

MEMORY IN POLISH FORMAL EDUCATION: TYPES AND STRATEGIES

Dominika Gruntkowska

*Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology Pomeranian University in Szczecin,
Arciszewskiego Str., 22A, Szczecin, Poland, 76–200
ORCID: 0000-0002-2904-5187*

The article explores the function of memory within Polish formal education, defining it as a projected and normative dimension shaped by official educational documents. Drawing on discourse analysis, the study examines how the core curriculum for secondary education conceptualizes, structures, and transmits memory. By applying theoretical perspectives on collective and cultural memory, specifically Pierre Nora's concept of "sites of memory", the paper argues that school education unifies national memory and, consequently, constructs a specific identity project.

The analysis demonstrates that memory in the Polish core curriculum is closely linked to tradition, national heritage, and value-oriented education, while the distinction between memory and history remains largely unarticulated. Educational content related to literature, history, and civic education often promotes emotive and symbolic engagement with the past rather than critical reflection, reinforcing dominant cultural narratives rooted in Romantic paradigms. At the same time, limited acknowledgment of plural and contested memories appears in selected curriculum elements, particularly in relation to post-war history.

The article highlights the discursive and power-laden nature of educational knowledge, showing how curricula and textbooks reproduce dominant interpretations of the past while marginalizing alternative perspectives. It also addresses the role of autobiographical memory, oral history, and postmemory in school education, emphasizing the need to critically examine their mediation and subjectivity. The study concludes that Polish formal education largely treats memory as a unifying national construct, which may weaken students' critical potential and their ability to recognize the constructed nature of historical narratives.

Keywords: discourse analysis, core curriculum, memory, postmemory, school.

The aim of this paper is to reflect on the issue of memory—understood as a category within the humanities. I am interested in, how this category is understood and how it functions at the level of school education. By "formal education", I mean its projected dimension, defined by educational documents.

As in school education, the category of memory primarily encompasses basic curricula, which contain the content of the curriculum and often also the method of its implementation in school teaching. Core curricula comprise normative documents that are announced by the Ministry of National Education as subject to regulations and published in the Journal of Laws. The core curriculum defines the content of teaching

and lesson plans, as well as their implementation in school teaching. Curricula and textbooks are available for use by the Ministry of National Education after being deemed compatible with the current software version. It should be noted that the curriculum details the content of the core curricula and is a mandatory document for schools, whereas the textbook is currently considered an optional teaching aid.

One of the key issues surrounding memory is whether it is presented as a component of historical discourse or constitutes a separate category. Assuming the latter, one should consider how the difference or interrelationship between the two is drawn. To demonstrate how the category of memory functions in school teaching, I will use the current core curriculum for the third stage of education – secondary schools.

I would like to use the thought of Pierre Nora, the creator of the concept of “site of memory”, as a starting point for my reflection. He understands it as something sustained by the national community and a manifestation of holiness—including national holiness. Nora (2022) also includes the school textbook among his numerous sites of memory, a recognition of its culture-forming role, understood as co-creating the national sacred. In the French historian’s thought, sites of memory are those that resist the disintegration of the concepts of history and nation, holiness and life. Nora (2022) notes that history that ceases to be the memory of a nation loses its sacred dimension and becomes a mere field of research, in which various competing trends and contradictory interpretations exist, and above all, meanings are negotiated. The existence of research on the writing of history makes it felt as an object of construction, subject to shifts and susceptible to the fluidity of meanings and the negotiation of values. Establishing a dividing line between memory and history leads to the recognition of memory as non-scientific, but personal and endowed with affect.

The awareness of memory as something subjective and belonging to people and communities entails the necessity of rejecting the existence of one memory in favour of the existence of particularisms, many different memories emitting dissemination from different perspectives (Le Goff, 2007). The multiplicity and disintegration of the connection between memory and history originated from the disintegration of their unity with the Nation, capitalized and understood as a sacred category encompassing a community bound by shared history, memory, and shared values, and regulating life through rituals understood by all and possessing a sacralizing power. Nora also notes that the specific homogeneity of social life was also expressed in the uniformity of the didactic model, that is, in the lack of dissonance between the memory-history and values of the Nation and the content of school teaching (Nora, 2022).

Nora highlights the relationship between the collective memory of a given society/nation and the content of education. He credits the iconic publication created for school use, *Tour de la France par deux enfants* (1877), with shaping collective memory through its widespread use in schools. Even when first published, this textbook presented an anachronistic and outdated image of France. The source of this image was adult memory combined with the conjuring of the past (Nora, 2022). The

crisis of school, in Nora's view, was its loss of the function of creating identity through the transmission of tradition, and thus the possibility of creating a nation that was homogeneous in terms of its values.

In the case of a textbook understood as a medium of memory, there are two ways of fulfilling this function: conveying the object to be known and remembered, and conveying how that object is to be remembered. Specific visions of a national past and ways of interpreting its past constitute arguably the most important element of collective memory, but also the subject of political discourse. Thus, visions of the past co-create the future and the present. "Now" becomes subordinate to "the past" insofar as a certain shared collective memory is necessary to create the integrity of society (Zenderowski, 2011).

It is worth considering the relationship between education and memory, and what kind of memory (co-)creates education. I propose that there is an interdependence between educational content and memory, because collective memory shapes the way we view culture and past events, thus creating a dominant discourse that is then reproduced through education. Educational content is, after all, created by people, participants in collective memory. Educational content, in turn, shapes students' identities (Gromadzka, 2006) and embeds the dominant model of culture within them, including the memory inherent to it. The mutual relationship between collective (cultural) memory, which shapes a given community's self-image, and the content of teaching is not sufficient to explain the cultural model of memory transmission. Public pedagogies, understood as elements of public culture, including artistic culture, that possess educational potential, play a significant role (Witkowski & Giroux, 2010). Public pedagogies co-create and create collective memory and are simultaneously shaped by it, similarly to educational content, which remains in a mutual relationship with each other.

Following Hayden White's (2010) lead, we can observe that the past available to us is primarily a story we create for ourselves and others. We inscribe the memory of the past into familiar cultural patterns. We adapt what happened to fit the pattern, the paradigm, within which we think. In this way, history connects with memory and takes on a pedagogical dimension – it transmits desired patterns, the ways in which they are formed and achieved, as well as the evaluation of behaviors, events, and attitudes taken in the past. Consequently, collective (cultural) memory is linked to myths functioning within given communities, leading to the formation of specific narratives about the past, establishing interpretations of events, or suppressing certain narratives. This transfer of memory can simultaneously become a transfer of generational trauma to subsequent generations (Bilewicz, 2024; Alexander, 2010). Postmemory, understood as inherited memory, resulting from family relationships and intergenerational memory, as well as culturally transmitted memory, is also formed through school (Bryś, 2020).

Nora (2022), writing about the disintegration of a single memory, co-creating the Nation–Memory–History triad, refers precisely to the formation of memory as a

discursive approach, thus focused on the multiplicity and sometimes contradiction between individual narratives. This triad introduces a homogeneous discourse both within each of the above categories and in the relations between them. Thus, the narratives produced within and between them constitute the only possible mode of representation, simultaneously constituting a discourse of power. Others, produced by minority groups located on the borders of or outside the Nation, are deemed irrelevant or even nonexistent. Thus, the dominant discourse is a practice of power that aims to unify and form a unified society identifying with the same values, sharing a common history and collective memory, and thus sharing the same vision of the past. In such cases, fissures and discrepancies remain hidden, relegated to the margins, where they do not impact or disrupt the dominant discourse. Homogeneity impacts education, primarily the content of teaching, which reproduces knowledge shaped by power. This leads to the creation of specific subjectivities that individuals adopt, only to reproduce this system in turn. The belief in the existence of “objective” and “certain” knowledge leads to the production of uniform student identities, the basis of which is enslavement (Klus-Stańska, 2012).

The disintegration of unity and the transition from Nation to Society, in Pierre Nora's (2022) thought, is a transformation from the monolithic, homogeneous Nation to the multiplicity and diversity that characterize Society. The multiplicity of discourses present in public space means that the “what” and “how” and “in what manner” we present in education lose their obviousness and transparency, becoming a choice within the framework of possible discursive practices. Recognizing this state of affairs stimulates research curiosity regarding the discourses present within education itself, that is, in textbooks and other educational materials. This research focuses in particular on the type of “knowledge” transmitted in schools – what models it adopts, and what identities it reproduces. An important aspect here is also investigation into the hidden curricula contained primarily in school textbooks (Żłobicki, 2002; Ostrowicka, 2022).

In the core curriculum for general secondary schools and technical schools, in force since 2018, with changes from 2024, memory appears only in relation to tradition and national heritage, and the educational function of the school is primarily emphasized.

“The school's mission is to orient the educational process toward values, which determine the goals of education and the criteria for its assessment. Value-oriented education primarily assumes a subjective approach to students, and values encourage individuals to make appropriate choices and decisions. In its educational and educational process, the school undertakes activities related to places important to national memory, forms of commemoration of past figures and events, major national holidays, and state symbols” (Journal of Laws, item 1019, Annex 1, p. 8).

It's worth noting here the mention of the category of “values” without any clarification. We are therefore dealing here with an assumption that the student must internalize the values espoused by the authors of the core curriculum. Furthermore, the

lack of a precise definition of values suggests that they belong to the dominant cultural trend and fit into the currently desired discourse. Assumed, undefined, yet certain values lead to the conclusion that there must be some point of reference so well-known to everyone that there is no need to verbalize it.

The subsequent sentences mentioning places, figures and events important for national memory also indicate the existence of a dominant historical discourse in which (the postulated) national memory participates.

“Literary and cultural education [...] should simultaneously introduce students to tradition as a guardian of collective memory, a link between the past and present – a transmitter of content distinguished from cultural heritage as socially important and significant, both in the past and in the present, a tradition that constitutes a significant factor in worldview processes influencing the formation of human identity. Reading literary and cultural texts should teach not only dialogue with tradition but also inspire questions about the work conditioned by the personal and cultural context, understanding the role of symbol and metaphor related to cultural (spiritual), moral, and sacred values” (emphasis mine. – D. G.), (Journal of Laws item 1019, annex 1, p. 46).

This fragment, relating to Polish language teaching, clearly indicates that knowledge of tradition is subordinated not to knowledge of myths and fantasies present in past culture and their present-day impact, but to the reproduction of these. Thus, the reception of content related to the nation’s history and culture is designed in an emotive rather than an intellectual context, and definitely not a critical one. Furthermore, there is a strong emphasis on the educational function of the educational process, which seems to dominate, or at least strongly intertwine with the content of instruction. Here, I see the risk of uncritical transmission of cultural patterns and all sorts of related entanglements. This type of education can lead to a weakening of critical potential in society.

In the case of Polish language – school subject, the core curriculum also determines the selection of required reading and a set of optional readings, which can be selected by the teacher. Literature itself constitutes an image of memory, a testimony to specific experiences, or it constructs a picture of the past—not necessarily known from personal experience. Finally, specific literary texts build a national imaginary, which is then culturally reproduced, as was the case in Poland, primarily with Romantic texts. Furthermore, school reading of the required reading is not freely chosen but rather subordinated to curriculum requirements and usually also guided by the relevant textbook content.

The above quote reveals an unarticulated but visible conviction that there is no difference between memory and history—collective memory and the tradition it creates should not only be accepted uncritically but also recognized as one’s own. However, in the case of the core curriculum for social studies, one can observe an awareness of the existence of not just one collective memory, but various memories, the carriers of which are social groups, understood in various ways. The point: “based on literature, it

analyzes the issues of the diversity of treatment in social memory of the period of the so-called People's Republic of Poland and its reckoning" (p. 503) may suggest that the authors of the document recognize that creating a fully unifying narrative in relation to such a new history is impossible.

In justifying the program of school subject history and the present³⁵, the authors present the discursive nature of "knowledge" about contemporary history. In connection with this, they recommend examining media discussions about the history of the 20th century.

"Controversies surrounding some of the issues covered by the detailed requirements provide an opportunity to examine and create arguments, as well as to analyze the specific features of the debate currently taking place in social media, including, among others, recognizing violations of good manners or various forms of disinformation" (Journal of Laws, item 1019, Annex 1, p. 523).

In this way, we demonstrate to students that, yes, memory of the past, particularly memory formed in response to one's own experience—autobiographical memory—can take various forms, including those opposed to the memories of other participants in the same events, but in my opinion, this is not enough. It lacks evidence that even scientific publications, popularization publications, and textbooks were also created within a specific cultural climate and social space, and that the author himself was not merely a 'pure knowing mind' but, like any other person, was entangled in various currents of thought and their own beliefs. I believe that the lack of addressing these issues leaves students helpless against potential manipulation by so-called authorities.

"Since students will be learning about the most important cultural, political, social, and economic changes in Poland and the world after 1945, it is worthwhile to provide them with meetings with participants and witnesses of the events discussed (e.g., activists of the "Solidarity" social movement). It is also worthwhile to visit local memorial sites associated with the events discussed, such as soldiers' tombs, sites of martyrdom (e.g., former Security Office detention buildings), graves of victims of the communist apparatus (e.g., the grave of Blessed Father Jerzy Popiełuszko), sites of strikes and social protests, and to take advantage of what museums have to offer" (emphasis mine. – D.G.), (Journal of Laws, item 1019, annex 1, p. 523–524).

The above passage recommends meetings with participants in the events, thus valuing oral, autobiographical history. The approach to these meetings seems to depend primarily on the way they are conducted, as well as on the teacher's subsequent actions, for example, discussing the issue of testimony as a historical source. I believe it is necessary to present students with issues related to the subjectivity of experiencing history through stories about events directly witnessed (Kurkowska-Budzan, 2011), as well as its strong mediation in the culture of which the witness is a participant. Furthermore, the way events are recorded in human memory is

³⁵ Currently, this subject is being phased out, so its implementation only applies to students who started their education before 1 September 2024.

influenced by, for example, the age of the person recalling the event at the time of the experience, as well as their position in relation to the events, e.g., being a participant or a distant witness. Furthermore, during meetings with witnesses to history, in the face of the so-called oral history, the significant role of the person initiating the interview and meeting, as well as the speaking situation itself, should be mentioned (Ciesek-Ślizowska, Duda, Sujkowska-Sobisz, 2020).

In the passage quoted above, I highlighted the phrases “soldiers’ tomb” and “places of martyrdom” to draw attention to them, as they place the entire message within the Romantic paradigm. “Tomb” (pl “mogily”) – instead of the linguistically neutral “graves” or “burial sites” – and “nation’s martyrdom” place the described places and their associated history within the context of the Romantic paradigm. Language dictates our perspective on the indicated elements of reality and locates them within a Romantic imaginative space. We are to “read” the indicated objects and the spaces associated with them using a Romantic code and incorporate them into this interpretation of the nation’s history. Thus, we are dealing with a strong revelation, in the language itself, of the intentions of the creators of the core curriculum regarding how to shape a vision of history and instill it in the next generation. Incorporating content into appropriate cultural codes also indicates to the authors of curricula and textbooks how the implementation of content related to the indicated issues should look like (Janion, 2001; Lewandowska-Tarasiuk, 2024).

The very concept of memory in formal education has various meanings. We speak of biographical memory, a narrative drawn from a witness to specific events, but “memory” also appears in the sense of collective and cultural memory, the sharing of which simultaneously constitutes access to a community. In educational discourse, memory is meant to be closely linked to tradition and form a unified, national symbolic imaginary.

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**ПАМ'ЯТЬ У ПОЛЬСЬКІЙ ФОРМАЛЬНІЙ ОСВІТІ:
ТИПИ ТА СТРАТЕГІЇ**

Домініка Грунтовська

Інститут педагогіки та психології Поморського університету в Слупську,

вул. Арцішевського, 22А, Слупськ, Польща, 76–200

ORCID: 0000-0002-2904-5187

Досліджено функцію пам'яті в польській формальльній освіті, яку визначено як проєктований та регульований вимір сформований офіційними освітніми документами. На основі дискурсного аналізу в досліджені розглянуто, як базова навчальна програма для середньої освіти концептуалізує, структурує і транслює пам'ять. Застосовуючи теоретичні підходи до колективної та культурної пам'яті, зокрема концепцію “місць пам'яті” П'єра Нора, доведено, що шкільна освіта уніфікує національну пам'ять і, як наслідок, формує конкретний проект ідентичності.

Засвідчено, що пам'ять у польській базовій навчальній програмі тісно пов'язана з традиціями, національною спадщиною та ціннісно-орієнтованою освітою, тоді як розмежування між пам'яттю та історією залишається головно невизначенім. Зміст предметів, пов'язаних із літературою, історією та громадянським вихованням, часто сприяє емоційному та символічному ставленню до минулого, а не його критичному осмисленню. Це поглиблює домінуючі культурні наративи, що ґрунтуються на ідеях романтизму. Водночас у окремих елементах навчальної програми, особливо тих, що стосуються післявоєнної історії, простежується обмежене визнання плюралістичних та суперечливих поглядів.

Виділено дискурсивну та ідеологічну природу змісту освіти, розкрито, яким чином навчальні програми та підручники відтворюють домінуючі інтерпретації минулого, витісняючи альтернативні погляди та тлумачення. Розглянуто роль автобіографічної пам'яті, усної історії та постпам'яті у шкільній освіті та підкреслено необхідність критичного аналізу їхньої інтерпретації та суб'єктивності. У досліджені зроблено висновок, що польська формальна освіта головно трактує пам'ять як загальнонаціональну конструкцію, що може знижувати потенціал критичного мислення учнів та їхню здатність розпізнавати конструйований характер історичних наративів.

Ключові слова: дискурсивний аналіз, базова навчальна програма, пам'ять, постпам'ять, школа.