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Consequences of changes in the educational field at the end of the 21st century. Customizations for history teaching

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Abstract. There are permanent approaches regarding the role and purpose of history in the context of the 3rd millennium. The idea that history should and can be studied was strongly emphasized because people need to know themselves. Three sources of fundamental knowledge of history were mentioned for the 20th and 21st centuries: school, family, mass media. Contemporary specialists warn that the success of teaching history in school should not be based on a strictly mechanical assimilation of historical data and events, but above all on the understanding by the subjects of history learning of the significance of historical processes, events and progress over time, but and to the contribution of history to the formation of national identity. This explains why the study of history is closely linked to education for democratic citizenship and human rights.

Keywords. Educational policies, education for democratic citizenship, alternative textbooks, open educational resources, key competences

Theoretical landmarks

Evaluating the quality of the educational process under the conditions of 21st century education is an interesting and instructive attempt, but it is not easy. The Romanian educational process has gone through numerous transformations in the last thirty years, both in terms of curricular aspects, namely the education plan, study programs and textbooks, as well as those regarding the managerial component. In this process, operations of request and response, of analysis and synthesis, of evaluation and application intervened and continue to intervene, all built on the basis of strategies in which all educational factors are involved. One of the major issues at the top of educational policy agendas in many European countries is related to the training and professional identity of teachers. The provision of far-reaching changes at the level of the initial and continuous training of the teaching staff does not only aim at the institutional models and arrangements at the level of supply, but also at aspects related to the changing professional status and identity of the teaching staff, the articulations and evolutions in the career, mentioned Lucian Ciolan (2011). The same author points out that new professional roles, duties and responsibilities are discussed to become part of the teaching profession. It is one of the reasons why this research idea arose, in which we set out to study the educational policy documents of the last decades. The analysis of the changes in the field of history in the last thirty years was the main purpose of the research and during the study of the educational policy

documents and the interviews taken with history teachers in the country, we drew up a series of conclusions and proposed suggestions for improving the quality of teaching- learning-evaluation, in the hope that positive measures will be taken in this regard at the national level as well.

As a discipline, history has seen important stages in our country since the events of 1989. Often confused with the science it expresses, history is seen under several aspects: the cultural, systemic, factual and the serial aspect. Thus, "the serial aspect is seen in the sense that repeatable events can acquire the qualification of historical" (Dumitrescu D., 2013, p. 18); the systemic aspect refers to the fact that all historical facts are related to each other through a system of cause-effect relationships, and the cultural aspect is seen as a socio-cultural reaction to unfolding historical events. As a result, as the contemporary didacticians point out, wanting to bring the informational and the didactic perspective of history to an agreement, the decision-makers regarding the discipline of history found certain forms of instruction and evaluation, which resulted more in the production of discussions on the contrary, some real scandals (Dumitrescu, 2013). They were generally caused by ignorance or exaggeration of an aspect mentioned above, but also by maintaining the conservatism of the people in the system who put into practice the proposed approach, but maybe sometimes also due to the fact that, often, non-specialists in the field mixed in the discussions, reasoning that history is everyone's good, which we all know how to do. Today's educators, in all the research they have done, have asked themselves the question: How can we teach history so that it becomes more attractive to students? The answers so far have been that history can be seen as a discipline in which facts are presented in the relationship of cause and effect, but it can also be taught as an event-rich discipline in which memorization is paramount. The research tries to confirm these answers, and to look for solutions to the dilemmas probably also caused by the insufficient training of the teaching staff or their fear that the formative perspective will lead to the dilution of the contents related to historical science or, as today's didacticians say, with what the staff believe didactic that students need to know, based on what they learned when they were in school. The discrepancies between the definitions of history are caused by the diverse perspectives of approaching historical facts; for example, a positivist perspective is one that assumes that history is described, presented as it happened, chronologically and factually, without assuming that the historian intervenes (Căpiță & Căpiță, 1995). Another perspective, structuralist, is the one that aims to analyze events through the prism of the elements of civilization. Historian Alexandru Zub summarizes some of the research on these issues, recalling that, in full postmodernity, history is fragmented into microhistories, and the historical discourse needs the rethinking of history as an academic discipline and the rethinking of the concept of scientific rationality. Zub (2006) cites Rusen, who states that postmodernism is a challenge for historians because the presence of the prefix post wants to demonstrate the dissatisfaction marked by those cultural patterns that are understood as modern.

By improving the teaching-learning-evaluation process, we can affirm that the didactics of history is a scientific discipline, the results of which emerge from the result of the interactions between the component elements of the didactic triangle: student, teacher, knowledge, synthesizing at the same time one's own information, but also that of others disciplines, such as geography or sociology (Manea, 2013). Today, history, viewed both as a science and as an educational discipline, gives the possibility of asserting important principles such as interdisciplinarity or multiperspective. The results of the research through teachers' assessments confirm that national identity is preserved by cultivating national values and the past, and by promoting the spirit of democratic citizenship. However, history has often suffered in the

Romanian school, being the victim of many attacks, many unfounded, from people who had no connection with the reality of the school. The attitude towards history is very contradictory in the 21st century. The researchers' analysis and personal opinion is that those who deal with the teaching and practice of history today have reiterated, on numerous occasions, that history cannot be understood as a string of facts, and that its role is to form individual capacities of students for to understand the past of humanity at all levels: local, national, regional, European, universal.

1. Research methodology

The purpose of our research starts from the new educational paradigms and the newest educational policies that should lead to changes in the field of school practice. Recent studies and more have shown us that history has consequences in the development of students' communication skills, to analyze sources, to stimulate critical thinking. Current didactics, as it is constructed, should lead to the formation among students of a way of thinking specific to history, and "the teacher should give the student access to the intellectual soul of the discipline" (Singer & Sarivan, 2006, p. 246).

The existence of a generation of programs in the Romanian space has, at least at the theoretical level, common elements, which have in mind the regulatory role of the students' acquisitions in terms of training. Some of the current programs are student-centered and synchronized with European educational documents, which are basic elements of curriculum design. But whatever the pace of student acquisition, there is a need to know the level reached and what steps need to be taken, for example remediation, support for excellence or reinforcement. Therefore, objective and correct measures of the level reached in each individual competence are necessary, according to which the didactic activity can be organized appropriately, in this way the student becomes aware of his own learning.

Analyzing the general teaching-learning-evaluation mode after the second half of the 20th century, we often make correlations with the communist period. The findings are that there are still many followers of the way the educational process was carried out then, which was based on a large amount of information, on the consideration that the student must assimilate everything that had been validated in the sciences. History is a side of education that tries to solve some problems that the individual encounters on an existential level. First of all, the teacher must know these facts and understand them because we can only understand the past through the lens of present facts. Today, the interest in the events of the past has decreased, but it is necessary that this gives thought if not certain lacks, such as models, analyzes of phenomena have influenced to a certain extent the way people behave. That's why more and more didacticists emphasize how important it is to make history a more attractive object, to make today's young people to be informed about our past and not only, to appreciate it, instead of demands to know amounts of information that may not be useful most of the time. The same didacticists appreciate that the understanding of history today also depends on the quality of individual experience and finding solutions to today's problems, in parallel with the support of the teaching of history in school by the European institutions.

1.1. Sample

The research considers the application of two questionnaires, one for students, to identify the general way in which they appreciate the discipline of history today, but also the educational policy documents that transpose the European recommendations regarding the training of key skills for students. Another questionnaire is intended for history teachers to

evaluate the best methods used in the teaching of this subject, how useful are the principles used in the teaching of history, or how is perceived the time required for the school discipline of history according to the existing framework plans, the principle of multiple perspectives, and so on In developing this method, we were guided by the stages presented by Ciolan (2011) in the chapter dedicated to the questionnaire method.

Both questionnaires were designed by us and were applied to final high school classes, with a total of 556 respondents, respectively, the teachers' questionnaire was applied to a number of 128 teachers, history teachers. In the first stage we analyzed the questions formulated in the research and the questionnaires in the field. In the second stage we moved on to the elaboration of the questionnaire items, keeping certain items according to the terms of our research. I organized the items and established the format of the questionnaire. In formulating the questions we were guided by the saying: "Be simple, clear and concise whenever possible" (Cohen et al., 2007).

After the questionnaire was completed, I followed the pre-test stage: I checked the questionnaire on a sample of students (30 students) in May 2020. The questionnaire was applied voluntarily to a number of 30 students of the XI and XII grades from the National Pedagogical College "Spiru Haret" Buzău. The questionnaire was sent online, considering that we are in the period of the Covid 19 isolation. At this stage, we aimed to achieve the following functions taken from Cohen (2007): elimination of ambiguities and spelling mistakes, identification of omissions, redundant or irrelevant items, time verification necessary to complete the questionnaire, checking the difficulty level of the items and their calibration, checking the attractiveness of the items for the respondent, identifying the codes that will be used for data analysis.

The questionnaire was self-administered by the students, after the teacher's verbal instruction. We remind you that the present research combines the quantitative and qualitative paradigm, as it aims to find causal relationships in the teaching of history, to understand them, to apply them in similar contexts in order to produce quality learning, considering that, according to the questionnaire, we used two qualitative research methods: focus group and interview.

An important characteristic in the classification of questionnaires is their administration mode, they can be self-administered or administered by survey operators (Chelcea, 2001). In our case, the questionnaires are self-administered, which implies that the answers were recorded by their author. Questionnaires of this type assume, as the aforementioned sociological research techniques treatise states, that the formulation and recording of the answers are done without a survey operator. The realization of the questionnaires proposed by us aimed at adapting to the existing situation: nowadays it is much easier to apply some questionnaires in the online environment. This time, in the situation of the COVID-19 pandemic, the online questionnaire was the only allowed application method. The use of an online survey tool allowed us to record a relatively large number of responses, more than would have been possible by solving them face-to-face. Some of the respondents were contacted individually, via e-mail. The e-mail addresses of the respondents were provided by the management of the schools where they worked, and in turn, the teaching staff distributed the questionnaire intended for the students in the classes where they teach, respectively the 11th and 12th high school classes. Both the questionnaire for history teachers, as well as the one for students was distributed in the online environment in the same period - the month of May 2020. From the beginning, the respondents confirmed their acceptance for the processing of personal data. It should be stated once again

that in our research we had the consent of the Research Ethics Commission, which we will insert at the end of the thesis.

In developing them, we were guided by the stages presented in the work coordinated by Lucian Ciolan (2011) in the chapter devoted to the questionnaire method. As the authors state, it is necessary to consider two extremely important aspects before developing the actual questionnaire. These would be, in order of importance, formulating the research problem and establishing hypotheses and objectives. Then the second equally important aspect is sampling, the way in which the population that will respond to the questionnaire/questionnaires is selected.

1.2. Data collection instruments

The analysis of the questionnaires requires that for each of the questions common to both students and teachers who teach history, the frequency distribution of the answers should be followed in parallel, in order to identify differences between the way of assessing the history discipline in parallel with the outline a training profile of the graduate.

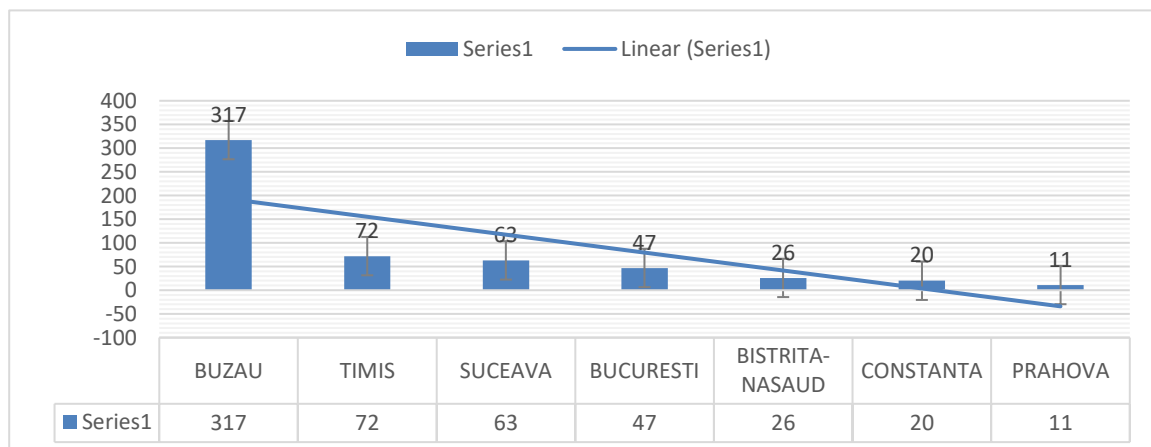
As I stated before, most of the time in our research we emphasized the difference that exists between middle school and high school curricula, and many times, we took as a benchmark the newest history curriculum, the current curriculum for middle school, which was approved by OMEN no. 3393/ 28.02.2017, stating that it applies starting from the 2017-2018 school year. For the training of students' skills, it is necessary to use didactic strategies adapted to the way of evolution and development of the students, i.e. depending on the social and cultural framework, particularities of age, etc. We will assess in the quiz how the skills in the current national curriculum are valued and implemented. In the figures below, we note the preferences regarding the teaching tools of the history discipline preferred by both students and teachers.

2. Results and discussions

The questionnaire addressed to the students was completed by a number of 556 students from all over the country, students from the high school classes, the 11th grade and the 12th grade, different profiles - theoretical, technological and vocational.

Figure 1

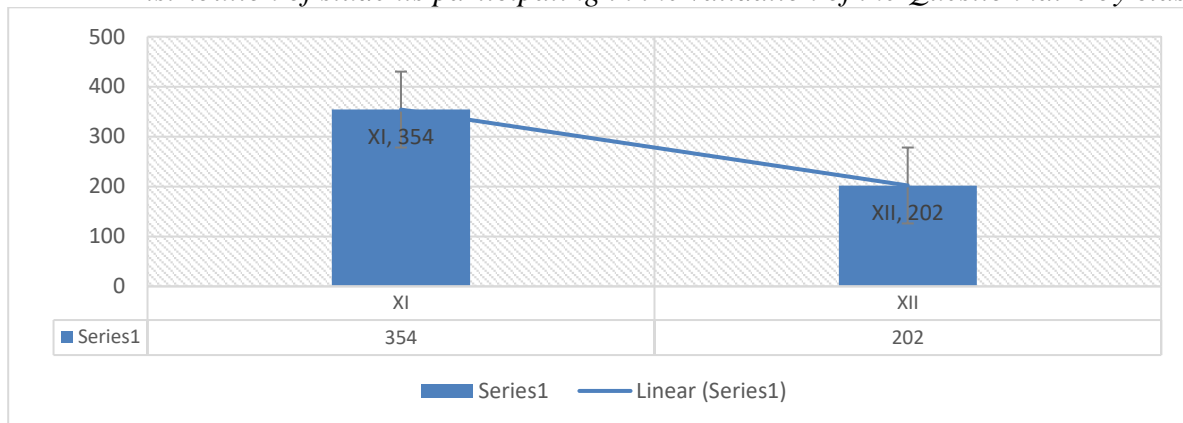
Distribution of students participating in the validation of the Questionnaire by county



The questionnaire was addressed to final high school classes, students from different high schools, for a greater relevance of the answers. As can be seen, the vast majority of student respondents, respectively 64% are in the last high school class, respectively, 202 respondents from the XIIth grade, which implies that the process of training key skills is almost completed, the perception of history, the way it is taught, its usefulness is already consolidated. The rest of the students, totaling a percentage of 36%, i.e. 354 respondents are students in the 11th grade of high school.

Figure 2

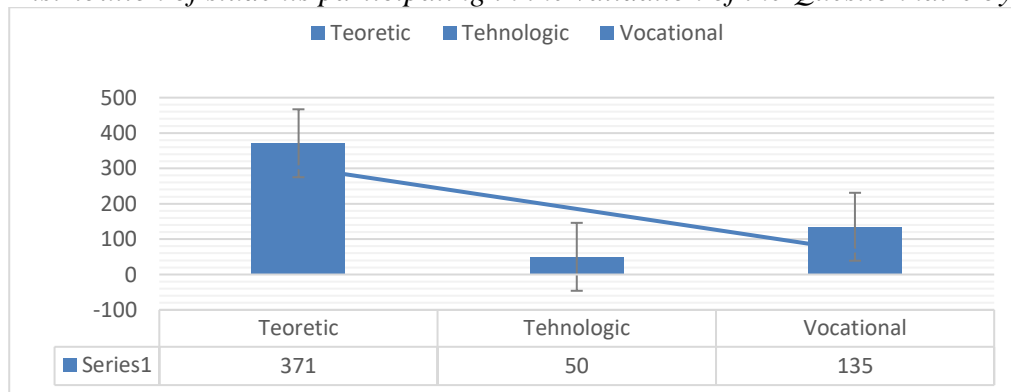
Distribution of students participating in the validation of the Questionnaire by class



The questionnaire covered a wide range of answers that encompass a variety of profiles that students follow.

Figura 3

Distribution of students participating in the validation of the Questionnaire by profiles



The questionnaire addressed to history teachers was completed by a number of 128 teachers from all over the country, teachers who teach in middle and high schools, having schools in urban or rural areas, with different teaching degrees. Most of the respondents have the first teaching degree, respectively 85 respondents, while the teachers who have the second degree and answered this questionnaire number 18. To these questions, history teachers who are in the first years at the department and they only have the final degree, they are 18 in number. 12 teaching staff who obtained the title of doctor answered the questionnaire.

The questionnaire was created by the author, based on the formulated hypotheses. During the period when the questionnaire was available for completion, 556 valid questionnaires completed by students and 128 valid questionnaires completed by teachers were recorded, as shown in the following table:

Table 1
Table sample respondents frequency percentage

Sample	Frequency	Percentage
Profesor	128	18.7
Elev	556	81.3
Total	684	100.0

Today's school has different students, with different needs, for which a different design of the activity is necessary, and we, the teachers, have a serious competition in new technologies, which give students access to well-documented information. That is why in our questionnaire we introduced questions about the differentiated curriculum, the curriculum at the school's decision, the methods and strategies of learning history, thinking to teach the students how to use the multitude of information they have access to, how to analyze and select, because only in this way will we develop their critical thinking. But this type of school and education presuppose major re-evaluations of the didactics of the subjects, without completely eliminating the teaching-learning-evaluation method of previous periods, considering that the role of the teacher will diminish.

Although these characteristics and differentiations are already known by most teachers, the teacher is tempted to limit himself to the teaching activity, more than to the learning one, based on certain considerations and due to the persistence of several factors, such as those that school curricula still contain a large volume of information, national exams - national assessment, baccalaureate, are still based on a quantitative assessment and volume of information, the lack of facilities to apply modern teaching-learning-assessment methods of history, routine and the professional capping of teaching staff, the impossibility of mobility of school furniture, and the list could go on depending on the difficulties encountered by each individual teacher.

One of the basic questions of our questionnaire refers to the teacher's role in motivating students to learn history. Let's not forget that, in the school for diversity, the teaching staff has the role of partner in learning with the student, that they must form a team, which proposes common objectives, a team that assumes direct participation in the realization of the lesson, in which the framework the didactic has the role of coordinator, because he is the one who determines the way of involvement of each individual actor, elaborates the plan of activities and the tasks for the achievement of the proposed objectives, issues that were also analyzed by previous didactic works (Bolovan, 2007).

Over time, we believe that the discipline of history can no longer be conceived outside of the new trends in its approach, trends already present in European teaching. Adaptation to the diversified demands of society is extremely necessary, because the school is not and must not be conceived as a closed fortress, on the contrary, it must have its doors permanently open to allow connection with the existing reality. In school, the role of the teacher is essential, but he must be in permanent collaboration with the other beneficiaries of education, which are the students, parents, the community. The formulation of our hypotheses in the research were

closely related to the fact that the teacher must be more than a transmitter of information, that what is extremely important in education can be achieved exclusively through the presence of the teacher in the classroom. Most of the time, the conditions available to a teaching staff to carry out their activity are precarious, a fact that leads to dissatisfaction, and only conscience and good faith determine them to continue their daily work. It is the teaching staff who must continue to educate their students, even in the current conditions, in which the pandemic has totally limited the possibility of conducting face-to-face classes. During our research, the formulation of hypotheses also took into account this fact, and the final conclusions will be under the influence of this difficult period that he went through.

In a final analysis of the changes in the field of education we will find that they are extremely fast. As numerous as they were, they considered the structure of the education system, national curriculum, framework plans, school programs, textbooks, etc. As far as the history programs are concerned, they have undergone changes just like all other subjects, with one exception, that of 1999. If we were to conclude after analyzing the middle school and high school history programs, we will find that there are several generations of programs of history. Thus, the newest programs are the gymnasium ones, implemented in the second decade of the 21st century, and the high school ones are developed and applied in the first decade of the 21st century. They have a different way of structuring, but their declared purpose is to focus on the regulatory role of students' educational acquisitions. Compliance with recommendations at the European level and the way of centering the activities on the student are still constant elements of the curriculum design.

For any study discipline, the school curriculum is the one that best shows us what is the offer of knowledge proposed to students who are in a certain stage of schooling, but also how knowledge is organized. A reading key is needed to decipher this document, to be used in various situations. That is why it is necessary that the content of these programs be coherent, have the capacity to incorporate changes and potential for development.

The school documents, the history curriculum, set ambitious goals, we believe, because often, in one hour or at most two a week, the history teacher undertakes the task of awakening interest in the study of history, national and universal, he must prepare them to become good citizens, to know the past to understand the present. We also take up here the question that Robert Stradling (2002) asks in his work: "What would you like the young person to remember from history classes five or ten years after leaving school?"

It is a very important matter, which has aroused the interest of didacticians today, and who consider it a problem that we must reflect on as responsibly as possible, regardless of the environment in which we operate, urban or rural, of the teaching degrees we have acquired, by the gymnasium, respectively high school specialization.

Learning history depends on the quality and breadth of individual experience, as well as on solving problems that the history teacher encounters on a daily basis. These problems refer to the possibility of generalization in history and the fact-based expression of value judgments, of moral judgments.

3. Conclusions

History was and is a science based on the accumulation of information that researchers study and assemble for the benefit of those who are interested in the events of the past. This clearly presupposes that historical sources be analyzed on the basis of well-established scientific benchmarks, with respect for professional ethics and respect for the truth. At the same time, studying history is essential to know all the political and social implications in today's societies.

History has been the discipline and science most often subject to change and attempts at manipulation. A Canadian historian stated in an article that "no one has ever changed the course of history more than historians themselves." (Steele K, 2004) The problem of history as a school discipline is reflected in a certain approach of the teaching staff when working on their own didactic scenario for the class. There are common and at the same time different elements with the academic approach, such as the lack of bibliographic research when thinking about the discipline, replaced most of the time by the study of the lesson from the textbook and the individual or team work of the students in the classroom. The role of the teacher is to arouse students' interest in the field of history, to train them in skills to be able to solve as well as possible the demands of the classroom, from the certification and selection exams, and then to face the challenges of life.

The research carried out during the documentation period demonstrated that the discipline of history is considered a discipline that needs a very good memory of all those who operate with it, because all events, dates must be known without a doubt. History has gained such a reputation for several reasons. The first factor that contributes to the development of such a conclusion is that school textbooks and curricula still contain a large volume of information that is difficult for students to absorb. Then, another reason would be that, in the contents of the program, manuals or other aids, they receive a multitude of chronological data, battles, treaties, events that should be remembered by the student, especially for passing some exams. Even if these contents have undergone changes and, at least in the secondary school curriculum, new topics related to social life, mentalities, which could be assimilated more easily, have been introduced, often they are not used, for the reason that they are not attractive and spectacular for today's students. Then, most of the time in the evaluation of history, the reproduction of the information takes precedence, instead of the analysis or elaboration of a point of view on a historical fact or process.

The analysis of European reports and documents prove as clearly as possible that national history still occupies an important place in school curricula, and very often in subjects related to European history a wide space is given to contents related to national history. The same reports reveal that very often the national point of view is still the only one presented to students as the only one on the past. As a consequence, changes occurred in the subject of history, new techniques were developed, such as those of oral history, events were also presented from the perspective of social categories less described in history textbooks, such as the evolution of the feminist current, and greater attention was paid to social history. There is a need to adapt the education system to the elements of the school for diversity. For this to be possible, students must actively participate in the development of information and knowledge, and above all become explorers, who, supported by their teachers, can discover the learning content. The history teacher is a source of experience for his student, a mediator between them and knowledge of the cultural values of the society.

The theoretical study of the documents about the teaching of history revealed the importance of supporting the teaching of history in the European school by the Council of Europe, the encouragement of the diverse approach to history, the link past-present-future. History can be learned not only based on the lives of leaders, or wars, but also on the culture of ideas, on the economy, society or everyday life. The teacher is the one who can value his students by stimulating critical thinking, not just by transmitting information, because the history discipline is the one that contributes the most to the acceptance of diversity, multiculturalism and the promotion of inter- and trans-disciplinarity. Today there are international organizations that have analyzed the issue of 21st century skills. Indispensable for

success at work are skills related to critical thinking, collaboration, creativity, negotiation, solving complex problems, coordinating with others, etc. The competences of the 21st century propose a reevaluation of the way we convey the contents to our students. OECD initiatives regarding the promotion of 21st century skills have had a particular impact. The consequence of these actions is now reflected in the curricula of many states. There are three main areas, reading, mathematics and science, to which are added the 21st century skills examined by the PISA tests. The competences of the 21st century are based on the "4 C's" - critical thinking and problem solving, communication, collaboration and creativity. (Taylor, 2017). 21st century skills are what ensure success in the ever-changing workplace, as roles within an organizational structure are increasingly less defined and companies are often dispersed across multiple countries. For this reason it is necessary to be much more sensitive to the way we communicate and our communications are received. Emotional intelligence and resource management are very important in this case. Collaboration is an important skill that we often promote in classroom activity. Very often we initiate team or pair activities, but we do not analyze with them how they worked together and how they could improve their cooperation.

In conclusion, in the last three decades, didactic tools and new teaching-learning-evaluation methods were implemented in Romanian schools to activate students, to better understand historical events/processes, but also to develop personal capacity to seek answers and ask questions. At the same time, the conferences and symposia dedicated to the teaching of history at the European level determined the increase in attention to history, recognizing its important role for the development of European skills, especially civic ones. Historical events often produce changes in the history curriculum as well. Thus, the events of the late 20th century in Europe led to the transformation of the content of the history programs, giving the start, more timid at first, for an overall vision of Europe, which until then had been impossible due to the ideological war between the East and West.

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