

Methodological Materials for Teaching Media Education in the Czech Republic: Prematurely Obsolete or Insufficient Support?¹

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Abstract

The submitted text is designed for pedagogues, who teach or want to teach the cross-curricular topic, media education, and also for Czech and foreign experts dealing with the field of media pedagogy and the integration of media education into the Czech school system. The author gives an overview of the offer of methodological materials in Czech, which teachers of Czech primary and secondary schools can use for media education. It describes in more detail the basic and most frequently methodological materials and manuals for teachers, available textbooks and also offers a list of Internet sources.

The text further summarizes findings of researches carried out among media education teachers investigating the situation in the field of integrating elements of media education into school plans and researching the changing needs of Czech teachers, who are responsible for the development of education connecting life with media. In the conclusion of the text, the author evaluates the current situation in the field of media pedagogy in Czech primary and secondary schools and refers to the problems that defend the full integration of media education into everyday school practice.

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Key words: media literacy, media education, methodological materials, textbook, teaching aids.

Media education in the Czech Republic as a subject of specialized interest

The process of introducing media education into school practice after the whole period of implementation of school reforms in the Czech Republic is the subject of specialized interest. The first specialized texts were focused primarily on the definition of the content of media literacy and media education (Verner 1999; Šedová 2004; Bína 2005; Jiráček, Wolák 2006; Verner, Bezchlebová 2007; Jiráček, Wolák 2008). The attention was later focused on some aspects of introducing media education into specific schools (Hrdličková 2007); other specialized research focuses on how teachers and their students accept media education (Wolák, Jiráček 2009; Wolák 2010b) and partial studies have been researched and the predominant approach to media education in practice in Czech schools (Smrčková 2010; Škapíková 2010; Ročňák 2012). In the last few years, the angle of research has broadened to include even the problems of pre-school education (Klímová 2010; Luštinec 2010) and parental mediation (Šedová 2007; Sloboda 2010; Cigánková 2012). In 2012, the first extensive nation-wide study was undertaken, researching the level of media literacy of the Czech population that was related in some aspects also to the problems of media education at schools (Stav mediální gramotnosti v ČR/The Condition of Media Literacy in the Czech Republic 2011). During this period of introducing media education, a set of expert studies and monographs emerged, connected with the problems of the theory and conception of media literacy in the Czech context (i. e. Niklesová 2007; Jiráček, Wolák 2007, Mašek, Sloboda, Zikmundová 2010; Niklesová, Bína 2010 etc.) and a comparison of the Czech concept of the systematization of media education with practice abroad (i. e. Kašpárková, 2010). Less attention has been paid to the researching of didactic approaches to media education and the analysis of available methodological tools for teachers (partial steps undertaken i. e. Kručayová 2012). The goal of the submitted text is to contribute to this discussion. An overview partly arises from the text published in the magazine *Komunikace, média, společnost* (Communication, Media, Society) (Wolák 2011b), however, dealing with a broadened and updated overview. The author of the text, moreover, attempts to connect the results of the survey analyses to the partial results arising from the currently implemented research that looks into the current needs of media education teachers at Czech primary and secondary schools.

The introduction of media education into the Czech school system: a brief summary of the situation

Media education entered the Czech education system in connection with the ongoing curricular reform focused (in a simplified way) on the deviation from strong curricula and their replacement by framework documents defining the content of education for each degree of education (more details on the reform i.e. Greger, Walterová 2007). The "framework programmes" – *Framework Educational Programme for Elementary Education* (http://rvp.cz/informace/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/RVP_ZV_EN_final.pdf) and the *Framework Educational Programme for Secondary General Education* (http://rvp.cz/informace/wp-content/uploads/2009/09/RVP_G-anj.pdf) – are based on "a new education strategy, which emphasizes key competencies, their interconnectedness with the educational content and application of the acquired knowledge and skills in real life" (*Framework Educational Programme for Elementary Education* 2009: 6) and serve as a common basis for teachers at schools who develop the curricula based on frameworks by themselves. Media education is defined in these documents together with some other topics as "cross-curricular subjects" – "the thematic areas of current problems of the contemporary world" (*Framework Educational Programme for Elementary Education* 2009: 91). Media education appeared in both framework programmes with the main goal to raise the level of media literacy and to contribute "to the pupil's ability to engage in media communication successfully and independently" (*Framework Educational Programme for Elementary Education* 2009: 104).

Although in our environment it is possible to find a distinct tradition of endeavours to introduce specific elements of media education (vide Jiráček) into the education system, it is the first time in Czech history when media themes have become an integral part of primary and secondary education in a systematic way.

The introduction of media education into primary and secondary education was determined by the problem of the lack of properly qualified teachers from the very beginning. At the beginning of the reform (roughly 2005), teachers did not have any opportunity to obtain qualifications in the field of media education (in other words: no certified media education teachers were available literally within the whole country). Educators found themselves in an unenviable situation. Many teachers realized the importance of the new topic, because they could not ignore the increasing role of the media in the lives of children, but they did not know how to grasp the subject – often having been, in relation to the media, less experienced than their students. They were supposed to teach the topic without previous professional training, having lacked a comprehensive methodological and didactic support (Wolák, Jiráček 2009).

The institutional supervisor of the reform, *Výzkumný ústav pedagogický v Praze* (*Research Institute of Education in Prague*) began to offer teachers the best results of evaluation of the introduction of new subjects in some schools (guidelines of good

practice), but it was rather a collection of small sub-themes and teaching ideas than a comprehensive and systematic guide to educational support. As revealed from the survey undertaken during that period among teachers – those who were personally engaged in the topic of media education – they began to teach media education and spontaneously created their own learning processes but it was their individual initiative (Hrdličková 2007). Teachers with no interest in the subject, who were forced into teaching the topic by school management, did not start teaching at all.

The civic associations and non-profit educational organizations responded to the situation described above and began to draft the first methodological materials, educational courses and support for teachers. In the period from 2005 to 2009, several long-term educational activities took place in the system of furthering education for teachers, targeting to help teachers to start up teaching media education and offering teachers the ready-to-use materials for teaching. However, experts from the field of media studies were also involved in the preparation of many of these courses, the quality of courses was questionable in many cases (media education was often confused with the use of modern technologies in teaching without critical approach, etc.).

In that period, expert research and university workplaces started to take part in the preparation of methodological materials up to the current period so the whole set of educational functions, methodological materials and supporting aids arose, which can make the situation easier for teachers. The important moment was also the creation of the documents *Doporučené očekávané výstupy (Recommended Expected Outcomes)*, (DOVZV 2011; DOVG 2011), that defined the educational outcomes more precisely and the goals of cross-curricular media education, which up to now had only been roughly defined.

In the description of the materials used, which are at the disposal of the pedagogues, the scholarly or popularized literature will not be looked at from the field of media studies (although its role concerning the needs of pedagogues of media education is undeniable) or even the titles focusing on the theory of media education and media literacy, but to the materials, which are directly specified as teaching or methodological aids for teachers at primary and secondary schools. It is possible to divide them into four groups: a) the methodological manual for teachers, b) the textbook solely for work with students, c) Internet portals and d) multimedia aids and other materials. Regarding the extent of this text, it is not possible to include all sources; therefore the overview focuses only on those the teachers have named in the implemented research.

Former methodologies

Still as the discussion about the possibilities of the establishment of the media education as a new educational topic was still fresh, the book *Úvod do studia médií (An*

Introduction to Media Studies) by Graeme Burton and Jan Jiráček came out (Burton, Jiráček 2001), becoming the first textbook on media studies written in Czech, which was based on the interpretation of the Czech media landscape and about the domestic tradition of media studies. Although it is not primarily specified to media education teachers, it has become a popular aid for its clarity and comprehensibility and also thanks to the subject matters for practical exercises, which can develop media literacy and are conveniently incorporated into the lessons.

The first title, which appeared on our book market and promised insight to the field of media education was a book by Jiří Roth called *Mediální výchova v Čechách* (*Media Education in the Czech Republic*) (with the subtitle *Printed Media in Confrontation with the Internet, Radio and TV*). The author of the book, then editor in chief of lifestyle monthly, in the introduction presents: "Although the publication bears the title media education, it is not a textbook. The education is meant rather as handing over experiences to the Czech media scene." (Roth 2005: 5). Roth's media education indeed brings a view in particular to the backstage of the production of the printed media. As the author emphasizes, it is about "the subjective view of a man from the field" (Roth 2005: 5), which should aid readers in their understanding of it, how printed media has emerged, who is creating them and for what purpose. Although it is not a real textbook, the text is supplemented by a number of practical examples, demonstrations and an illustrated visual material. The author always at the end of the chapter summarizes the basic findings and offers the possibilities to practice new knowledge and subject matter to further development, therefore – with awareness of the subjectivity of the author's view – the book can even serve as a useful supplement during media education lessons.

Methodological manuals for teachers

The first comprehensive **methodological material** specified for media education teachers came about in 2006 and was called *Rozumět médiím – základy mediální výchovy pro učitele* (*Understanding Media – Foundations of Media Education for Teachers*) (Mičienka, Jiráček 2006). The methodological material of the project Understanding Media, which through the financial support of the ESF was implemented by the non-profit organization *Partners Czech* in cooperation with the *Centre for Media Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague* and in which it was set up in the Czech Republic for 300 pedagogues in the basic approaches to grasp the media problems in educational practice, consisting of methodological manuals and a multimedia CD-ROM. The methodological manual is divided into eight thematic units that respect the delineation of media education as it is defined in the curricular documents. Every unit is introduced with an introductory text, which serves the teachers as a theoretical summary offering a basic framing of the given problems and solutions to further studies,

the focus of individual chapters presents the methodological materials, the lesson for media education teaching in the form of a proposal of scenarios of teaching lessons. All subject matter is supplemented with exercise pages. The multimedia CD-ROM contains an electronic version of the manual and, in particular, demonstrations and materials (primarily dealing with media contents), which are possible to use during work with the manual. Because the manual and CD-ROM came out when the project was launched (2006), in 2007 and 2008, the updated CD-ROM versions were published, where there were more new lessons, materials, and even a list of a hundred important terms from the field of media studies.

The project *Understanding Media* was very successful as an educational operation and the methodological manual is a well-circulated material among teachers up today. The manual is currently sold out, the project was finished (2008) and the only way to get the material was to take part in the project and finish it. People interested in this methodology can purchase the book *Základy mediální výchovy (Basics of Media Education)* (Mičienka, Jirák 2007), that was put out by the Portál publishing house and that is connected to the material of *Understanding Media* (the lessons of the project have become a base for the texts of the publication, however, they have been supplemented and modified by the authors). The book is still in distribution, yet a clear disadvantage is the absence of a CD-ROM, which hinders its use by teachers in lessons.

Být v obraze (Keeping Up to Date – Media Education with the Use of Audiovisual Surroundings) is the title of the methodological material published by the organization *Člověk v tísni (People in Need)* in 2007 (Strachota, Valůch 2007). It deals with a set of audiovisual materials (mostly documentary films) accompanied by a methodological manual for teachers. The set contains fifteen lessons, whose text is placed in the manual and the audiovisual part on a DVD. More than ten hours of audiovisual materials create the films (both Czech and foreign), which are related to the problems of media. It is possible to work with the units of the films, however, the manual offers well-processed advancements for work with demonstrations (the methodology does not lack exercise pages, situations for reflection and evaluation). There are several activities assigned for every film that cover the basic topics of media education. The set *Keeping Up to Date*, thanks to its being founded on visual parts, presents an attractive – and quality – instrument for teaching media education. Its disadvantage is a relatively high purchase price.

The publication *Média Tvořivě (Media Creatively)* presents the next didactic-methodological support for media education teachers, which started as part of a project with the same name by the local organization, *Aisis* (Broklová 2008). The authors of the manual are expert lecturers, who led courses of media education for teachers in 2007 and 2008. In the preface it presents that the manual “should serve primarily as support for the integration of the cross-curricular theme of media education to many existing subjects and should dispel part of the image of pedagogues that ‘media ed.’ belongs mainly in Czech lessons and ‘computers’”. (Rutová 2008: 6) More than half of

the publication really creates the subject matter on the integration of elements of media themes to some subjects – and it does not stay only on the subjects of the Czech language and civics, the teacher finds even an interesting subject matter for the link to media education with art education, with geography, chemistry and physics. The following chapters such as Interpreting the Possibilities of Photography, Video in Teaching, and A School-wide Magazine or How to Lead an Editorial Team of a School Magazine Publication (compared against the aforementioned methodology) focus rather on the production approach to the integration of media education, and thus receive its title: *Media Creatively*.

All the aforementioned methodologies have several common features. They are specified for the teachers of the second half of primary schools and secondary school pedagogy. They started when there was a great demand for “instructions how to...” by the schools – methodology in the form of prepared scenarios of teaching lessons that the teacher can immediately use without significant previous preparation. The experts from the field of media theory and practice participated in making the structure of the texts; the activities were verified and reviewed by experienced pedagogues and lecturers. All the methodologies offer teachers the possibility to decide whether they will integrate the presented subject matter into the existing subjects, or they will use a separate time block – its concept and duration of activities suit rather the second option. *Understanding Media* attract attention thanks to an adequate blending of theoretical background with the methodologically well designed activities of high quality. *Keeping Up to Date* thanks to its use of documentary films. *Media Creatively* thanks to its varied offer of methods integrating media education into existing educational fields. These three publications provide teachers decided to participate in media education (and are coerced by the school management) with basic methodological materials who are at the disposal through one hundred scenarios of teaching lessons covering a majority of thematic circles of defined cross-curricular topics in media education.

In conclusion, it is necessary to mention that although these are the most used aids they are not the only ones; in the last five years several inspirational texts have been written, offering topics of lessons. The publication *Mediální pedagogika – Média a komunikace v učitelské praxi* (*Media Pedagogy – Media and Communication in Teachers' Practice*) (Pavličíková, Šebeš, Šimůnek 2009) also deserves attention; it contains “subject and thematically varying contributions whose common feature is the effort to overcome the space between the expert scientific discourse about media and the pedagogical practice of teachers” (Pavličíková, Šebeš, Šimůnek 2009: 7). The text diverges from “the cookbook approach” to media education. Each of the chapters firstly theoretically anchors the following problem, and then will offer several ideas how to integrate the given theme into pedagogical practice. The publication *Media Literacy and Media Education* (a publication with a CD-ROM) by Eva Niklesová and Daniel Bína (Niklesová, Bína

2010) is very helpful. It deals with a set of study texts that are provided free of charge as study support for primary and secondary school teachers and is focused on explaining the basic terms from the media study field. Several projects connected to the topic of advertising are offered on a CD-ROM in the field of methodology.

The publication *Mediální výchova (Media Education)* by Pavel Verner (Verner 2007) could even be a great help to teachers for a basic orientation in the field of education to media literacy; it is also designed for primary and secondary school teachers and brings a brief overview of basic themes of media education. The book *K mediální výchově (To Media Education)* by Tomáš Frank and Věra Jirásková (Frank, Jirásková 2008) deals with media education and communicational strategies in practice. It is even possible to search for methodological inspiration in the publications *Výchova k mediální gramotnosti (Educations to Media Literacy)* (Bína 2005) and *Mediální gramotnost: nový rozměr vzdělávání (Media Literacy: a New Dimension of Education)* (Jiráček, Wolák 2007).

Teachers who have decided to integrate media education in the form of **production activities** – the work of students editing a school magazine – can reach for several publications offering instructions for it, how to set up and organize the editing of a school magazine, as in the publication *Základy žurnalistiky pro redaktory studentských časopisů (The Basics of Journalism for Editors of Student Magazines)* (Navrátilová, Jeřábková 2004) published by the *Open Society* in cooperation with the Children and Youth Association at Horní Slavkov in 2004 (the publication is spread freely on the Internet). Another valuable and inspirational material for teachers can be the book *Mediální tvorba v kontextu vzdělávání: na příkladu česko-německého mediálně-pedagogického projektu o genetice (Media Structure in the Context of Education: the Example of a Czech-German Media-pedagogical Project on Genetics)* (Sloboda 2011) by Zdeněk Sloboda. (For more materials see e.g. Bartošek, Daňková 2008 and Pokorný 2011.)

Teachers should also consult the *Manual of Examples of Good Practice* published by the *Research Institute of Pedagogy in Prague* as the implementer of school reform in 2007; it presents interesting methods of teaching and extra-curricular activities that were started in a pilot of new educational programs in sixteen piloted primary schools in the Czech Republic (*Příručka příkladů dobré praxe*, 2007). They make its chapters attractive by describing the experiences of pedagogues with the implementation of the school television and radio broadcasting.

Textbook

In the offer of materials for teaching media education, one important ingredient had been missing for a long time: **a textbook** assigned to students. Recently, this gap has been attempted to be filled by *Mediální výchova (Media Education)* by Jan Pospíšil and Lucie Sára Závodná (Pospíšil, Závodná 2010). It is the first teaching text that deviates

from the methodology for teachers and is primarily intended so that students work independently (it is defined primarily for secondary school students). The interpretation of the textbook is illustrated with a number of visual appendices, graphs, diagrams, examples, and it quickly captures the reader's attention. Although in the visual material the pictures and graphics of the illustrated character prevail, supplementing them and the reproduction of the current materials that make it easier for students to develop an image about historical changes of some media products. The text of the textbook is also supplemented by small subject matters for reflection (or homework) that interestingly live up the interpretations and can be taken into a deeper investigation of the discussed fields (for more, vide Wolák 2010c). The textbook in principle copies the basic thematical fields of the cross-curricular topic of media education as is delimited in the curricular documents. Like in the majority of textbook texts for school, there are even topics outlined in a basic contour and some of their aspects are left out, which is understandable regarding the extent and purpose of the publication. However, in the text it is coming to a relevant contradiction between the simplifications on the one hand and perhaps to excessive expertise on the other that is present in several passages. The contradiction "adequacy of the level of content" manifests itself most apparently in the workbook, which is a supplement to the textbook text. *Media Education – Workbook* (two notebooks – questions and answers) was published in the form of two separate publications and offers teachers instruments for using exercises (exercises, quizzes, other supplemental activities) and evaluations (tests) of awareness, which students acquire through work with the textbook. Up till now teachers had lacked such a aid in media education, which should serve to the evaluation of measuring cognition and the abilities of youth in the field of media problems, most the effort about its creation strikes on the difficult possibility of the precise definition of the amount of knowledge, which the "media literate" student should have at a primary or secondary school (*The Research Institute of Education* just last year published *The Recommended Expected Outcomes* for teaching cross-curricular topics, which delineate what the student should know, who studies media education). The effort of the authors to create a system of evaluation is pleasing, nevertheless, even here the question suggests itself whether what is practiced here, is necessary knowledge that a secondary school students should gain in the lessons of media education (the text is all too often aimed at the knowledge of technical terminology, of models of communication, of names of media theorists etc...). We are still waiting for a textbook, which would focus on the goals defined by *The Recommended Expected Outcomes*.

Internet sources – methodological materials on-line

In the introduction of media education, several **web portals** appeared on the Internet, which tried to support the introduction of elements of media education into the teaching practice and were primarily specified for teachers. Some of them were bound to the aforementioned educational projects (i. e. *Understanding Media* www.rozumetmediim.cz and *Media Creatively* www.mediativorive.cz) and their activity finished with the ending of the given projects (unfortunately, because both offered a number of materials for teachers, on the project pages of Media Creatively it was offered to download even several translations of British textbooks on media education). The Methodological Portal of the *Research Institute of Education* www.rvp.cz has a fundamental role at this time, which offers many texts and methodologies for media education teachers (created by media studies theorists and independent teachers). The portal for Media Literacy and Media Education www.medialnigramotnost.cz of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague tries to be the starting point and signpost for all those interested in the problems of media education; teachers especially appreciate the ever widening offer of freely accessible methodological subject matter for teaching, which are the results of work of the Media Studies students of the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague. The Pedagogical Faculty, University of Ostrava works on a similar principle <http://mediator.osu.cz/>.

The *Reading Literacy and Project Teaching* portal www.ctenarska-gramotnost.cz – the interest for media education teachers lies in the section Reading Literacy and Media Education, where there are subsections Inspiration from Abroad (it is possible to find translations of curricular documents from the Canadian province, Ontario), School Magazines, The Competition of School Magazines, Tips for Teaching, and Sources for the Topic. Web sites that can be found interesting from the methodological point of view are the provoking pages for teachers www.skolamedii.cz – the project School Media in ethical connections is run by the College of Media and Journalism in Prague under the auspices of the Archbishopric of Prague and the Czech Bishop Conference – and the portal www.mediasetbox.cz of the project Media Set offering downloads of a carefully created methodology including worksheets (Krouželová 2010). A number of web portals of Czech primary and secondary schools can further serve as inspiration for teaching media education where teachers offer their experience and results of work in media education lessons, and also portals of educational centers (i. e. www.centrum-detske-komunikace.cz/) and of organizations operating children's media (i. e. www.radiodomino.cz and www.detskatelevise.cz). Important activities are created by the *Center for Media Education* www.medialni-vzdelavani.cz and the *Association for Media Pedagogues* www.medialnipedagogika.cz.

Other sources

Teachers often take advantage of Internet portals which are not designed exactly for their needs when preparing their media education lessons; however, these offer an interesting and practical use of material (dealing with media blogs, Internet pages of media institutes especially the Czech Television and Czech Radio), regulating and self-regulating organs, research centers, portals intended for the safe use of the Internet etc.... – their overview would call for a separate study, i.e. www.rpr.cz, www.rrtcv.cz, newly started popularized portals www.detiamedia.cz and www.peoplemetry.cz.

In the conclusion of the text, it is necessary to mention **the multimedia aids and other sources for the topic**. Apart from those, which started in the projects described above, it is necessary to mention two aids that were not tied to the educational action primarily intended for pedagogues, even though they are usable in practice for teachers. The first one is the multimedia CD-ROM *Mediální studia na přelomu tisíciletí (Media studies at the Turn of the Millennium)* created by the Center for Media Studies, Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague and the National Museum, Prague in 2000; apart from the technical articles from the field of media studies, it offers a number of visual materials, which are a convenient supplement to media education lessons. The second essential tool of this type is presented in the DVD *Česká média v proměnách 20. století (Czech Media in the Changes of the 20th Century)* (Bednařík et al. 2008), a material containing all multimedia materials presented at the *Golden Times of Media Exhibit* organized in 2005 by the National Museum, Prague (the DVD was put out by the Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University in Prague and the National Museum, Prague in 2008).

Even an educational television programme can serve as a supplemental source in the lesson, the problems of the media have been looked into by the magazine *Věřte, nevěřte [Beyond Belief: Fact or Fiction]* of the ČT 24 channel and the Czech Television educational cycle about media *Být v obraze (Keep Up to Date)*, which is designed exactly for the use in teaching (Wolák 2010a).

Conclusion

As the previous overview has indicated, the didactic-methodological vacuum, characteristic for the time at the outset of the integration of media education into the education system, appears to have been filled. Teachers who decide to implement elements contributing to the development of the media literacy of students in their pedagogical practice have a relatively wide range of instruments at their disposal that can help them start the lessons.

However the most current researches (the author of this text is just finishing a research focused on the investigation of current needs of teachers charged with teaching

media education) show that that many teachers take part in media education only formally (Jirák, Wolák 2010, Duben 2012). The most frequent reason given is that the media environment has changed and this change is not reflected by the available methodological sources. The truth is that the overwhelming majority of the described methods hardly deals with the issue of new, network media, the use of the Internet etc.... (in general, many of the methods started in the time when the word Facebook did not exist). The described tools are especially related to the traditional media and their contents, which today's youth are already ceasing using. Teachers paradoxically find themselves in a similar situation as at the outset of the reform process. This time they have a number of materials at their disposal but hardly any of them reflect the media reality of today's youth.

In that context the newly emerging projects appear to be very important, which try to provide teachers with tools for talking to children about the problems of the network media (etc.) (very important is the activity of the *Centre for the Prevention of Risky Virtual Communication* – <http://www.prvok.upol.cz>).

We can only hope that Czech media education teachers will soon wait to see not only quality methodological materials (the majority of which they create themselves), but even a deeper appreciation of their interest in the topic of media in the form of the creation of qualified university studies in the field of media pedagogy (that will provide them with updated findings).

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