

**PHD DISSERTATION
(SUMMARY)**

Mária Farkas

**HISTORY TEACHING IN PUBLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS IN THE
DUALISTIC ERA**

Consultant:

József Kardos

Professor, Doctor of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences



Eötvös Loránd University
Faculty of Humanities

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Theme and goal of the dissertation

The policy of elementary schools in the dualistic era has long been in the centre of interest of historians and researchers of the history of education, thus lots of excellent monographs and papers have already been written. Researchers have covered and elaborated a number of fields ranging from the analysis and the implementation of the Act XXXVIII. of 1868, through the issues of school operational rules and regulations, school management, curricula policies, school policy concerning the nationalities, changes in teacher training concepts to suit the needs of public elementary school education, to discovering changes in moral standards that were to be communicated through these educational institutions. The number of studies dealing with the teaching of history in Hungary from the point of view of history textbooks has also increased. However, (as far as I know) neither the aims and value system inherent in history teaching in public elementary schools, nor its student book base have been discovered yet. This dissertation intends to examine this field, with special focus on the secular and denominational schools, and Hungarian and non-Hungarian educational language schools. I consider the analysis of this theme important because:

1. It was in the dualistic era when the so called “fourth generation” that “experienced and lived through the highest number of social and national shocks in the Hungarian history” (Glatz, 1989) was born and brought up. The members of this generation spent their childhood and teenage years as citizens of one of the five world powers, and grew to their adulthood in a Hungary that lost 1/3 of its territory and emerged following the Treaty at Trianon; these people had lived in constitutional monarchy, in republics labelled with different adjectives, proletarian dictatorship, and in bourgeois and socialist regimes, they struggled through two world wars, a number of revolutions, counter revolutions, and consolidation periods;
2. In the examined era (and for a long time after it too) this type of school was the only one available for millions of citizens, Hungarians, and those Hungarians who were not speakers of Hungarian –as the contemporary expression labelled them–. All those masses of people, Hungarians and non-Hungarian nationalities, acquired their “basic knowledge” in these public elementary schools, and then they lived to

experience, either suffering from or contributing to, the massive changes and cataclysms of the 20th century. From the perspectives of historical knowledge and thinking it is of no minor importance to discover to what extent “the people”, which became a key political factor in the 20th century, could safely rely on the knowledge gained in this type of educational institution. Also it is interesting to reveal how much the learnings provided by these schools “encoded” whether someone became the follower or the victim of the prevailing ideologies or delusions.

3. Act XXXVIII. of 1868 did not only make it compulsory for children to attend public elementary schools and remedial classes between the ages of 6-12 and 12-15, but it also fostered the *teaching of history to enter into a new stage of its carrier as far as quantity and quality are concerned*: previously history was for the elite solely as a compulsory or typical subject taught at higher levels (in the beginning in colleges, then in secondary schools as well), which then –for the first time in our history– developed to be *a compulsory subject in public elementary schools* that was obligatory to attend too.
4. The new situation generated debates, first of all about *what the people’s “intellectual culture” should be like* –i.e. how to construct the content of the passed law. Following the enlargement of the circle of voters the “people’s” potential political role, as perceived by Eötvös too, grew. If we concentrate on this factor, it was evident at that time to reconsider what function history teaching –which had had a long tradition– should hold in public elementary schools from then onwards. What the aim of history teaching in elementary schools should be, what topics should come into the focus of attention, which age groups to target, and what perspectives and approaches should be taken on in order to produce the desired outcome. (And as a matter of fact, how the desired outcome can be articulated, if at all.) –All in all, the main question of the several debates generated by this issue was the following: to what extent politics could be drawn into the life of schools, and to what extent history teaching could be used as a means of meeting concrete and daily political aims.
5. *“The people” itself*, who is in the focus of the dissertation, *was highly divided both nationally and religiously* in the era. Due to the fact that nationality and religious affiliations meant the same at some cases or, at least, they were closely connected

there was still some chance in indirect ways and in theory that viewpoints of nationalities, and their endeavours could be implied by heads of denominational schools although neither the act on education, nor the act on nationalities granted the right for the nationalities to run schools. Discovering how much this freedom could be felt in reality can bring us closer to understand what kind of image of national identity the people had in mind following the massive changes triggered by the First World War. These people had built up almost half of the population of the country, and were not Hungarians neither as far as their language, nor as far as their ethnical affiliations is concerned during the dualistic era. After the war, it was the right to autonomy, and referring to the wish of the nations that served as an ideological base for reshaping the map of states of Europe. Sometimes, perhaps the belief in this idea was an honest act, but in the majority of the cases referring to these rights was nothing but disguising the true intentions of the big world powers.

6. The educational policy of the state itself was to face considerable challenges in the field of history teaching in public elementary schools, partly due to the facts that there had been some hiatus in the independence of Hungary, plus the Kingdom of Hungary consisted of various nationalities. These challenges were to be responded, in particular, the question of which *narratives* to favour in the schools *that foster the development of the Hungarian national identity*. If we analyse the national tasks along a three-dimensional system, we can discover the constant and dynamic components of the constitutional bourgeois educational policy model, which was realized in the educational system, and the links between history teaching and politics will also become observable. (The three-dimensional system focuses on a) national independence, and the Habsburg-Hungarian historical relationship; b) the official relationship with the Hungarian citizens who were not speakers of Hungarian, and the confrontation of the two concepts: one state, one nation represented by the official politics, and the idea of one state, many nations, as expressed by the nationalities; and c) welfare issues with respect to the nation and nationalities.)
7. Schools are to educate *homo politicus*, and as we will see, there is no debate about it. But the question is: what this *homo politicus* should be like? Should it be a loyal subject who supports the prevailing order, either formally or driven by strong

beliefs, and who, by any chance, wishes to improve the prevailing order? Or should it rather be a citizen who takes on an active political role and questions the legitimacy of the whole system, someone who wants to change the system deliberately, moreover with the intention to “overthrow” the order, who then becomes the follower of the new order? In my opinion, these questions recur in cycles again and again in the 20th century, as a natural consequence of the changes of the different regimes, and in response to them new (or often just seemingly new) answers are given.

8. My examination, on the ideologies of history teaching in public elementary schools in the dualistic era, goes beyond this period, and covers the *age of revolutions* too. The reason for this is that revolutions always reflect on the subverted regimes either directly or indirectly, and looking at their educational policy, especially their retrospective criticism on history teaching, we can find elements that nevertheless may be different from the previous concepts, but are still valid. In any case, analysing this perspective of the *age of revolutions* can bring us closer to answer the main question.

Sources and methods

In the course of my analysis of the changes of aims, objectives, concepts and methods *the laws* defining the framework of educational policies and possibilities, *the curricula* shaping the contents of teaching, along with *the officially approved student books* served as important sources.

I could use and rely on the rich and valuable studies covering the bibliography concerning the laws and the curricula, that is why in these cases I restricted myself to deal with those aspects only that were particularly important for my field of study.

I considered the national curricula as a starting point for the examination of the various curricula, but –due to the fact that national curricula was obligatory to respect in secular schools only, as ordered by the act on public elementary schools, while in the case of denominational schools it served only as a guideline– I looked at the curricula of religious schools too, along with the curricula that were not Hungarian (published by the Serbian and Romanian orthodox churches).

On the other hand, concerning the age of revolutions we cannot even speak about any official curricula. In this case, I rely on the minutes found in the Ráday Archives, which report on the ideas related to history teaching, and the discussions held on the future of public education in the period of bourgeois democracy. As far as the sources of the proletarian dictatorship are concerned, I turned to the documents of the VAOSZ (National Alliance of Urban Employees), which was the organisation that rallied village nurses, kindergarten teachers, and elementary school teachers too. At that time VAOSZ developed to be a key organization shaping the educational policy with its educational reform plan and educational auxiliary materials, which can be considered as a kind of national curriculum, thus I used these documents as well to track down the alterations in the aims and objectives of history teaching.

To discover the contemporary historical narratives created for the pupils of elementary schools, I analysed the history textbooks along with the reading books that due to their special function served as a kind of subsidiary student books.

The quantity of the published *history textbooks and reading books* in Hungarian and in other languages (in both cases it means hundreds of volumes) made me do a selection. In the course of this selection process I tried to keep it in mind that, besides concerning other factors too, this era was not homogeneous ideologically either, and the changes that took place in the society and in the prevailing ideology during those 50 years could have their impact on school textbooks as well. That is the reason why, my intention was to depict the situation as seen at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the examined era from the perspectives of denominations, mother tongue, and approaches to history. Altogether I have analysed 123 textbooks written for schools where the language of education was either Hungarian or other. In the case of the books I selected to help construct the image of history that was to be conveyed through them, I paid attention to the *date of their publication*. Therefore, I refer to texts written both before and after the curriculum approved in 1905. I also took care of representing *all denominations* through the authors of this type of textbooks. Concerning the selection of school books written in languages other than Hungarian, besides the above mentioned conditions, I paid attention to examine and report on *all nationalities concerned in the question*, and in this respect, into my study I involved the group of language books too which were used to teach Hungarian and other languages. I have not analysed the

sources in details from pedagogical or didactical point of views in either cases. My intention was to reconstruct the historical approach mediated to the pupils of elementary schools where either Hungarian or other languages were spoken as the language of education.

According to the curricula, the teaching of history was based on the knowledge gained through the historical stories in the reading books in the 3rd and 4th forms, thus I had to include these reading books into the examined circle of elementary school books. In fact, I had to begin my research with them. Their significance cannot be neglected: for despite the obligation to attend school daily till the age of 12, and then in the form of remedial classes up to the age of 15, lots of pupils managed to complete only the first four forms (or not even all of them), thus they did not have any other image and idea about history than just what they were provided with in the stories in their reading books. The aspects of selecting the reading books were the same as in the case of history text books.

There is quite a number of reading books and history textbooks available from the dualistic era, which are rather varied and diverse according to the types of schools they were used at, thus the process of summing up the typical characteristics is not easy. On the other hand, from the age of revolutions, we have at our disposal only plans, textbook outlines, and publications finished or partly finished but in neither case published. Nevertheless, I do hope that I managed to give a realistic picture about the educational plans and ideas based on the available materials.

From the 4th form the number of historical texts in the reading books increased, therefore at the time of their analysis, just as I did in the case of the historical textbooks, I moved along certain special standpoints: I examined the perceptible narratives from national and social viewpoints and from the aspect of the question of the nationalities. Meanwhile, I again concentrated on discovering the differences between the textbooks published before and after 1905, when the new national curriculum received approval, and I also reported on the characteristic features specific to denominational school books.

The books of the denominational schools show typical characteristic features that can be palpable till the end of the 19th century, thus I distinguish between the Catholic and the Protestant narratives. Later on in the era, however these features were

less different and thus I examined the constructions that were born as a result of the process of uniforming the narratives.

Concerning the textbooks used in public elementary schools where pupils of different nationalities (which meant almost half of the population of the country) went to, which were supported (in the majority of the cases, by denominations), and in which languages other than Hungarian were used for education, I examined two things: on the one hand, I looked at whether the narratives of the Hungarian history differed from those expressed in the textbooks of the Hungarian schools, and on the other hand, I examined whether or not more information was provided on the non-Hungarian nationalities in their textbooks, and if there was any chance given for them through these books to create and care for their own national identities.

Findings of the dissertation

1. It can be safely stated that the teaching of history in public elementary schools in the given era was considered a highly *important matter*, and this statement can be easily backed if we take a look at the list of *authors of the books*. We will see that they were all very well prepared experts. These authors included writers, historians, members of the Academy, doctors of philosophy, royal school inspectors, and heads of teacher training institutions. Writing or editing a reading book for public elementary pupils was not regarded as an insignificant act or an unworthy task at all in that era.
2. The ideas expressed reflecting on the mission of history teaching in the examined five decades began with the concepts of a bourgeois constitutional regime, and as time passed transformed and altered to suit the ideas of a party-state system. All of the emerging concepts bear features of massive *political implications*, all try to suit a given political ideology (either the prevailing one, or the one that was desired): it was this condition, the given political system that determined whether the religious or the scientific ethos was favoured in schools, what the ideas, morals, expectations, and social values to be communicated were, and to what extent “other solutions and ways of thinking” could still be approved besides the official ones. (Of course this last option was limited and as time passed it simply was not offered at all.) *Liberal*

ideas were gradually stifled and soon entered a stage at which freedom of teaching became disclaimed completely. Eventually, the utmost aim of all the analysed teaching models, independent of their declared objectives, was to educate and bring up citizens who become loyal supporters of the given political system.

3. There was a persistent endeavour to *canonize “the modern Hungarian national identity and pride”* that was born in the Reform Age, further elaborated during the dualistic era to become almost a sacred concept. Beside this idea, all other historical problems, and most evidently the social issues and tensions, and the question of nationalities, were neglected in the course of history teaching in elementary schools (as well).
4. Despite the vicissitude, the *strongly emotional* books used in elementary public schools bravely applied the then trendy method of *creating myths* of the past, and concentrated on developing the image of a great and heroic past of the Hungarian nation with a strong political history grounding. Only half of the books cover bits of world history, but the ratios are very different: they are between 10 and 30%. The same can be said about the topics of the texts. The most detailed period of world history appearing in the books is ancient times, then come the Crusades, followed by the inventions, great discoveries, Protestantism, some times the American War of Independence, or rarely the French Revolution. These features are relevant to the whole era, thus there are no differences whether a book was published before or after 1905.
5. The important national topics (the thesis of the Hun-Hungarian sameness, the icon of Attila, the deep rootedness of the Hungarian nation, the “constitutional” control system, obedience to the “princes” with persistence in keeping the freedom of the nation dating it back to the tradition of the so called “Scythian country”) appear *early in the reading texts of the pupils in the 3rd form, and then these stories are further elaborated in the 4th form.* The main objective of these narratives is to give moral teaching and to educate the pupils to interiorize the ideas of the unity of the nation, patriotism, respect of the constitutional system, obedience to law and order, and allegiance to the monarch. The main problem in the hard periods of the Hungarian history was always due to discord and dissension. National tragedies always occurred when the above values were abused (in the majority of the cases by

lords, sometimes “bad” kings). A further characteristic feature of these narratives is that “*inner*” problems, i.e. *conflicts* within the nation are presented more often in the beginning of the era than after 1905, when due to the directives of the new curriculum these conflicts receive less and less attention. The situation is just the opposite in the case of the “*outer*” problems, in particular *the Habsburg-Hungarian conflict*. At the beginning of the era there is almost complete silence about these topics, while after 1905 a braver critical voice can be heard. Yet, all the authors intend to live up to the expectations required by the “status quo”; and the trials to give and argue for the legitimacy of Francis Joseph indicate this endeavour too. If this is not enough, one could still turn to the maxims: “the king is sacred and intangible, and anyone saying bad about him or blaspheme him shall be punished with detention”. What pupils learnt about the *citizens who were not speakers of Hungarian* was not much, if at all any; they were taught that the Hungarian community had always been extremely tolerant and open to welcome foreign peoples, and that these peoples had always been very keen on becoming Hungarians. As far as the *social issues are concerned*, the children learnt that although there had been some conflicts in the past due to the subjugation of the serf and their absence of rights, by the dualistic times these conflicts were solved by the laws of 1848 and again reinforced by the Compromise of 1867, and declared that all members of the various social classes are equal citizens. The monarch is working on making his people prosperous, while the duty of individuals is to live up to their rights guaranteed by the constitution, and carve out their own fortune.

6. Dealing in details with the *Hungarian history* and the ancient past is one of the major centres of interest of both the reading books and history text books in the elementary schools. The *topic of modern times is almost completely missing*, or if, by any chance it still gets in the books, it shows the children a peaceful, developing and happy world without any problems. This approach may as well seem logical on its own, since the conflicts of the past were mainly caused by the “misunderstandings” between the monarch and the nation, and this problem had been safely cleared up, at least in the books.
7. Due to the spirit of liberal pluralism, *certain topics of the national canon* (the origins of the Hungarian people, the period of raids, the merits of the establishment of the

state, national and/or religious motives in the course of uprisings against the Habsburg oppression throughout the 16-18 centuries, the birth and stages of development of a modern Hungary, and the views expressed about the outstanding key figures of the era) appeared in a kind of talking back-way in the narratives of the Catholic and Protestant books, as well as in the texts that have no denominational affiliations in the 5th and 6th forms. This was mainly typical till the turn of the 19th-20th centuries. From then onwards, the differences soon faded away in the spirit of “national unity”, and without any doubts, the historical narratives that favoured and fostered the emerging *bourgeois values* began to gain ground.

8. Based on the language books, reading books and history textbooks of schools where the *language of education was not Hungarian* it can be justified that the educational policy of the public elementary schools went beyond the idea of “nationalism in the language”; it aimed at making people identify completely with the Hungarian national identity. (In the spirit of Hungarian national ideology, the expression used for foreign language speakers in the country referred to Hungarians who did not speak Hungarian, while in the jargon of the nationality movements, it referred to proper nations.) Although the sphere of public education widened, the nationalities-nations became more cultivated, and the number of individual carrier opportunities increased, there was still no chance given to any “different” collective identity to gain ground besides the dominant Hungarian. In the case of these nationality books, the pluralism of the era was relevant, their number is impressive, and they are varied in form and partly in their contents too. The main point is though common in all of them: on all levels and in all circles they foster the idea of Hungarian national identity. According to the narratives— due to being a tolerant nation— there had always been *concord* and harmony in Hungary among the communities of different languages. When in 1848-1849 there happened to be a conflict in this relationship, it was said to be owing to a kind of outer influence, the consequence of the instigation of Vienna, “the Court”, and the “bad counsellors” of the monarchs. The possibility that other nationalities also began to develop to become autonomous nations was never even brought up.
9. All forms of historical narratives support the *concept of the Hungarian nation state*. The peculiarity of the publications produced for the different nationalities of the

country is only that in these books *the history of Hungary is presented in a more retouched way* than in the student books used in the Hungarian-speaking schools. The textbooks of the nationalities sometimes mention bits of inner social and welfare conflicts too, although they reflect on these issues only moderately and in a very restrained way. So, if we want to speak about them, because before long it will be inevitable, let us do so, but for god's sake: "Nicht vor den Kindern!"

10. Be that as it may, the masses of people who were to face the historical storms of the 20th century had been *left alone by their schools*. We can declare that the fine words of Sándor Imre professing the idea that "pedagogical viewpoints and political guidance's cannot go hand in hand", did not come true.

Publications relevant to the theme of the dissertation

- Szemléletformálás és értékközvetítés a népiskolai történelemoktatásban a századfordulón (tantervek és olvasókönyvek tükrében). In: *Filozófia – művelődés – történet*. A BTF Tudományos Közleményei. XVIII. Trezor Kiadó, Budapest 1999. pp.: 117–145.
- Szemléletformálás és értékközvetítés a népiskolai történelemoktatásban a két világháború között (olvasókönyvek tükrében). In: *Filozófia – művelődés – történet*. A BTF Tudományos Közleményei. XIX. Trezor Kiadó, Budapest 2001. pp.: 117–147.
- Lojális alattvalót vagy homo socialist? (A XX. század első két évtizede népiskolai történelemtanításának dilemmáiról.) In: *Filozófia – művelődés – történet*. A BTF Tudományos Közleményei. XXVI. Trezor Kiadó, Budapest 2004. pp.: 151–212.
- A népiskolai történelemtanítás kortárs kritikái a 20. század elején. In: *KÚT (Az ELTE BTK Történelemtudományok Doktori Iskola kiadványa)*. III. évf. 2004. 3–4. sz. Pp.: 88–98.
- Sokszínű vagy uniformizált alapszintű oktatást? (Oktatáspolitikai megoldások a 20. század első két évtizedében.) Válogatás az óvó- és tanítóképző főiskolák, karok oktatóinak tanulmányaiból. In: *Tükörcső, 2003–2004*. ÓTE, Baja 2004. pp.: 8–32.
- A népiskolai történelemtanítás és a nemzetiségek a dualizmus korában. In: *Filozófia – művelődés – történet*. A BTF Tudományos Közleményei. XXIX. Trezor Kiadó, Budapest 2007. pp.: 231–275.