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CONTEMPORARY TENDENCIES IN TEACHING LITERACY THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract. *The article reviews some of the contemporary tendencies in the teaching of basic literacy to primary-school pupils – the goal and the tasks of the education process; the accents in the analytical-synthetic method of teaching literacy in the primary school in Bulgaria; the didactic tools to guarantee a quality basic-literacy teaching for the children from minority communities in connection with the renewal of our education system, which forms part of the European one.*

Key words: *contemporary tendencies, primary literacy teaching, goal and tasks, audio analytical-synthetic method of literacy teaching, basic literacy teaching to children from minority families.*

The contemporary tendencies in the educational process are connected to the personality-oriented model. Embedded in the context of basic literacy teaching as part of the in native-tongue and literature education of the primary pupils, the philosophy of an education centered on the child entails changes in the direction from a language studied by the pupil toward a pupil, studying and practicing the language in a rational way (Vassileva 2004).

Since the 2002/3 school year, a gradual introduction of the new syllabi and curricula in the primary school has been underway; they follow the unified European standards for modernization of the common education space. State educational requirements have been developed for the the curricula for the grades I to IV, textbooks and manuals. The new syllabi and curricula

regulating the primary literacy teaching, creates the favourable conditions for the active inclusion of the pupil in the educational process, for active study, for motivating the activities, performed by the 6-7-year olds to learn reading and writing.

In this context, several of the contemporary tendencies in the primary literacy teaching, as outlined by Prof. St. Zdravkova (cf, with more detail, Zdravkova, 2009) can be highlighted

1. Goal and tasks of the contemporary education in basic literacy.

The goal of the Bulgarian language and literature educational process at the 1st-4th grade stage - to create the pupils' bases of communicative competence, as commented on in the contemporary syllabi and curricula – is achieved in connection with the concept of an

education, which presupposes the opportunity to freely communicate, adaptability of the individual in different situations, however in keeping with the individual's needs. In this sense, the meaning of the basic literacy teaching is essential, because learning to read and write ensures the pupils' successful performance in different public spheres.

It is important for the 6-7 year old children to learn to read and write since schooling is connected of reading and writing as speech acts. The extent to which a child masters reading and writing and the writing and reading techniques that they acquire underlie not only their successful linguistic and literary education, but also their education in all disciplines.

The quality primary literacy teaching interprets irreversible acquisition of literacy by the pupils and is aimed at laying the foundation, on which the linguistic and literary education, as well as the linguistic competence of the pupils, will be built.

With view of the goal, the tasks to be achieved are, as follows:

- introduction to the sounds of language (as variants of the phoneme and as a phoneme) and the letters, to the relationship sound-letter;

- creating a basic conscious idea of the language units and the parts of speech (sound, syllable, word, sentence, text) and forming the skills for differentiating between them, and analysis and synthesis skills;

- development of the child's phonemic sense of hearing and the

phonemic perception as a prerequisite for successful teaching in reading and writing;

- acquisition of the algorithms of reading various types of syllables; forming a technique of dividing words into syllables;

- acquiring generalising reading skills (reading whole words at a time);

- forming skills for reading words, sentences and whole texts while understanding what is being read.

- Introduction to the joined-in writing scripts (capital and small letters), to the relationship (the sound as a variant of the phoneme and as a phoneme) joined-in letter-sound;

- Forming handwriting skills (capital and small letters) and joining them into combinations of letters and syllables;

- Creating skills to correctly and legibly write words, sentences, short texts while understanding what is being written;

- Piquing the interest toward reading and writing as a means of communication;

- Development of communicative speech skills;

- Mastering the etiquette of speech behaviour;

2. The contemporary accents on the in analytical-synthetic method of teaching basic literacy in the Bulgarian primary school are connected to:

- priority given to work on the phonemic sounds and the sound of words. The sound analysis exercises are conducted systematically and purposefully throughout the whole

period of basic literacy training, gradually getting more complex. The sound analysis plays important educational functions during the period of basic literacy teaching. On the one hand, it is a means of introducing each new sound to be learnt. On the other hand, the sound analysis has much more overarching educational functions, because it introduces the first graders in the language and speech environment, for example: for internalisation of the relations sound-letter: in the use of a single letter to signify a group of sounds я, ю, ш = [ya, yu, sht] and in the use of a combination of letters to denote a single sound дж и дз = [ʃ], [s];

- the modern methodology of sound analysis develops the children's phonemic awareness, activates their learning activity;

- in the modern variant of the sound analytical-synthetic method of teaching literacy, a new strategy toward the syllable is implemented in the process of creating reading skills. The syllable is posited as the main readable unit in the modern sound analytical-synthetic method of literacy teaching (since 1991). It is a main reading unit, but it is viewed against the backdrop of the word, as a part of the word, and not as an isolated entity. Reading syllables is aimed at looking for meaning. It is encouraged to read them, without focusing on syllable-by-syllable reading, while encouraging synthetic reading (word by word).

The essence of the new strategy is for the pupil to master the reading

of various types of syllables as a necessary stage of reading a word, i.e. to read all syllables as readable units. However, simultaneously, methodological approaches that encourage the children to apply synthesis for reading words.

One of the most often used methodological approaches for achieving the new strategy toward the syllable for syllable-connecting reading within the framework of the word are:

- reading with ligatures;
- "living" syllables
- relating syllables to objective representations (may be graphically connected), like, eg.:

syllables: visual/objective representations

- win window
- pen pencil
- tul tulip

- reading syllables on patterns of words with visual cues, like:

Rose (a picture)

r	o		
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- use of word stress in reading

The main goal in using these methodological approaches is to encourage the synthesis, to widen the field of word recognition of the pupil so that they can take in the word at a glance and reproduce it as a signifying entity.

- functional analytical-synthetic procedure with the linguistic and speech units in the course of building the reading and writing skills. The interaction between analysis and

synthesis is introduced and takes place not only audibly, but also visually, eg., using a methodological ping pong ball. As a rule it is used to introduce one of the startup words in the sequence word-syllables-sounds-syllables-word. This facilitates reading in terms of conscious synthesis, serves as a preparation of conscious writing without omitting letters, creates propensity to read whole words. The analytical-synthetic procedure, related to the linguistic units, is incorporated in the overall system of literacy teaching and is implemented not only in its overarching variant, but also as variants and modifications, in accordance with the stage in literacy teaching that has been reached: for example, the analysis can start not only at the level of the biggest linguistic unit, the text, but at the level of sentence/sentences or word/words; the synthesis initially follows the model syllable-word, syllable-word-sentence, but later, when the children make some progress with reading, the model changes and acquires the following structure: word/words – sentence – text or word/words – text.

- forming skills for reading with comprehension, i.e., creating in the first graders a motivation to read. The priorities in the didactic technique of initial literacy teaching guide the work of the teacher toward the incorporation of interactive methodological procedures in the forming the reading or writing skills, in keeping with the pupils' capabilities and their stage of reading

and writing development. In this respect, the proposition of acquire the code of the transition from the graphic signs to the sound of the word in reading and vice versa – from the sound to graphic sign (in writing).

The skill to read forms in parallel to the desire to read. Some of the variants of looking for a signification in reading are, as follows: prognostic reading supported with visual aids; prognostic reading supported with plot representation; readable riddles, prognostic reading with letters omitted (t_ble; _air, etc.), composing letters into words, reading of crosswords, etc.; varied motivation of the reading exercises – eg.: game motivation, reading through problem-solving situations, for example, inclusion in logical exercise of the type “*Which is the odd word out?*” – *table, chair, sofa, rose*. Why?); reading and writing motivation based on their communicative function, for example keeping correspondence (writing a letter with an appropriate addressee, of notes, notifications, etc.);

- simultaneous acquisition of reading and writing. In the contemporary variant of the audio analytical-synthetic method of teaching literacy, there has been introduced a system for gradual integration of the activities into a common unified psychological structure of reading and writing, while encouraging synthesis in reading and integrating movement in writing;

- variation in the methodological work with pupils, with who the process of literacy

teaching starts at a zero or low status of mastery of spoken Bulgarian.

3. The contemporary tendencies in primary literacy teaching are connected to the changes that have taken place in the Republic of Bulgaria, related to the renewal of our educational system as part of the European educational system. Part of the requirements envisage putting the utmost effort into guaranteeing equal access to quality education to the children from ethnic minorities. The children from ethnic minorities have always been a risk-prone group in terms of literacy. They are faced with difficulties in mastering reading and writing and do not reach the required level of literacy, which would guarantee successful further education.

Ideas for a variant model for teaching literacy to children from ethnic minorities, who do not have sufficient mastery (or have no mastery at all) of Bulgarian (teaching reading in Bulgarian as a second foreign language) have been put forward by Zdravkova (cf. in more detail Zdravkova, 2009).

The preparatory classes in the period 1991-2003 are a possible solution for the children with linguistic insufficiency to receive help toward mastering Bulgarian to a degree from which their successful literacy teaching can continue. In the preparatory class, an intensive spoken course in Bulgarian is held for children to whom it's not the mother tongue.

Since the academic 2003/2004, the preparatory class has taken up the

task to prepare for school; and it is mandatory. The syllabus for the preparatory class comprises content divided into three modules: the first module is for children whose mother tongue is Bulgarian, who have not attended kindergarten, the second module is for children whose mother tongue is Bulgarian and who have not attended kindergarten, and the third module is for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian and have not attended kindergarten. The underlying idea of the syllabus, the variability in the teaching, finds practical expression in the teaching aids for the education and training of children in the kindergarten. (cf. Petrova 2008). These ideas for literacy teaching to bilingual children can find their continuation in the teaching aids for the first grade. In this respect, the alternative primer *Bukvar ABV with Reader* for the first grade (cf. Zdravkova, St. et al, 1994) suggests ideas, along with the traditional concept which posits that literacy teaching should be adapted to the linguistic experience and competence of the children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian.

4. The communicative orientation of the educational process in Bulgarian language and literature in the 1st-4th grade stage puts forward requirements toward the literacy teaching in the primary school stage with accents on:

- placing the 6-7-year-old child in an active position with regard to the elements of literacy. The prevailing tendency is for the pupils to play an active role in the

educational process – they model, intonate, handle the randomized alphabet, compose words following a pattern, compile orally stories taking clues from pictures, etc.;

-broadening the element of demonstration, participation and animation in the process of basic literacy teaching, eg. Including didactic games, readable riddles, crosswords in the basic literacy lessons;

- the social aspects of the process of basic literacy acquisition are bolstered. The communicative approach towards the use of reading and writing for serving social purposes, from the earliest stages of teaching, leads the teacher toward planning educational activities that require from the first grader to practice reading and writing in varied social situations;

- developing the activity of reading, talking, writing and listening as a single complex and incorporating them into communicatively oriented activities;

- reading of functional reading material which stimulates the pupils' communicative speech activities,

-creating and maintaining motivation to read, in connection to the actual everyday needs of the first graders;

-from the very beginning, the first graders should be encouraged to write, while maintaining the idea of the written word as a form of communication, as created in preschool age.

The communicative orientation of contemporary education in basic literacy expands the number of possibilities for the pupils for successful social interaction.

The mastering of the basic literacy teaching in an irreversible way enriches the communicative competence of the 6-7-year-old children, which makes possible the successful education, bolsters their integration in society and ensures the level of linguistic culture that is necessary for the spoken and written communication.

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