

History and Citizenship Education within the Austrian School System

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Abstract

Teaching in digital times is in general in a transition process. With knowledge available in seconds, it is the competence to distinguish fact from fake that is the key. This article tries to give an overview of the enormous changes having taken in place in the last 10 – 15 years in Austrian History and Social Studies /Citizenship Education curricula and didactics. In the long tradition of history education in Austria there is now a complete change of paradigm. Competence-oriented education was introduced instead of content-oriented teaching. Especially History teaching in Austria is in a decisive situation, one new curriculum following the other and leaving teachers behind. Since 1962, History has been combined with Social Studies, and as of 2023, this part has been dropped in favor of Citizenship Education, following a growing need in society. The curricula from 2007/08 first reacted to EU-policies, PISA-results and the changes in society, technology and internet applications by introducing competence-oriented teaching. The new approach was based on challenging the so-called historical facts, calling them constructed national narratives with an intention of justification and creating national identification. Only eight years later, in 2015/16, curriculum innovation went one step further. The whole curriculum was completely taken apart and organized in a new way, creating room for new competence areas and new content on Citizenship Education and Historic disciplinary competences. In this way, the tools of historic science are made available to children. Furthermore, the curricula are structured along basic concepts rather than chronology according to the Federal Law, amended in 2023 (BGBL)¹. The question now is how to get teachers on board. Teachers agree there is a need for a different approach but struggle to get along and understand the new concept. We see the dilemma between societal needs, political intentions, modern, innovative didactics and teaching practices.

Keywords: competence-oriented education, methodology of history, Citizenship Education

Introduction

Austria is a small country in Central Europe, the German speaking successor of the Habsburg Empire, which turned into a republic in 1918 after the abdication of the last emperor. 9 million people live here, with one big city, the capital Vienna, with 2 million inhabitants, and two more cities with around 300,000 (Graz, Linz) and the rest in smaller cities and villages in rural areas. The average age in Austria is 43,2 years, and there are slightly more women than men, 50,7%. There are slightly more people above 65 years than youngsters under 19 (roughly 1,7 million), most of the population, 5,5 million, is between 20 and 64 (Statistik Austria, 2023).

Statistics Austria say that 19% of the Austrian population are foreigners, this percentage has continuously risen from 9% in 2002, and is now 21,7% for people living in Austria but who were born in a foreign country.

There is a growing expertise in Austrian schools in teaching German as a foreign language and many efforts are taken especially in adult education to teach people who master neither our alphabet nor the language. But as the latest PISA-study shows¹⁶, children with migration background are still disadvantaged.

There is a problem of an aging population: having declined by about 10% over the last decade, the proportion of 6 -15-year-olds is projected to drop further to 9.46% of the population and increase again until it reaches a share of 9.67% in 2030 (Statistik Austria, 2014a). These trends will vary across the provinces. Vienna will experience a strong increase in the number of students due to its large share of relatively young immigrants, the size of the student population, however, is expected to stagnate or decline in other parts of Austria.

The Austrian Education System

The Federal Republic of Austria has a free and public school system, with nine years of mandatory school education and one year of compulsory kindergarten. After four years of primary education, children – or rather, their parents - must choose between *Mittelschule* (general secondary) or *Gymnasium* (AHS, academic secondary), depending on marks in the last year of primary school. Through a series of recent reforms this

two-track-system has been made permeable and so good grades in Mittelschule allow children to get into upper secondary schools of their choice.

After 9 years of school, pupils can start an apprenticeship. Besides training on the job, they have to attend Vocational School (Berufsschule) for three years - a dual system, something which is a peculiarity in Europe. School can be attended either in block release (5 days a week for about four months) or day release (once a week in the same stretch of time as a normal school). On the days they are at school they do not have to go to work. At the end of three years, there is the final apprenticeship examination (Lehrabschlussprüfung). It is possible to go in for tertiary education after finishing the apprenticeship if they go in for “Berufsreifeprüfung”, a course with a final exam which entitles you to attend university (Federal Ministry of Education, 2022/BMBWF).

Pupils who want to go to university must complete four to five years in upper secondary at an institution of higher education (AHS) or a vocational college with higher education entrance qualification (BHS). Most of these schools require an entrance exam or demand good marks on the last school certificate. Upper secondary schools offer a series of vocational-technical and university preparatory tracks involving one to five additional years of education beyond the minimum mandatory level. The final exam for either one of those higher education institutions is matriculation (Matura). After that, you can go to university or an Applied Science University, though some subjects may require additional exams (e.g. medicine) (Federal Ministry of Education).⁴

The legal basis for primary and secondary education in Austria is the School Act of 1962 (SCHOG). Federal legislation plays a prominent role in the education system, and laws dealing with education effectively have a de facto constitutional status because, like Austrian constitutional law, they can only be passed or amended by a two-thirds majority in parliament. In fact, the provinces have influence on education, especially on the finances, primary and general lower secondary schools, the employment of teachers and the appointment of leading functions.

In 2016 a new law about compulsory training until 18 was passed, trying to solve the problem of youth unemployment and youths not fit for training. Youngsters who live in Austria and did not find a place as an apprentice or a job after finishing mandatory education, or failed in upper secondary school, have the obligation to go in for training or schooling until they are 18. If they do not comply, they will be fined. State institutions offer training or help finding a suitable school (Federal Ministry of Education, Flyer 2023).

In Austria, *vocational* upper secondary education plays an important role. 20% of 15-19-year-olds are enrolled in general upper secondary education and 43% in vocational upper secondary education. A further 3% are enrolled in lower secondary programs and 16% in tertiary programs. This compares to an OECD average of 37% enrolled in general upper secondary programs, 23% in vocational upper secondary programs, 12% in lower secondary programs and 12% in tertiary programs. Moreover, 54% of 25–34-year-olds have a vocational education and training (VET) qualification as their highest level of attainment, which is the highest share among all OECD countries: 35% at upper secondary level and 3% at post-secondary non-tertiary level and 15% at short-cycle tertiary level (table 1). (OECD, 2023)

School Maintenance, Funding

The Federal Ministry of Education is responsible for funding and supervising primary, secondary, and tertiary education. Primary and secondary education is administered, however, on the level of the federate provinces by the authorities of the respective provinces. In Austria, as of 2018, there were 5,661 schools with 1, 115, 318 pupils and 122,509 teachers (Statistics in a Pocket, 2019)

Across all levels from primary to tertiary education, Austria spends 17,744 USD annually per full-time equivalent student (adjusted for purchasing power and including expenditure on research and development), compared to the OECD average of 12,647 USD, which means rank 4 out of 39.

In Austria, in full-time equivalent terms, there are around 10 students per staff member in general upper secondary programmes (OECD average: 14 students per staff member) and 10 students for every teaching staff member in vocational upper secondary programmes (OECD average: 15 students per staff member) (OECD, 2023).

School Autonomy 2017

In mid-2017, the Austrian National Council adopted far-reaching measures for the education sector, including a special focus on the extension of school autonomy which also applies to VET schools. The reform gives schools and teachers more scope for measures for the organization of teaching. They are permitted to adjust class and group sizes,

depending on how they design pedagogical and didactic aspects of learning, there is no central specification. Resources, which remain unchanged overall, can be used flexibly in various locations (CEDEFOP, 2018)

The duration of periods of instruction can also be varied, with the 50-minute lesson only serving as a parameter of calculation for resource allocation: total teaching time for teachers and pupils, based on the applicable curriculum, does not change. This simplifies project-oriented teaching, block instruction and theme-centred teaching – which is asked for in the new curricula. The grouping of pupils and the forms of teaching can also be handled flexibly. School opening hours can be laid down for individual locations in school partnership agreements. This allows school infrastructure to be used in a flexible way (CEDEFOP, 2018).

Merging into so-called school clusters of two to eight school locations in a region is allowed. The individual school locations are still schools but are strengthened due to cooperation in the cluster. The school cluster management fulfils a cross-location function. Timetables and the distribution of subjects are set out centrally in the cluster in consultation with the locations. Individual school locations can still have one point of contact to support the cluster management on site. A specific advisory body for each school cluster gives the school partners in the cluster an additional opportunity to have their say (CEDEFOP, 2018).

In-service teacher training on demand conducted in-house is expanded to support individual development concepts. Teachers must have an electronic portfolio accompanying their career and documenting all the in-service and continuing education and training measures they undertake (CEDEFOP, 2018).

Another important point of the reform is a new attempt of depoliticization of school administration. School heads are selected using a national standardized procedure in which external experts will carry out evaluations. The heads of the school or school cluster carry out selection of newly employed teachers (instead of allocation by school authorities). Furthermore, new school heads will be assisted through specific programs. The public authority examines the formal requirements and assumes functions related to service legislation; it only intervenes in a regulatory capacity if no suitable applicants are found for specific locations. (CEDEFOP, 2018). However, four years later, political influence, especially in appointing leading functions in the school system is still the rule rather than the exception (e.g. Rechnungshofbericht, Reihe BUND 2021/37).

Private schools

According to the Ministry of Education, private schools in Austria account for about 8% of the total number. Most publicly authorized private schools are denominational schools run by the Roman Catholic Church; in addition, there are some schools which teach according to a particular system e.g. Waldorf). Private schools are fee-paying establishments, teacher costs are paid by the state, however. There are also private teacher training colleges, but only of late a few private universities.

Teachers in the Austrian School System

The aging can be seen among teachers as well. 40% of teachers in general upper secondary are aged 50 or older. Teachers in vocational programmes are on average older than their peers in the general programme and so are the teachers in post-secondary education.

Austria has a high percentage of female teachers under 30 in primary and lower secondary education, also the percentage of teachers under 30 in early childhood educational development and pre-primary are especially high in Austria (OECD, 2023) This coincides with a reform in teacher training in 2013 with the goal that teachers on all levels must have a master's degree (Bologna). This prolonged initial teacher training also in primary education from 3 to 4 years for the Bachelor, with one following induction year in schools with a mentor, and then one year to write the Master thesis either on the job or back at university. As there is a shortage of teachers, the Ministry of Education is currently (2023) reforming the reform by shortening study time and running a campaign for people to make a lateral career move into teaching: "Teacher: a Person with Class" (Lehrer:in Person mit Klasse) to avoid a crucial shortage in the near future. Until the full implementation of the reform there are still different service laws and salaries for teachers in different types of school. In all types of schools, Austria's teachers' salaries are among the highest in all OECD countries at ranks 2 and 3, especially teachers aged 55 and older who well rank 1. Also, principals' salaries rank high in international comparison (OECD country report Austria, 2023). After the implementation of the newly trained teachers there will be *one* public service law valid for all teachers of all types of school (Dienstrecht Pädagogischer Dienst) – a major innovation.

A recent OECD TALIS study 2023 showed that the *job and workplace satisfaction of teachers is above average*, but they feel they get less support in international comparison. They complain about too much administrative work and other side-activities like collaboration. They suffer most from *the growing diversity of pupils* and the loss of the idea of a homogenous group of children. Also, teachers note that for many pupils free time and free time activities are more important than education.

The growing numbers of children with migration background and poor knowledge of German constitute another problem. *Cooperation with Parents* also seems to get more difficult. Teachers today are definitely more than only providers of knowledge, they fulfil an important role as educators.

Teachers themselves would rather go back to times before the different reforms of the last decade: streaming instead of inner differentiation, they criticize school autonomy and demand less time stress in fulfilling curriculum requirements in extremely heterogeneous classes. Teachers meet with a lot of demands from all sides, but most of them take motivation from the work with the children: to see them grow and develop – often against all odds – and they hope to become the “one teacher that makes the difference”(APA- Science, 2023)

Social Function of Schools, Overall Goals and Curriculum

According to the Austrian Federal Constitutional Law Article 14 - as amended (B-VG, Art. 14) democracy, humanity, solidarity, peace and justice, openness and tolerance towards everyone regardless of race, social status and financial background are fundamental principles of education in Austria.

In more detail the present Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research (BMBWF) states these as the current goals of the Austrian school system: ‘At the end of their school education young people are self-directed and know about their strengths and talents. They can see their perspectives in a changing society in the digital era. They can grasp opportunities to help them master their private as well as their professional lives. They are active members of society and know the value of democratic participation and contribution. It is the goal of the Austrian School System to allow children find their own optimal development path within the educational system’ (Federal law: BGBl. SCHOG (§2, 2023)¹¹.

Social Outcomes

One of the social outcomes of the relatively expensive Austrian school system is stated in the OECD country report: “In Austria, below upper-secondary education’s average score for the perception of democracy and the importance given to citizens having the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums is relatively high, compared to other OECD and partner countries with available data. According to 2020 data Austria ranks 5th out of 24 countries, also, the rate of women and men between 22 – 29 years neither in employment nor in education is relatively low at 6.5%.

Historical Roots of the Austrian Education System

Mandatory primary education was introduced by Empress Maria Theresa of Austria (1740–1780), ruling in 1774 that all children of both sexes from six to twelve had to attend school - statewide. To achieve this, schools had to be established in all areas — even rural ones, which were required to have a one- or two-class elementary school (known as Volksschule). Furthermore, textbooks were unified and teacher education was regulated. At that time, religious and moral education was still a large part of the curriculum; besides, schools also taught reading, writing, and arithmetic. Girls, however, were only fully allowed to enter secondary or tertiary education by the beginning of the 20th century. (K12 Academics)^{11a}

A school reform which is still in force today was introduced after 1918 by the President of the Vienna Municipal Education Authority, Otto Glöckel. All children should be guaranteed an optimum educational development regardless of gender and social circumstances. General secondary school was introduced in 1924, compulsory for all 10-14 year olds. (Ministry of Education and Science,2022)¹²

During the Nazi-regime (1938 – 1945) equality of the sexes was taken back again and schools became places of political influence, spreading Nazi ideology. The three pillars of Nazi influence on children were parents, schools and a free time youth organization “Hitlerjugend”. Within a very short time non-Nazi principals were replaced by loyal ones, Jewish teachers were fired, Jewish children forbidden to enter schools. All teachers were

objected to Nazi campaigns and trainings. Intellectual standards were lowered, the subject Sports was given more importance, in Biology and Geography teachers had to teach the Nazi genetic and race theory. All confessional schools and kindergartens were closed in autumn 1938 (Weigl,1988).

The history of the Austrian education system after World War II, in the Second Republic, may be characterized as an attempt to transform higher education in a way to provide more equal access for all social classes. Before the School Act of 1962, Austria had a rather strict “two-track” education system (see above) with disadvantages especially for the rural population. So, before the 1962 reform, the great majority of children, more than 90%, attended the then compulsory 8 years either in primary schools (8 grades in rural areas), or Hauptschule, where they were divided according to their performance in primary school into an “A group,” which was directed toward two- to four-year vocational-technical training schools after graduation from the Hauptschule and a “B group,” which was required – since 1967 - to complete one additional year of compulsory education before entrance into apprenticeship programmes or agriculture, or the workforce. Only less than 10% of elementary-school graduates enrolled in the Academic Secondary School at age ten.

In 1962 the Austrian school system was completely reorganized by an extensive school act. In addition to extending compulsory schooling to nine years, it also raised the level of compulsory schoolteacher training to an academic one at colleges of teacher education (*Pädagogische Akademien*).

Since 1993 inclusive education for children with handicaps was made possible in primary schools, since 1997 also in lower secondary. In 2009, another reform of the general secondary track introduced the New Middle School (Neue Mittelschule) with inner differentiation after a long period of piloting in experimental schools instead of Hauptschule with streaming. The process was finished by 2017/18. (Federal Ministry of Education, Science and Research).¹²

The 2017 Education Reform Act (Bildungsreformgesetz 2017), established a new governance model for the education system and *evidence-based quality assurance*, including:

- Definition of a comprehensive framework on school quality
- Regular collection of data on all aspects of school quality
- Availability of these data for all levels of the school administration

- Production of annual school reports, based on school programs
- New system of school inspection and school evaluation (Eurydice, 2023).

The school-leaving exam in Austria (Matura) was reformed in 2009. There is now a partly standardized, centralized Matura which justifies the successful completion of an academic secondary school or a college of higher vocational education and qualifies for university entrance. The goals of the new Matura (at Academic Secondary School-AHS) and Colleges of Higher Vocational Education) are to guarantee standardized basic competences and objectivity through standardized tasks and standardized assessment criteria as well as comparability and transparency of school performance, and Europe-wide comparison of degrees. The exam consists of three independent sections: a Pre-Academic Thesis (Academic Secondary School) or a Diploma Thesis (College of Higher Vocational Education) Written standardized exams in languages and math; not standardized oral exams in up to four subjects. (BMBWF, Educational Paths in Austria, 2023).

Position of History Education in Austria

On the History of the Subject

There used to be a subject called “Historie” already in the Monarchy and the first curricula were formulated in the middle of the 19th century. History teaching starts in Primary School within the framework of “Sachunterricht” (Realities; it includes science, geography and history) and aims at giving children some ideas of the local history and some glances of past cultures.

With the school reform of 1962 (SCHOG 62)¹¹ a new combined subject was created for secondary education “History and Social Studies” (Geschichte und Sozialkunde, GS) and introduced. The idea was to convey some content of social sciences without increasing the number of school subjects.

Learning History is obligatory in secondary education and is taught in lower secondary from grade 2 – 4 (ages 11 – 14), in upper secondary in all four grades (14 – 18) until the final Matura exam. In vocational upper secondary colleges it is a compulsory subject as well, but there are fewer hours per week. It is sometimes taught in combination with other subjects and can be chosen for the final exam (Matura). The subject is called “History and Citizenship Education” starting from 2023 (Sitte C., et al)²⁰.

In 1978, a general cross-curricular educational principle “Citizenship Education” was introduced. All teachers of all subjects were supposed to integrate CE content or cooperate in projects with other subjects to teach Citizenship Education content matter in adequate ways. In 1985, a new curriculum for History and Social Studies was introduced which was identical for both tracks of lower secondary and was downsized and reorganized into *core curriculum* and *additional content* in 2000, the idea of the ‘skeleton curriculum’ (Federal Law: BGBl, 1984). In 2008, competence-oriented curricula for history education were introduced in Austria as a consequence of the PISA-shock (BGBl., 2008). These tests showed deficits in pupils, especially in transferring and applying what had been learned to new cases (Brait, 2022).

Also, the aspect “Citizenship Education” was explicitly added, the subject name was changed into „History and Social Studies and Citizenship Education” and CE competences for grades 3 and 4 were introduced.^{17a}

Since the new curriculum in 2016 the subject content has shifted from Social Studies to Citizenship Education and from 2023 the subject name has changed to History and Citizenship Education (GPB).

The New Curriculum

Zentrum Polis, Politik lernen²⁰, which was founded as a gateway for teachers to support the implementation of the changes, explains the reason for the new curriculum like this: the government programme of 2013-2018 promised that Citizenship Education should be enforced by adding obligatory Citizenship Education modules to the history curriculum. An expert commission advised not only *adding* things but introducing a totally new concept. The new curriculum was piloted in several voluntary schools.

From 2015 the new curricula were developed in a new approach: they brought together experts and teachers from *all* types of school (primary, lower and upper secondary) to formulate educational goals and competences together to make clear what kinds of competences should be the result of eight years of schooling and how each type of school could contribute. The outcomes were still structured along general goals and competences and subject competences and theme-centred approaches, a consequence of the curricula reform 2000 which was never really put into practice (Kern, 2020).

In the general part of the curricula pupils’ cross-curricular competence goals are explicitly formulated: self -, social-, and learning competences which are new. Until then

they were found in cross-curricular principles, but with an output that was not satisfying. Above all, some of these competences are connected to subject specific topics. That means that competence description and goals in e.g. Citizenship Education, language education, entrepreneurship education are specifically connected with subject goals. Subject competences are still seen as important but the big and complex challenges in society e.g. climate change, migration, and digitalization should be addressed in a combined approach (Kern, 2020). The competence definition follows the model by Weinert (2001).

Content

- In the old curriculum history was structured along chronology and focused more or less on Europe. In a nutshell content of grade 2 used to be a first insight into history from the origin of man until the end of Middle Ages, grade 3 started with Modern Times and finished with the end of World War I and grade 4 started with the end of WW I until Present Times. The curricula for both tracks were identical, but the learning goals differed.

The new curriculum is based on basic concepts and competences on history learning and historic disciplinary learning and Citizenship education. It lists content matter detailed where varied historic and methodological connections can be made to present times, e.g. aspects of globalization are not only a feature of the 20th and 21st centuries, but also of Discoveries in early Modern Times or the Roman Empire.

Basic Concepts are also included in the curriculum. These are central and recurring themes in teaching history, or rather the *concepts* that are included in them. There are basic concepts that

- reflect the origin of historic and political knowledge: evidence, constructivity, causality, perspectivity and selectivity
- regard time as a basic concept of historical thinking between continuity and change: the course of time, chronologic order, points in time
- focus on connections of human cohabitation: structure, power, communication, scope for action, living and natural environment, norms, work, diversity and distribution.

Basic concepts help teachers in designing their teaching and allow learners to understand connections when meeting similar or equal conceptional structures in different case studies. The different concepts are supposed to be combined. (Zentrum Polis)²¹

Competences in Citizenship Education and History Learning

The competence model goes back to the work of Krammer (2008) and Körber (2007). It is applicable for all grades and all types of school. The curricula themselves are based on the work of Weinert (2001). He defines competence as „cognitive skills and capabilities available in individuals or to be learned by them in order to solve certain problems as well as the motivational, volitional and social skills and willingness to be able to use problem solving successfully and responsibly in variable situations“ (Weinert, 2001) So, instead of only cognitive learning pupils should acquire a combination of knowledge, skills and attitude and be able to apply their competence for solving (real world) problems.

The following competences are promoted in Citizenship Education:

The overall goal of competence-oriented history teaching is reflected and self-reflexive political awareness. It is *not* about teaching comprehensive knowledge, but creating learning situations which enable pupils to apply political thinking and action in relation to their living environment and experience.

- Competence of political judgement
- Competence for political action
- Methodological Competence
- Political Competence /Expertise

These four competence areas must be achieved by working on exemplified content. It is not lexical knowledge that dominates the learning but by learning from the example pupils should achieve political maturity and the competence for political participation so that without the help of third parties, they show civil courage, voter responsibility etc. The close connection with History and Citizenship Education is stressed by the goal that also there the teaching is designed in a way that allows students to achieve competences in asking historical questions, in historic methodology and in historical subject matter. (Zentrum Polis, 2023)

Teacher Education and Didactics für GPB

Teacher students must achieve competences for History as well as Citizenship Education. There is little research on the history of didactics for History and Citizenship Education. Together with the reform of teacher education which was developed in teamwork with universities and teacher training institutions in four different regions in 2013 (Ministry of Education, Pädagoginnenbildung neu)²⁴ the government wanted to establish a professorship for History Didactics and Citizenship Didactics in each region which was partly implemented. All in all, there are four big didactic centres in Austria working at the further development of history teaching and also smaller departments in the University Colleges of Teacher Training. There are Centers for Historic Didactics at the University of Vienna, and especially important for its influence, the one at Salzburg University, which is now a part of the Federal Centre of Societal Learning at the University of Teacher Education Salzburg. From 2002 – 2018 there was also a magazine for history teachers “Historische Sozialkunde” (Historic Social Studies).

On their websites, also the publishers of schoolbooks show concrete teaching designs for various topics. It is also interesting to see how differently schoolbooks deal with the requirements of the new curriculum. Some of them are available online as digital documents (see annex section 1) (Zentrum Polis, 2023)

Position of Citizenship Education in Austria

According to the Austrian Ministry of Education, Citizenship Education comprises human rights education and is closely related to similar educational principles and cross-curricular themes such as media education.

Citizenship Education is a precondition for individual development as well as the development of society as a whole. It actively contributes to shaping society and to putting democracy into practice; it addresses the problem of what makes society recognize government and authority as legitimate. In a democracy, free appointment, control and impeachment of the governing by the governed serve to legitimate government and authority. Citizenship Education is committed to this conception of democracy. The more this notion of democracy is embedded

at all levels of society, the more successfully democratic government systems will work and the better society will be able to organize itself according to the concept of democracy. (BMBWF, General Ordinance, 2015)

The Austrian school system offers a variety of school types with different focuses, especially in upper secondary level. Hence, there is a range of various curricula of citizenship education. In vocational colleges citizenship education is taught as a separate subject. The new curricula of the subject “History and Citizenship Education” in secondary level foresee compulsory modules for citizenship education from grade 6 on. Curricula also comprise teaching on topics of human rights.

Aside from curricula, citizenship education is defined as a cross-curricular educational principle (*Unterrichtsprinzip Politische Bildung*) which applies to all subjects and to all types of school, at each level. The content parameters are decreed as a basic principle, this means that every teacher can be called upon to teach citizenship education – even at primary level. In 2015 the general ordinance was brought up-to-date in terms of modern didactics for citizenship education. One of the support structures for teachers of every school subject and every type of school with the integration and implementation of citizenship education is the gateway Zentrum Polis Politik lernen. It strives to develop adequate activities for every age level (Zentrum *Polis*)¹⁶

Brief History of Citizenship Education

In Austria the general right to vote for men was introduced and a formal introduction to political studies for citizens, called *Bürgerkunde*, was established. The goal was to create a positive attitude towards the existing social and political system. Primarily, information about the political system and related institutions was imparted (Wolf,1998).

Citizenship Education for adults was first organized by associations that were dedicated to workers and general adult education (*Arbeiter- und Volksbildungsvereine*) as well as by middle-class reading and literature clubs (*Lese- und Literaturgesellschaften*). The driving force behind these efforts was the emancipative goal of empowerment.

The time between the wars and the two World Wars themselves were not supportive to the development of a system of democratic education. On the contrary, a lack of identification with the Austrian state as well as authoritarian developments and the dictatorship made schools the procurers of legitimation for whoever was in power (Steininger)²¹.

A radical re-orientation in Citizenship Education after World War II was short-lived and the 1928 curriculum was reinstated basically unchanged. A Decree on Citizenship Education in 1949 focused on an education that promoted conscious 'Austrianness' (Wolf,1998).

In his article on the role of history didactics past 1945 Borries (2001) asks the question on whether history as a subject should support the self-conception of the state or the personal growth of students and mentions three dates when "historic opportunities" were missed on changing history didactics: 1949, 1968 and 1989.

In 1974, the Austrian Ministry of Education tried to introduce a new compulsory school subject in the final years of secondary schools: Citizenship Education; but the bill failed in parliament. So as a compromise, Citizenship Education was established as a cross-curricular principle. In difficult and time-consuming negotiations between the various stakeholders, a Decree on Citizenship Education in Schools was finally signed in 1978 and made it *one* of eight general teaching principles.

In 2007 the voting age was reduced to 16. This served as an important stimulus for Citizenship Education. A broad coalition demanded more Citizenship Education from an earlier age. All pupils and students should be prepared for responsible political participation during their compulsory schooling. In the school year 2008/09, the reformed subject History and Social Studies/Citizenship Education for the 8th grade entered into force. The new curriculum also introduced competence-orientation (Zentrum Polis)²⁰. And in 2016, a curriculum reform resulted in further strengthening the part of Citizenship Education in the subject History and Citizenship Education. (Steininger)²¹

Dilemmas

Difficult Political Consensus in Education Matters

Austria's education system is a political minefield. There is little agreement between the two major political parties, the conservative ÖVP and the social democratic SPÖ. The SPÖ has kept pressing for more fairness for underprivileged children with one of the highlights in 1973, the introduction of free school buses and schoolbooks for every child. One of the consequences is the impressive variety of schoolbooks in Austria (see annex 1). A major goal was also permeability in the two-track system, measures against failing a whole school year just for one negative subject, reform of the general secondary school into New Middleschool arguing for a comprehensive lower secondary system,

partly standardized Matura (see above). But school laws require a two-thirds majority in parliament ,and other political parties are reluctant to give up tradition. Hence, major reforms are difficult to undertake.

Therefore, also one of the structural problems of the Austrian education system still remains: the early selection process at 10 and the requirement of parents' attention to schoolwork. The latest PISA-results show again that children still do better at school if their parents have an academic background. The Pisa ranking 2022 saw Austria at rank 21 which is inadequate when it is at the forefront of expenditure. One of the interesting conclusions of the results of 2023 is that in almost all OECD-countries the results tumbled after the COVID-pandemic. In Austria the results went only slightly down in general, mostly in math, slightly in reading, and remained at the same level in science. The findings also confirm that children with migration background still do worse at school (Strobl, 2023).

The Gap between Science and Teaching Practice

Already in the 1980s a certain hostility between practicing teachers and the university-based scientists was stated by pedagogical experts (e.g. Peter Posch, University of Klagenfurt), and school developers complained that Austria's teachers had century-old experience in resisting requirements that came from "above"/the authorities (Strittmatter). This still seems to be the case. With the introduction of the University Colleges of Teacher Education in 2008 it was hoped that this gap could be made smaller or bridged. Instead, some teachers might be under the impression that the grip of science on them was just fastening. Initial teacher education as well as further education and in-service teacher training must be science-based now and every teacher from elementary school to upper secondary must have a master's degree. Some teachers feel that the "knowledge of practice" is not appreciated any more.

Historic Knowledge versus Historic and Civic Competences

In Austria, there have been repeated reforms of history curricula in recent years. These reforms have had the goal of implementing competence-orientation and content of Citizenship Education. Transmitting lexical historic knowledge is regarded today

as sharing (national) narratives (Kühberger).²⁷ However, a number of recent research studies have shown that history teachers are either not fully informed about the new curricula or do not fully understand the extent of the change, or do not know how to design learning processes that allow children to become competent. They find it difficult to implement the new standards – or are reluctant to give up on historical narrative, and incorporate the central theoretical principles of the curricula only partially into their teaching practice (Brait, 2022).

The Problem of Implementing a New Curriculum/ Modern Didactics vs. Teaching Practice

Teachers in Austria take a long time to adapt to changes that come from “above”. Even though the teacher training colleges provided a great number of courses on the new curriculum, teaching practice seems to show little change from content orientation to competence orientation, which was the goal of the curriculum reform. Based on 85 qualitative interviews with Austrian history teachers, an unfamiliarity with the theories of the new history didactics is seen. Many history teachers are not aware or informed about the technical terms used in the curricula, and when manifestations of historical culture are considered in history lessons, they are rarely critically examined (Brait, 2022).

In 2014 Christian Pichler (2016) made a survey of 89 history teachers who taught at upper secondary schools in the province of Carinthia. Among other things he showed that most of them did not consider working with sources and historical representations, or the development of methodological competence and it was explained by a lack of time. He found that more than ten years after the FUER competence model was first introduced, many history teachers were still unfamiliar with it, as Roland Bernhard (2019b) documents in his study. Kipman and Kühberger (2019) suggest in their work that most history teachers do not try to develop the orientation competence in their classrooms. For example, 61.7 per cent of the 277 teachers from three federal states surveyed in their study stated that they thought subject-specific competence orientation to be ‘important’ or ‘very important’, but 68.7 per cent of the respondents explained that they had not yet become fully familiar with it (Kipman and Kühberger, 2019: 89–90). Also, the final examinations (Matura) as shown in another work 2018 in Carinthia by Pichler (2020) displayed exam tasks at mostly a factual knowledge level

and examinees only at a competence level that should be achieved at the end of lower secondary (Brait, 2022). An explanation might be the fact that continuous education is not compulsory for teachers and they can attend courses according to their own choice.

Textbooks vs. Curriculum

The reforms were intended to put an end to the predominant content orientation of teaching (Ammerer, 2009). It must be said that the four competence areas, the FUER competence model (Körper et al., 2007) are only briefly explained in the general part of the subject curriculum with one paragraph each. Maybe with such a change of paradigm one paragraph in a curriculum is not enough to change a complete paradigm of teaching

Teachers in Austria, however, are textbook-oriented rather than curriculum-oriented and textbooks are slow to change. Analyses of state-approved textbooks are already available, and they show that education reforms including competence orientation has only been partially implemented (Bernhard, 2016; Eigler and Kühberger, 2018; Mittnik, 2018; Bramann, 2019; Buchberger, 2020; Brait, 2022). Since Austrian curricula are committed to a critical approach towards historical culture, in addition to a source-based approach, the inclusion of historical representations is necessary to meet state requirements.

So, there is a new and innovative curriculum with a complete change of paradigm and teachers who know very little about it or are reluctant to apply their knowledge. The question for the future will be how to implement this modern curriculum into teaching practice.

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