of democracy. We cannot agree with how the concept is defined and interpreted in the textbook. As stated by Kleisten, all citizens had equal rights. We consider this simplified statement as inadequate because women, foreigners and children alike had no civil rights.

It needs to be pointed out that the textbook informs about a flat granting of Roman citizenship to all free inhabitants but there is no explanation of why this was done. We also take the liberty to claim that the battles with the German tribes are completely taken out of the rest of the text and are not explained accordingly although this is the subject matter that is relevant to our land (Laugaricio – Trenčín). The textbook primarily covers two emperors, Diocletian and Constantine the Great. With relation to the latter one, the textbook text goes back to the previous subject matter, Christianity. It is striking that the textbook even there does not say anything about the effects of Christian teaching on transformation of antiquated thinking and culture and does not say what the historical contribution of Christianity was and how Christian morals differed from non-Christian ones.

It also has to be pointed out that the textbook offers positive sections. Respective portions of the explanatory text were designed in depth and bring many fundamental pieces of knowledge. We highly appreciated the section titled the Spartan Life (*Život Spartanov*) focusing on the history of day-to-day life. Another thing deserving praise is that the textbook did not reduce the contribution by Alexander the Great to just his control over vast territories but it also describes development of the Greek culture that the emperor

promoted by inter-connecting the concerned culture with other parts of the empire, meaning including the cultures of the then Orient.

The Other Text Components were the second operationalization parameter. Our primary focus was on the extra-text components and the questions and assignments. A summarizing statement can be made that the extra-text components assigned for the respective subject matter items were generally adequate and mostly embedded within the context (they clearly relate to the text content) and underpin the text visualization. For instance a chart (with division of the society into three classes), a sketch of a Spartan soldier, images of vessels for chip-courts and a photograph of the Acropolis (although there is no information about why and for what purpose it was built). One of the texts includes an image of the law of the Twelve Tables accompanied by an explanatory text that we found to be very interesting and enriching.

We have certain reservations concerning the questions and assignments. As hinted at in the introduction, we perceive a textbook as a tool for development of the students' thinking. For that reason we consider the converging nature of almost all of the questions as insufficient since they do not develop higher cognitive processes in students. Questions and assignments are very useful in textbooks and they should focus primarily on the core topics that could not be included (for space reasons) in the main text. The analysed textbook, however, centres its questions and assignments at revisions of the subject matter, especially its factographic components. We also have reservations to the wording of certain questions such as: "The Athenian society was a democratic one, with the rule of the citizens instead of a king." This is an oversimplified statement that is not in accordance with the previous explanatory text. We could have similar reservations also to the next question following the text: "What makes the characteristics of Pericles's behaviour to be in contrast with the principles of democracy?" This question does not encourage thinking within the historical context but it elicits a historical look because the principles of democracy were comprehended as moral and democratic principles.

As mentioned above, many questions focus primarily on the lower cognitive processes such as "When was the inscription on the Trenčín rock made?" or "Give the historical and the modern names of regions that were under Ancient Roman influence." On the other hand, we appreciated that certain questions and assignments led the students to independent search for valuable new information. We also favourably evaluated inclusion of questions that encourage historical cogitation in students through the if-history.

3 Instructional strategies

Contemporary teaching puts emphasis primarily on the subject matter, teacher, instructional objectives, and textbook as well as on instructional strategies and teaching methodology. The presently frequently criticized issue is the way in which the instructional content (as a ready-made/processed form) is mediated to students and the role played by students in the instructional/educational process (in many instances they do not need to apply critical thinking, evaluate the information, inter-connect it and find mutual interrelations).

For students it is very important not only to be able to know respective learning strategies that will help them effectively receive and process new information but also to know the rules for how to use them and remember them.

We can find the concept of a strategy in contemporary terminology in almost all areas of human activities. We can find the concept of a strategy in the political, technological, economic and social areas. We identify strategies generally as certain methods and steps made to resolve problems resulting from day-to-day life.

Teaching/learning strategies are now among the key topics of psychology, specialized didactics and educational policy within the curricular changes. We consider instructional strategies as key determinants not only for effective learning but also for attainment of the educational/instructional objectives.

Strategies, from the pedagogic point of view, can be procedures or procedure plans that allow the students to solve the set tasks or problems. Strategies may get automated in students only when they are intensively used and practiced.

In defining the concept of a strategy, we have to draw from the proposition that instructional strategies are not just about the teaching procedures and processes but they also are related to the entire system of methodologies and techniques that the teacher uses in teaching. Books and professional literature present several specifications of the term instructional strategies.

Klimeš (2005) defined strategies as: "...a procedure, methodology, general way in which a person solves problems or makes decisions."

We agree with Vlčkova (2007) who wrote that strategies are sets of certain steps, plans that guide students to attainment of the set objectives within the educational/instructional process. J. Mareš (1998, p. 58), on the

other hand, delineated strategies as “larger scope procedures that students implement in their way to solve problems/assignments, to accomplish something or to avoid something”.

For the authors of this paper on instructional strategies, they are steps and elements that follow certain objectives (are the means for their attainment within respective instructional areas). Using instructional strategies, we can involve all students in instruction, develop their capacity for critical and creative thinking, understanding the instructional content and thinking within broader interrelationships. We consider instructional strategies as a tool for active learning because they support development of self-regulation and metacognition in students. For that reason, in selecting and modifying instructional strategies, we have to take account of three attributes: age, teaching style, gender, personality features, level of knowledge and motivation, and level of knowledge of the instructional assignments as well as the level of awareness of one’s own cognition processes (Vlčková, 2003).

3.1 Cognitive and metacognitive instructional strategies

The following section of the paper presents cognitive and metacognitive strategies that are in the forefront of today’s professional literature. Under cognitive theory, knowledge can be defined as a symbolic mental structure in an individual’s mind. Individuals, while learning, are receiving information, encode and decode it, store it in their memories and actively process it (Palmárová, 2008). Cognitive theories emphasize the need to give sense to the knowledge and information. Students need help to organize and systemize the new information within the existing information stored in their memory and cognitive scheme. The cognitive scheme can be defined as an individual’s internal knowledge structure that contains the earlier received and processed information. Every new information item that the student receives is compared with the existing (so far received) knowledge within the mental scheme. If the information does not fit the student’s mental scheme (s/he does not understand the information) it may be difficult to keep that information in her/his memory. If the teacher is to present information to students that they can use, the important thing is to give the students also the means to allow them to create their own visualizations that will be most convenient to them (Bertrand, 1998).

J. Mareš (2001) outlined four categories of learning strategies: cognitive strategies (creating schemes, maps); metacognitive strategies (planning the objective, monitoring); strategies allowing knowing oneself (one’s learning style); and motivational strategies (interest in the subject matter, internal motivation).

Dole et al. (1991), having analysed professional papers, arrived at a summarization of the basic characteristics of cognitive strategies: they include thinking, understanding and reconstructing the meaning of the studied material; they are conscious and deliberate strategies; they can be adapted, are flexible and can be modified.

Ertmer, Newby (2013) included the following in cognitive teaching strategies: structuring of the subject matter, instructional explanations, conceptual mapping, summarizing, syntheses, mnemonic-technical aids, information organizing, analogies, demonstrations, organizing and arranging the information to encourage their optimum processing.

We consider the development of cognitive strategies within the school setting as very important. Students must be able to analyse and justify the information within the cognitive strategies. The concerned strategy type is supported by a number of activities that are mutually interrelated. The important capacity is to draw a conclusion from the presented information, find any hidden meaning in the text or speech, and analyse concepts and expressions. With regard to the written form, the need is to remember creation of structures by students and working with text that also dwells in emphasizing the important information and summing up the core facts within the subject matter.

Discussing metacognition, one has to remember that it is a multidimensional construct because it also influences other cognitive dimensions: besides critical thinking (pondering, evaluating, analysing, synthesizing and modifying one’s pre-concepts) it also is a way of problem solving and using respective learning strategies and motivation that arrive with the stage of formal operations.

The beginning of metacognitive information processing is becoming aware of one’s own capacities. Teaching strategies applied by teachers in the educational/instructional process in contemporary instruction are the key elements that need to be emphasized in education. Metacognition has been becoming a quite popular specialized term in the area of cognitive, psychological and pedagogical matters. We consider metacognition as the decisive and crucial skill for a human being to be able to learn effectively.

An apt definition was presented by J. Mareš (1998) who was thinking about metacognition as a set of ideas and theories of knowing oneself but also about the process of knowing other people. This definition says that metacognitive knowledge is important for the students just like for the teacher in knowing and diagnosing the students. The etymology of the preposition “meta” refers to a phenomenon that is superior to our

cognition and represents a level at which our cognition-related activity is organized based on strategies allowing this cognition. Metacognitive-designed instruction requires specific roles on the part of the teacher as well as the students. The teacher gives students space for monitoring their thinking and learning to make sure the new subject matter follows up the network of previously-acquired knowledge and skills. Students can ask questions during the lesson and the teacher is helpful.

Table No. 2: Developing metacognitive thinking from the students' and teacher's views by Schofieldová, (2012 in Lokajčíková, V. 2014)

From students' view	From teacher's view
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan and describe learning objectives • Expectations of students from the teaching • Explicitly express cognitive processes and capabilities needed for completion of the assignment • Clarify the learning objectives that the students are to exercise • Create relations to previously-learned knowledge • Ponder things and use rhetorical questions • Create concept schemes for better comprehension • Realizing what I am good at and what needs improvement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Encourage students to think and clarify • Allow the students to think "aloud" • Know the students' previous knowledge • Use information from peer evaluations and self-evaluation • Use aids in the teaching process • Use charts

For discussion of metacognitive strategies, the key is to have the correct content definition as well as comprehensions of the *concept*. Students embed new concepts in their already acquired structures and systems depending on at what thinking level and at what extent and depth the process of concept acquisition and development of systems is going on. The important thing is that every successfully applied strategy dwells in merging the concept-making process with the aspect of the social construction of the concept. The concept, according to J. D. Novak (1998), is regularity in events and objects that are called certain terms. Learning concepts is a demanding challenge and the making of concepts alone in children has been the subject of developmental and cognitive psychology for many years.

The professional literature presents the notion of "*concept maps*" in relation to strategies for structured subject matter, graphical representation of the subject matter and its categorization.

In recent years a search has been going on in the professional public to find a general title for the group of approaches to subject-matter structuring. Drawing from older theories of subject-matter structuring, from the Galperin theory of making orientation outlines and charts of logical structure, up to the more recent theories that started developing at the beginning of the 1980s, which use information-processing theories and the semantic memory theory. Authors have gradually worked on strategies that are independent from the content of the subject matter and can be universally used, such as: creating networks, creating schemes, recurrent graphical representation and structuring of key concepts. (Mareš, J. 2001).

The so-called *concept mapping* method is not a common or disseminated procedure to support students' learning in our school system, even though it is a method that has been strongly integrated within the international, especially American, didactic tradition. A mental map, the way we understand it, is a graphical representation of the knowledge structure of the concerned subject matter by the student where the nodes (points) stand for concepts and the connecting lines (arcs or lines) represent relationships among respective concepts. This is a method for learning, testing and ascertaining knowledge whose essence dwells in acquisition of the mutual relationships among the concepts. The mapping theory draws primarily from theories of learning from text with comprehension and information processing theories. Text comprehension is of a relational nature and it cannot be understood as a simple reproduction of the read or heard text. Text comprehension is a complex hierarchized cognitive process, going from simple memory information processing, through deducing the text interrelations, up to critical evaluation of the acquired information.

The aim in text comprehension is creating accordance between the subject's cognitive competence and the text's cognitive structure. Developing an effective learning strategy is not an easy process. Students can gradually internalize certain teaching strategies from their teacher that s/he applied in the educational/instructional process. L. Portlance (2002, p. 21), in the presented scheme of metacognitive teaching, described respective requirements that need to be observed in the process of developing students' metacognition. The student is in the centre of this development and the other components (transferring the learning responsibility onto the student, encouraging deliberate learning, supporting metacognition, taking account of the students' experience and helping them to create interrelationships, supporting interaction with other students) are handled by the teacher. In this way the teacher is considered as the more competent agent within the strategic teaching process as the main source and model of the strategically-designed instructional process.

Many students do not possess sufficiently developed and mastered learning strategies. Later on they suffer from ineffective learning, an inability to solve the assigned problems in the practical instructional setting, failure to complete assignments, and poor planning for their learning. Yet, there are students who have mastered a broad spectrum of learning strategies; they apply them to learn effectively and they know how to successfully plan their instructional activities. This is the space for active intervention by teachers. It is up to teachers to use in their teaching process as many effective teaching strategies as possible. Students can then choose from among a broad array of presented strategies and use those that best fit with the studied subject or topic.

We summarize the cognitive and metacognitive strategies that have been discussed in the studied professional literature and outline five main classes, namely:

- Strategies for essential orientation in the learning text (it is here the activation and consolidation of relevant knowledge already owned by the individual occurs; concurrently there is acquisition of the first idea of the content and extent of the studied subject matter)
- Strategic memorizing of information (we consider memory as one of the key categories for successful learning; the objective of grasping is also to better remember the information)
- Information encoding and decoding (it is here that recoding of the acquired information into a simpler, easier to remember form occurs).
- Strategies for analysing key information (the core ideas of the subject matter constitute the text macrostructure, create a certain skeleton that makes information remembering and handling easier; students are able to better assess the importance of the information on the basis of the text structure)
- Strategies for summarizing and elaborating respective pieces of information (meaning reducing the acquired information into the form of consolidated material that, following a critical analysis, reflects the original; elaboration is understood as strategies for active interlinking of information from the text with one's own cognitive knowledge).

Conclusion

If we want to make the teaching process more effective, the teaching has to be modified and, above all, be active and effective. The question remains whether that is possible at all? Can we influence learning effectiveness by using instructional strategies? Do we put enough emphasis on development of respective cognitive and metacognitive functions of students in the learning/teaching process?

To improve and increase the effectiveness of their information processing and their own learning, students need to be able to identify the strategy that should to be used for their specific learning situations. These questions need to be raised and answers to them found; only then will we stop focusing only on quantity in our instructional environment and will turn our attention to the quality of our students' knowledge. We consider it as important to continue increasing the effectiveness of the educational/instructional process through innovation, modification and application of relevant learning strategies in the teaching process.

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