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INNOVATIVE CURRICULAR CONCEPT OF THE EDUCATIONAL AREA MAN AND THE WORLD OF WORK AND ITS IMPLEMENTATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

CONCEITO CURRICULAR INOVADOR DA ÁREA EDUCACIONAL O HOMEM E O MUNDO DO TRABALHO E SUA IMPLEMENTAÇÃO NAS ESCOLAS PRIMÁRIAS

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Abstract
This article focuses on the innovative curricular concept of the educational area Man and the World of Work in primary education in the context of the ongoing curricular reform in the Slovak Republic. We pay attention to the concept of the educational area, its goals, and structure based on the integration of three interconnected components: technology, career education, and entrepreneurship and initiative. We analyze the new content of the technology component with a focus on developing students' technical literacy through activity- and experience-oriented teaching. The article also includes specific examples of the work of teachers and students in individual educational cycles, which illustrate the possibilities for the practical implementation of content and performance standards in educational practice.

Keywords: Curriculum Reform. Primary Education. Technological Literacy. Career Education. Entrepreneurship Education.

Resumo
Este artigo enfoca o conceito curricular inovador da área educacional "O Homem e o Mundo do Trabalho" no ensino fundamental, no contexto da reforma curricular em andamento na República Eslovaca. Damos atenção ao conceito da área educacional, seus objetivos e estrutura, com base na integração de três componentes interligados: tecnologia, educação profissional e empreendedorismo e iniciativa. Analisamos o novo conteúdo do componente de tecnologia com foco no desenvolvimento da alfabetização técnica dos alunos por meio do ensino orientado para atividades e experiências. O artigo também inclui exemplos específicos do trabalho de professores e alunos em ciclos educacionais individuais, que ilustram as possibilidades de implementação prática de padrões de conteúdo e desempenho na prática educacional.

Palavras-chave: *Reforma Curricular. Ensino Fundamental. Alfabetização Tecnológica. Educação Profissional. Educação Empreendedora.*

1 INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

The educational area *Man and the World of Work* occupies a special position in the basic education system, as it contributes significantly to the development of students' practical skills, technical and professional literacy, and their gradual preparation for an active and responsible life in society. In the context of a dynamically changing world of

work, increasing digitalisation and technological progress, as well as environmental challenges, this educational area is becoming increasingly important. The ongoing curriculum reform in the Slovak Republic responds to long-identified shortcomings in traditional teaching, which was mainly focused on the reproduction of isolated knowledge and only to a limited extent reflected its practical applicability. The new concept of the educational area Man and the World of Work is directed towards functional, meaningful, and activity-oriented education in which the student is an active participant in the learning process. The aim of the innovative educational standards is not only to impart knowledge about technology, materials, and work activities, but above all to develop the ability to apply this knowledge in solving practical tasks, making decisions in everyday situations, and planning one's own educational and professional career. In this context, the educational area of Man and the World of Work becomes an important tool for supporting lifelong learning and forming a positive relationship to work.

2 CONCEPT OF THE EDUCATIONAL AREA MAN AND THE WORLD OF WORK

The new concept of the educational area Man and the World of Work is based on the integration of three interrelated components: technology, career education, and entrepreneurship and initiative. This conceptual division reflects the need for the comprehensive development of the student's personality, which goes beyond the acquisition of technical skills and also includes self-awareness, the ability to plan, make decisions, and take responsibility for one's own actions. A distinctive feature of the new concept is the strengthening of the communicative, activity-based, and experiential nature of teaching (European Commission. *Education and Training Monitor 2025).* The learning process is understood as the active construction of knowledge, in which students acquire new experiences through their own activities, experimentation, collaboration, and subsequent reflection. In this context, the role of the teacher shifts from the transmissive mediation of knowledge to the facilitation of learning, methodological guidance, and the creation of conditions for a safe and meaningful learning environment. The concept also emphasizes the continuity and gradation of educational goals across educational cycles. In the lower cycles, elementary ideas about materials, work activities, and professions are

formed, which are then systematically deepened and developed in the following cycles. Education designed in this way creates the conditions for acquiring functional, interconnected, and long-term sustainable knowledge that can be used in real life.

3 NEW CONTENT IN THE TECHNOLOGY COMPONENT

The technology component is a fundamental pillar of the Man and the World of Work educational area and focuses on the systematic development of pupils' technical literacy. The innovative content standards are designed to support a gradual transition from elementary knowledge of materials and tools to their purposeful use in creating their own products and solving technical problems *(Žáčok, 2024)*. In the **first educational cycle**, attention is focused on learning about and exploring the properties of natural and technical materials through sensory perception and simple manual activities. Students work with materials such as paper, cardboard, textiles, modeling clay, and selected natural materials, forming basic ideas about their properties, possible uses, and behavior during processing. The aim of this stage is not to learn technical terminology, but to create an experiential basis for further education. In the **second cycle**, the curriculum is expanded to include a more systematic examination of technical materials, their production processes, recycling options, and environmental contexts. Students learn to plan work procedures, select appropriate materials and tools, and evaluate the results of their work in terms of functionality, aesthetics, and economy. An important element is the connection between technical activities and the development of financial literacy and cooperative learning. **The third cycle** is focused on the development of independent and creative activity among students. Students make targeted use of the properties of technical materials in the design and implementation of products, work with technical documentation, and learn basic technological procedures for manual and machine processing. Emphasis is placed on compliance with occupational safety principles, environmental responsibility, and the ability to critically evaluate one's own activities (Žáčok and Klátik, 2025). The curriculum designed in this way supports the development of technical thinking and the ability to solve problems in practical situations.

4 EXAMPLES OF TEACHERS' AND STUDENTS' WORK WITH THE NEW CURRICULUM

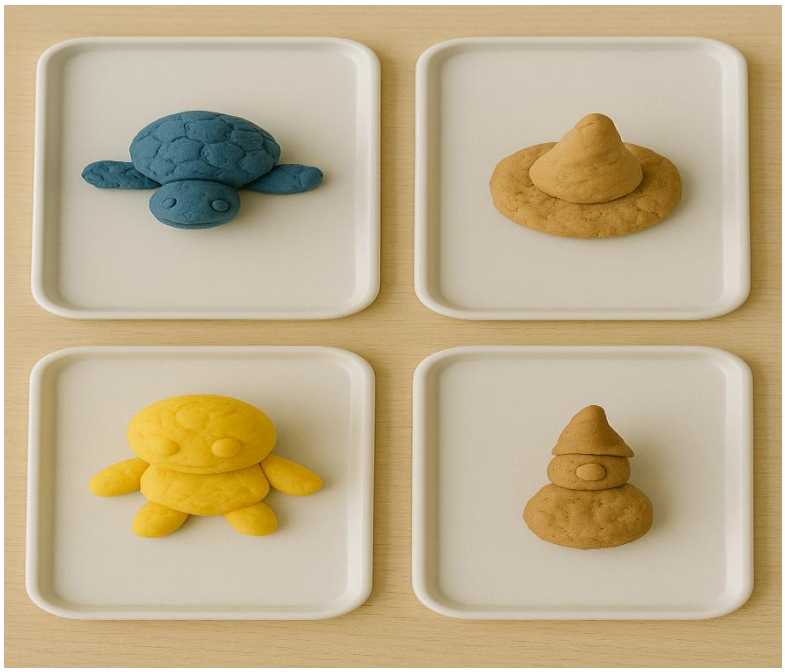
When implementing the new content standards for the educational area of Man and the World of Work, activity-based learning becomes the natural core of the teaching process. In the educational process, the teacher prepares functionally and thematically linked workstations that provide students with a variety of materials and tools necessary for actively discovering technical principles and processes.

4.1 Example from Cycle 1 – learning about materials

The teacher prepares workstations for students with various modeling materials (plasticine, dough, clay, etc.). The task of the students is to examine their properties – softness, malleability, reaction to pressure or drying – through their own activities. The students verbalize and compare their observations, while the teacher acts as a facilitator and guides the discussion. The result is a simple product based on their own design and a joint reflection on the work process.

Figure 1

Products made from modeling materials



Source: author

4.2 Example from the 2nd cycle – creation of a utility item

As part of the thematic unit "Technical Materials," students design and make a simple gift item out of paper and cardboard. The work is carried out in groups, where students divide tasks, plan the procedure, and also take into account the financial aspect of the project. The teacher supports the development of entrepreneurship and cooperation and guides students to evaluate the result in terms of functionality and aesthetics.

Figure 2

Products made from paper and cardboard

Source: author

4.3 Example from the 3rd cycle – technical design and implementation

Pupils solve a problem-based task – the design and production of a simple coat hanger made of sheet metal. First, they create a technical sketch, then select the appropriate work operations (measuring, drilling, bending). After the product is made, it is presented and evaluated in terms of functionality, safety, and environmental impact. This activity develops students' technical literacy, critical thinking, and self-evaluation.

Figure 3

Metal hanger

Source: author

5 DISCUSSION AND COMPARISON OF THE EDUCATIONAL AREA MAN AND THE WORLD OF WORK IN THE SLOVAK REPUBLIC AND OTHER COUNTRIES AROUND THE WORLD

The educational area Man and the World of Work, introduced as part of the curriculum reform in the Slovak Republic, reflects current international trends towards strengthening practically oriented, competence-focused, and activity-based education. Its basic goal is to link the development of technical literacy, career orientation, and entrepreneurship with real-life situations, thereby creating the conditions for better preparation of students for life and the world of work (Pavlov et al., 2025). When compared with foreign education systems, it can be said that the Slovak model shares several features with international practice, but also has specific characteristics. In the European context, there are education areas or subjects with similar content that focus on technical and work activities (Hašková and Lukáčová, 2022). For example, in Finland, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom, technical education is implemented through subjects such as Design and Technology, which emphasize project-based learning, product creation, problem-solving, and the application of creative thinking (Pavelka, 2023). These approaches support the development of practical skills, technical thinking, and the ability to apply knowledge in real-life situations, which is in line with the

philosophy of the Slovak educational area Man and the World of Work. However, foreign models often approach technical, career, and entrepreneurial education separately, or link them only partially through interdisciplinary projects. In many countries, career education is implemented as a separate area or through counseling services, while entrepreneurial skills are developed mainly within the framework of economic or civic education. The Slovak model differs in this respect in that it integrates technology, career education, and entrepreneurship and initiative into a single coherent whole, thereby creating a comprehensive framework for student development. A common feature of the Slovak and foreign approaches is the emphasis on activating and activity-based forms of teaching. In both cases, learning through practical activities, projects, teamwork, and solving authentic problems is preferred. Such teaching supports the development of key competencies such as cooperation, communication, critical thinking, and responsibility for one's own work. At the same time, it contributes to higher student motivation and better links between school and real life. Differences can be observed mainly in the extent and manner of integration of digital technologies. In some countries, technical education is strongly linked to digital literacy, programming, and working with modern technologies, while the Slovak educational area of Man and the World of Work places greater emphasis on manual, craft, and technical activities in a broader sense, supplemented by reflection on work, its significance, and environmental contexts (Porubský et al., 2015). This approach can be seen as a balanced foundation that creates space for the gradual expansion of digital elements in further stages of implementation. A comparison with foreign systems also highlights the challenges associated with the practical implementation of the new educational area. As in other countries, the readiness of teachers, the availability of methodological support, and teaching materials play a key role in Slovakia. The success of the reform depends on the ability of teachers to effectively link the individual components of the area and create meaningful educational situations that develop the technical, personal, and social competences of students.

Based on a comparison, it can be concluded that the educational area of Man and the World of Work is fully compatible with international trends in competence-oriented education. Its integrative nature represents significant added value, enabling the comprehensive development of students. At the same time, however, it places increased demands on pedagogical practice and systemic support for teachers. Experience from

abroad can be an inspiration in this regard for further improving the implementation and development of the educational area in the context of Slovak education.

6 CONCLUSION

The innovative curricular concept of the educational area Man and the World of Work represents a significant qualitative shift in the field of technical and vocational education in primary schools. The shift from encyclopedic learning to activity- and experience-oriented teaching creates conditions for deeper and more lasting acquisition of knowledge and skills that are useful in everyday life. The integration of the components of technology, career education, and entrepreneurship and initiative enables the comprehensive development of the student's personality and supports their ability to navigate the dynamically changing world of work. The above examples of the work of teachers and students confirm that the new content and performance standards provide schools with sufficient scope for creative didactic interpretation of the curriculum while maintaining clearly defined educational goals. In the long term, it can be assumed that the high-quality implementation of the new concept will contribute to strengthening students' technical and professional literacy, forming positive attitudes towards work, and better preparing primary school graduates for further education and practical life. The educational area of People and the World of Work is thus consolidating its stable and well-founded place among the key areas of general education.

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Authors' Contribution

All authors contributed equally to the development of this article.

Data availability

All datasets relevant to this study's findings are fully available within the article.

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