FORMATIVE ASPECTS OF THE PREPARATORY SCHOOL YEAR AT THE SUBJECT COMMUNICATION IN ROMANIAN

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Abstract:Given the fact that we have found a huge heterogeneity in the way of realization of didactic process in the preparatory school year (at least in the subject of Communication in Romanian) and also the removal from the Finnish model (which was said to have inspired the situation in Romania), we consider it is necessary to formulate a series of comments and remarks on the desirable development of the teaching activity in the curricular area Language and Communication. We intend to re-interpret the curriculum of the preparatory school year for the subject of Communication in Romanian, indicating the most frequent and serious deviations from it, and to name a few rules of positive discipline for the little students in order to improve their authentic participation in their own training, with long-term positive consequences.

Keywords:preparatory school year, didactic process, development, Communication in Romanian.

1. Introduction. Finnish model

In the Finnish educational system, after graduating from kindergarten, according to the law, children must attend preschool education or other similar activities for one year before compulsory education begins. The year preceding the compulsory education, in Finland, named "preschool education" *promotes and supports children's growth, development and learning, and it enables children to transition smoothly from the preschool environment to school. Preschool provides a good basis for life-long learning. Preschool teaching methods take into account children's comprehensive manner of functioning and learning through play, movement, creative activities, experimentation, observation and questioning, in interaction with other children and adults*. (According to https://www.hel.fi/helsinki/en/day-care-education/day-care/preschool/)

From a letter addressed to the "future preschool pupil", written by the *Department of Early Education and Care* from Helsinki, we find out that "The preschool 2017–2018 school year starts on 10 August 2017 and ends on 1 June 2018" (https://www.hel.fi/static/liitteet/vaka/esiopetus/Tervetuloa%20esiopetukseen_2017.EN.pdf).

The educational goals in Finland are: "Promotion of personal well-being; Reinforcement of considerate behaviour and action towards others; Gradual build-up of autonomy" *National Curriculum Guidelines on Early Childhood Education and Care in Finland*, p. 14), all these goals being achieved focusing on the *joy of learning*: "When they act in a meaningful and relevant way, they can experience the joy of learning and feelings of success" (ibidem, p. 17).

At a theoretical level, the Finnish and Romanian system educational systems resemble, despite the fact that the future Romanian students do not receive home notice letters about their future work, nor as many didactical materials than there. So, these two countries present some similarities but also some obvious differences on this respect.

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2. Romanian situation regarding preparatory school year

Theoretically, the implementation of the preparatory school year in Romanian educational system ensures equal chances for a correct start for all children, allows access to education regardless of their origin and offers pupils the possibility to adapt gradually to the requirements of the educational process.

According to the *Curriculum for primary education*, the finalities for this level of education are: ”To ensure the first stage of basic education for all children; / To build up each child's personality, respecting his/her own development level and rhythm; / To ensure that each child acquires the basic knowledge, skills and attitudes that stimulate the effective and creative relation with the social and natural environment, and provides the necessary opportunities in continuing education” (Eurydice, *Teaching and Learning in Primary Education).*

General competences for *Communication in Romanian language*, stipulated in National Curriculum for primary education, are:

1. Understanding the oral messages from familiar communication contexts
2. Expressing oral messages in different communication contexts
3. Understanding a variety of written messages in familiar communication contexts
4. Writing messages in various communication situations.

From the very first sight, there are obvious formative aspects of educational process.[1] What we aim is to identify certain issues or practical aspects that would facilitate the integration of the child into the school system and, in particular, the achievement of the school objectives.

Starting with the school year 2012-2013, we had the opportunity to visit over twenty different preparatory classes, in the pedagogical practice of students, as well as special inspections to obtain the first degree in education (by primary school teachers). In addition, we have obtained information about the teaching process at this level from the teacher-methodologists in the evaluation commissions for the first degree in education, but also from the school management where I have carried out inspections. At the same time, some students who worked as primary school teachers, as well as some graduates of the Primary and Pre-school Education Pedagogy, with whom we collaborated, provided valuable data in this regard.

In fact, there is a great variety of ”interpretation” of curricula, at least in curricular area *Language and Communication*.

In the preparatory school year, children are often first taught to write in block letters/printscript as in English-speaking countries,by some teachers who want to discipline their students. The National Curriculum specifies that pupils *would draw* the letters (that is different from *to write* the letters!). This is only an example of misinterpretation of the educational goal.

We will not deal with the many differences in the actual realization of the educational process, but with those aspects that constitute the most important background on which learning how to learn is facilitated.

Even if there are some studies on the uniformity found in children aged 6 and 7, on intellectual performance, depending on the origin of children in a certain environment, the type of predominant activity in the families of children, but also on the multiple intelligences of children (Gardner, H., 2006), sometimes there are huge differences between their intellectual abilities.

[1]For instance, the absence of homework and of marks/grades is intended to encourage student participation in the learning process and some freedom of expression of the pupil.

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The great heterogeneity of the students comes from the fact that their previous experiences are often extremely different because: some have attended the kindergarten, others, not; some have brothers / sisters, others do not; some get used to sleep at noon, others do not; some are trained with intellectual activities, others with physical activities; some have parents who value teaching, others do not; some are cheerful and spontaneous, others are shy and morose; some people get up early, others do not; some already know to read, others do not; some already calculate well, others do not; some are disciplined / docile, others are nonconformist; some prefer the company of other children, others prefer the adult company; some have well-defined ideals / goals in mind, others, not; Some communicate easily, others, not; some have good memory, others do not; some are creative, some are reproductive; some see an authority in an adult, others see him as a partner; some physically meet their parents daily, others sometimes only virtual; some are healthy, others are not; some have social intelligence, others do not; some can conceal, others do not; some are aware of the parents' concerns, others do not; some are sensitive to the opposite sex, others reject it! And the examples can continue!

Children who are already able to read at the entrance to the preparatory class are also different, depending on how they got to be able to read. Some of them have done this on their own initiative (with intrinsic motivation), others have been helped, stimulated or even conditioned to learn by parents (in general) and others have benefited from the involuntary models offered by their older brothers or by voluntary models provided by pre-school teachers who have exceeded their curriculum attributions.

That is why the most important thing in didactic process at preparatory school year is to identify adequate strategies for gaining and maintaining the pupils' attention and interest specially when in the same classroom there are between twenty five and forty students.

The fact that teachers have as wishes a quarter of teaching hours is welcome. They may decide to deepen certain contents, to improve the negative aspects found, to opt for extension of knowledge, to recapitulate the taught matter, to develop new skills to pupils etc.

Using the game in teaching (knowledge) is a pleasant way to assimilate knowledge, but especially of assimilation by students of rules, prohibitions and learning tasks.

If there are some students with knowledge and skills that exceed those stipulated in the curriculum (for preparatory class), they will be directed to help their colleagues are in the process of their learning, but this is not unidirectional, because there is a danger that a class can split into "helping pupils" and "students receiving help". Therefore, we should ensure that their roles are interchangeable (of course, in different fields).

As in the kindergarten, some children do not use polite pronouns and the plural form of the verb in the second person, addressing and the teacher as a playmate. It is time for them in the preparatory class to learn the polite address, specific to the Romanian language and tradition.

Since it is not compulsory to attend the kindergarten, and in some areas the number of kindergartens is insufficient, some children who come directly into the preparatory class are not familiar with either active listening, teamwork or communication rules within a big group. For them, adaptation to the school program takes longer than for children who have attended kindergarten.

Children entering the preparatory class are usually ages between five and nine months and seven years. For this age segment are visible differences in age even from a month to another, reflected in children'sknowledge, so that in conditions where there are differences over a year, and children's skills are higher.

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At this age,"rewarding" by offering the opportunity to spend a day or weekend with a toy agreed by boys and girls can be a way to motivate children to participate voluntarily in learning activities is still acceptable.

Even if there are some studies on the "uniformity" of the intellectual performance of children aged 6 to 7, depending on the area (urban / rural), their parental model and the type of child's predominant activity (physical or intellectual), we can even see huge differences between the results of the students' activity, but also between their different ability to integrate into school and to adapt to novelty.

In the absence of grades / marks in the preparatory class, feedback on pupil activity can be provided by applying a symbol on the child's worksheet because it is appropriate for him / her to be aware of the quality of his / her activity in a pleasant way. For example, this can be accomplished by applying a class stamp (ladybug, bee, flower, etc.) to the worksheet, as the learning task has been done appropriately (well / very well). Providing such feedback has some qualities: for the teacher, it is quick and convenient, and for the pupil it is a proof that he/she has worked well. The lack of getting the symbol on his/her worksheet means certain gaps / errors revealed, usually by highlighting or using question marks, and the child being able to easily recognize where it is necessary to work more or to restore his / her theme.

Convinced that *kids do well if they can,* Ross W. Greene affirms that all pupils experiencing school failure or behavioral deviations have some underdeveloped thinking skills. The author has identified twenty-four undeveloped skills and problems (in the domains of flexibility/adaptability, frustration tolerance or where another lacking skills) and his list remaining open.

Wearing school uniforms?

First of all, we consider that the actual meaning of *school uniform* refers only to type of cloths and its colours allowed to wear, associated with certain symbols (badges, engravings etc.), when it "(a) serves as a group emblem, (b) certifies an institution's legitimacy by revealing individual's relative positions and (c) suppresses individuality." (Nathan Joseph, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/School_uniform)

We believe that where parents and teachers plead for the wearing school uniform, the concept of "uniform" is good to expand in school supplies, as this avoids distracting children's attention from the activities proposed by the teacher. At the same time, the differences between children are avoided or at least attenuated. The ruler, sharpener and plasticine (clay) do not become points of attraction as long as all the students have them the same.

Because there are many controversial discussions in this respect, and in Romania, the school uniform is not compulsory, given the great heterogeneity of the students, this issue being is left to the school and parents latitude. Only in some private schools and in some public schools, where parents require this, the wearing of school uniform is compulsory.

So, in spite of some advantages of not adopting the uniform (the freedom to adapt the clothes of one's own personality, the choice of each one for the preferred color, the assumption of a certain status by the child, the stimulation of the child's creativity, the early acceptance of differences in material status by each child etc.), we believe that wearing schooluniforms helps a lot pupils in preparatory school year.

Oral communication. During preparatory school year, oral communication should prevail over other activities, perhaps with the exception of "learning by doing".

Rhythms in oral communication of children are different as a result of previous cognitive experiences, interaction with other children and adults, emotionality, promptness of response, or other skills possessed or not by children. Educating oral communication is very important

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because it conditions good relationship and underlying training. A harmonious personality is inconceivable without a good ability to communicate. Even the job interview is the result of the ability to communicate, often being more important *how* than *what* you say. In fact, entire human life is based on communication. It is obvious that communication is a fundamental competence that needs to be educated early and continuously in order to become a good manner. That is why, in the preparatory school year, pupils need desirable communication patterns, being encouraged to manifest a communication initiative, to express their ideas and feelings in an appropriate way, to ask for information or clarification, to respect their dialogue partners. In addition, their paraverbal and non-verbal language should be in concordance with the verbal language.

Conclusions

There are some certain advantages integrating pupils in preparatory school year, beginning with their familiarizing with school rules (regarding daily schedule, timetable, sitting at a desk etc.) and ending with the knowledge and skills assimilated by students.

The high number of children in a classroom (over 30) requires the identification of teaching strategies different from where there are less than 20 students (in a classroom).

There are no unique solutions for forming a positive attitude towards the act of learning, but there are many examples of good practice that can inspire teachers in the teaching process in the preparatory class.

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