

History education and historical consciousness: today and perspectives
for the future (the case of Estonia)

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One cannot speak about the problems of history education without bringing up **historical consciousness**, its formation/forming. Historical consciousness has been variously defined. The following **K.E. Jeismann's** and **R. Schörken's** definitions are the ones I like best. In translation from German to English these definitions would sound as following:

Historical consciousness expresses the connection between interpreting the past, understanding the present, and the future perspectives. (K.E. Jeismann)

Historical consciousness embraces, besides knowledge, also conceptions of the past and its interpretation, and attitudes derived from these. (R. Schorcken)

I agree with the authors who, to sum it up, characterize historical consciousness as a phenomenon, which: a) is derived from culture, b) is expressed in a person's consciousness as a result of processing of temporal and historical experience, c) can be used as a model of interpretation and behaviour.

Considering the role of history educating young people for life in a multicultural society, the importance of the concept of historical consciousness by far transcends the limits of history educating.

The need to continuously see connections between past, present and future is especially revealing in the so called transition states, Estonia being one of them.

Estonia is experiencing significant political changes and undergoing educational reforms. Estonian schools are undergoing a paradigmatic change. In this case the role of history education is very important. History cannot be studied in a vacuum divorced from the political, social, national context in which it is taught. **One trend of the Estonian society is integration with European structures and good relationships with other European nations, especially with our neighbours.**

Thus, the history of European countries, especially the history of our neighbouring countries, plays an important role in history education. It comes especially into consideration when it has got a direct or indirect importance to the development of Estonia. **We have looked at historical education to raise young people's consciousness of their common cultural traditions and to help create a climate for resolving the tensions and difficulties which remain.**

One peculiarity of the today's Estonia (unlike Estonian situation before the Soviet occupation in 1940) is that Russian-language population form 36 % of Estonian population. Hence - we must consider this situation.

The question of **cultural identity of Russian-language people** (among them pupils) living in Estonia is a complicated issue. Many of them have difficulties in identifying themselves with any particular culture. **Under the pressure of Soviet ideology they lost their cultural roots.** Russian identity, as usual, is the strongest part of this aggregation of identities, but simultaneously (themselves partly) these people consider themselves as representatives of Estonian, Soviet and world culture.

In Estonia there have always lived permanent immigrants. These were compact groups having their national feeling: Germans, Russians, Swedes, etc. Our immigrants now are people from different parts of the former SU, the so-called Russian-language

population. They have begun to lose their national feeling. If our previous immigrants knew Estonian, had integrated into Estonian society, knew Estonian culture, then most of our present immigrants just some years ago neither knew the Estonian language at all, nor felt interest towards Estonian culture. They have felt themselves as a ruling class and did not want to integrate into Estonian society. In the Baltic States the Russian language during Soviet regime enjoyed a privileged status.

Now, gradually, the situation begins to change. Those belonging to the Russian speaking community (school pupils among them) have step by step begun making decisions about defining their identity. Not to go into detailed analysis of the problem, suffice it to mention that both scientific research and various surveys show: **Russian speaking youth has begun to feel interest towards Estonian language and problems, and towards integration into Estonian society in general.**

With the view of clarification of simplicity-complicity of historical thinking, national attitudes, cultural identity, the Soviet syndrome among the pupils of different nationalities, in 1995 600 graduates (pupils of the last-12th form) were questioned. (Project "**Historical consciousness and national identity**", carried out by the author of this paper together with colleagues V. Kolga and P. Lepik.) There were 310 graduates from Estonian-language schools and 290 graduates from Russian-language schools (the questionnaire "Me and history"). There were direct questions about nationalities, e.g. "How often do I think about my national belonging, nationality" (five point scale), questions about cultural identity, religion, etc. There were some questions about simplicity-complicity of historical thinking.

To get graduates' opinion on anxiety-full problems, we used open questions. For example: "What could be done to make less Russians' trouble in Estonia?" and "What could be done to make less Estonians' trouble with their nation?" On the basis of responses to the above mentioned questions it was possible to differentiate 10 variant types of responses. **We can see both mutual understanding and a certain non-understanding.** Both Russian and Estonian students were of the opinion, to make less Estonians' trouble it is necessary to increase population, to keep and develop the Estonian language, culture, traditions. In the opinion of a quarter of Estonian students (even more than Russians) we must try for better understanding of Russians, to explain them the situation in Estonia.

On the basis of the data of this and other research projects we are glad to say **today that we really have no tensions between young people of different nationalities in Estonia** (unlike Estonian situation before re-instatement of independence in 1991). The graduates of Estonian-language and Russian-language schools are tolerant with regard to each other and national problems. At the same time this investigation raised a lot of questions for the future research.

Considering the above mentioned a pressing need has arisen to help as much as possible those willing to become integrated into Estonian society, especially through the education system. The following examples can be given, based on the activities of two small working collectives (Dep. of Curriculum R & D and Chair of History of Tallinn Pedagogical University).

In connection with the project *Seminars for innovation of the learning process* (it is a part of the larger project *Curriculum Development: inter-school and inter-subject projects*) Dep. of Curriculum R & D for the second year running has been including into its R & D activities Russian-language schools (as the so called pilot schools).

On the basis of our new national curriculum there is an urgent need to modernise learning process fundamentally. **Russian-language schools call for special attention.** Non-Estonian language schools and their teachers complain about the lack of dialogue and information exchange. Nothing of this is possible without special activity.

The main purpose: innovation of the learning process both in Estonian- and Russian-language schools, mostly creating conditions for shaping of student's higher thinking abilities; creation of professional dialogue between teachers of Estonian and Russian schools, **facilitation of Russian schools' students/teachers integration into Estonian society.** Main activity: seminars for the teachers (there have been treated theoretical and practical problems, connected with the new state curriculum, instructional design, theories of the learning, multimedia, etc.) and one conference with all project partners (teachers' presentations); the teachers have constructed, analysed and tested instructional scenarios, researchers have observed and analysed lessons, analysed instructional scenarios and compiled together with the teachers a collection of articles on the teachers' experiences.

Thanks to the support of the Royal Netherlands Embassy and Estonian Ministry of Education it was possible in school years 1996/97 and 1997/98 to involve 7 schools (3 Estonian- and 4 Russian-language schools), to carry out six seminars, one conference (all participants of the project) and one introductory discussion (representatives from each school), to prepare and print different materials for seminars, to compile and publish annotations of the teachers' instructional scenarios, to visit and consult schools in Narva (by the researchers), etc.

Our teachers are very interested in this project.

In connection with favourable conditions for Russian-speaking community's integration into Estonian society, **the Chair of History is glad to observe that during recent years an everincreasing amount of Russian school graduates have expressed a wish to study History as an additional Major Subject** (History as the main Major Subject is currently taught only in Tartu University). They have achieved mastery of the Estonian language and study in the same group with the graduates from Estonian schools, but after graduating from the University they go to work in Russian-language schools. When we take into account that almost all history teachers in these schools received their education in the Soviet Russia (that is why history teaching in these schools is not without problems), **these young people's going to work in these schools is of exceptionally great importance.**

Now it is very important without further delay to organize long-term courses for history teachers from Russian-language schools. Suffice it to say that the teachers themselves express their utmost readiness for this, but our Chair has not so far been successful in finding financial support for the courses. The search goes on. We have not lost hope of conducting the courses in cooperation with a foreign foundation, using the services of foreign lecturers as well.

In relation to the history curriculum it should be mentioned that starting from the current school year began the transition to the new state curriculum as a whole, including the subject curriculum of history. In Russian-language schools the transition will begin in the next school year. This is the second stage of history education re-organization. The Soviet system had been abandoned already before our independence was re-instated.

By compiling of our curriculum we have seriously thought about the problem : how must the **proportion and relationship between local history, national (Estonian) history and regional (Mare Balticum), European/world history** be best presented? We formulated our standpoints so: *in teaching/learning history there should be chosen the content considering geographical vicinity, cultural unity and factors of intensity of historical intercourse.*

Consequently:

1. *Native place and local history.*
2. *Estonian history.*
3. *The history of the states of the Baltic Sea.* It is the history of our neighbouring countries. Our history is closely connected with the history of Sweden, Finland, Germany and Latvia. Russia too has striven after the Baltic Sea . During some historical periods our history was closely connected with the history of Denmark, Poland and Lithuania. These periods are reflected in our curriculum.
4. *The history of Western culture.* The history of Europe and America forms therefore a special level.
5. *The history of remote countries.* For us the history of Asia and Africa is not primary. Particular chapters about some countries during some periods are chosen. The aim: to illustrate the peculiarity of these countries and nations and to give a certain picture about the basic stages of history to develop the world outlook.

By our conception history study should promote getting acquainted with local history and Estonian history (in close connection with the history of the countries of the Baltic Sea) systematically, European and world history both synoptically (orientately) and detailed (learning of historical events and phenomena which best characterises the corresponding era); interpreting the problems of contemporary society and converting them to be meaningful for oneself.

To keep from fragmentary approach, ignoring the concept of time we systematically bring into being so called "bridges" with the help of general brief reviews about developmental tendencies, a synoptic view of events in various parts of the world at the same period.

We find we must treat Estonian history in close connection with the history of other European countries, especially with our neighbouring countries near the Baltic Sea. We try to give our students the feeling that they belong to a regional community around the Baltic Sea. In one form of gymnasium (school year 10) we have such course of history : Estonian history in close connection with the history of the states around the Baltic Sea, i.e. with some focus on our European neighbours. For example, teaching/learning the development of Estonia in the 13th century, we give a brief general review of the economical and political situation in Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Russia, Latvia. Before teaching/learning the Livonian war, a short historical background is given: the situation in Russia, Poland and their relationships. Etc. This course make possible to treat the history of Estonia and of neighbouring countries in their contact points and differences. In other forms is treated world history (emphasising European history and including Estonian history).

We try to emphasise positive mutual influences in our common history, with a growing emphasis on social, economical and cultural spheres. We think that the treating of these issues are in most cases similar to the treating them in our neighbouring countries.

Nevertheless, when learning some topics, there are controversial or quite different points of view. Mostly these problems are connected with the role Russia played in our history. Thus, they are not always easily understood by Russia and by pupils of Russian-language schools in Estonia. **There are historical events and figures which are very important for one nation, yet bearing the stigma of extremely negative attitude for another people.** For example, in connection with the following:

The activity of the Peter I and The Great Northern War (1700-1721) had a great importance for the Russia. But the time of this was one of the hardest periods in Estonian history. On Estonian territory foreign forces fought each other. From the standpoint of Estonia, all these forces were conquerors. And as a matter of fact, the ravages of the Russian Army were most terrible. Especially brutal was Field Marshall Sheremetjev. Conscientiously he reported to Peter I what kind of territory was ravaged. As a result of the war itself and the accompanying plague two-thirds of the Estonians were destroyed. The Estonians were in danger of extinction. (By the way, the Soviet textbooks emphasised the positive importance of the results of the Great Northern War in the life of the Estonian people.)

For Estonia, **Tartu Peace Treaty** is a matter of great importance (02.02.1920). According to this treaty Soviet Russia recognised Estonia as de jure independent state and renounced "voluntarily and forever all rights of sovereignty formerly held by Russia over the Estonian people and territory. The Russian Federation has not still recognised this treaty.

The interpretation of the events of World War II and year 1940 in Estonia is quite different. One part of World War II became Great Patriotic War for the Soviet people, but for Estonians it means just one occupation followed by another. The Red Army occupied and incorporated Estonia into the Soviet Union. It was the end of the Estonian independence. **Besides, Nazi crimes against humanity are outright condemned, but not communist crimes against humanity.**

The above mentioned issues are very serious. It does not mean that we like tensions in our multicultural society and between us and our neighbouring countries. But we find, **curricula should a) include opportunities for learning and teaching about controversial and sensitive historical issues in an open and frank manner, and b) promote attitudes which encourage respect for diversity and differing values within each country and between neighbouring states. In order to prepare young people for politics in democracy, we must know our history, to overcome the embitterment.**

We hope one factor to build up confidence is our attempt to suggest to our pupils tolerance in history teaching/learning.

Summary

In Estonia started in 1997-98 a new state curriculum as a whole, including the subject curriculum of history. A major problem is the teaching about controversial and sensitive historical issues, promoting respect for diversity and differing values.

Key-words: historical consciousness, cultural identity, history curriculum in Estonia.