TEACHING LITERARY TEXTS TO PRIMARY-SCHOOL CHILDREN

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Abstract: *When assimilating literature and transforming its content in the most valuable fuel for life, children may come across a unique and quite challenging problem, compared to other arts, which is the access to the literary message. The present paper aims to identify the most appropriate teaching methods and techniques used to equip primary school children with the ability of interpreting literary texts in order to discover their true messages and multiple values. When approaching literary texts with young learners we aim to equip them with a wide range of useful skills, such as: accurate, and expressive reading, reading awareness, techniques of interpreting literary texts, accuracy and fluency in oral and written communication through vocabulary and grammar structures, etc.*

Keywords: *literary texts, primary-school children, accuracy, fluency.*

The interpretation of a literary text requires some knowledge of theoretical concepts and mastery of practical skills and abilities to work with the text. Pupils need to acquire some notions of literary theory accessible to their age – basic notions of stylistics, spelling, orthoepy, punctuation - and some techniques for working with the literary text - full reading, excerpts reading, formulating main ideas, the use of dictionaries, reading sheets and bibliographic records, summarising, study notes, etc. By acquiring these working techniques and literary terms, the reading of literary texts will not remain at the stage of mere reading, but will teach pupils to express their opinions, personal impressions on what they have read, to analyze, and to interpret the text from multiple perspectives. Thus, the message of the text can be thoroughly perceived and determine changes in pupils' attitude and behaviour, following the examples provided in the literary text.

In primary education, learning to read is performed in two stages: the first stage corresponds to the actual literacy (Ist grade) when pupils learn the reading mechanism operations and begin to form the ability to sense and understand the meaning of texts they read; The second stage corresponds to practicing and achieving qualitative reading (IInd to IVth grade) when pupils learn the correct reading - clear speak without omissions or additions of sounds, inversions of syllables or words; fluent reading - fluent rhythm, fluent reading awareness - pupils understand the purpose of their reading, engaging thinking operations and affective processes; expressive reading - the ability of pupils to suggest, by intonation, stress, rhythm, and pauses, ideas and feelings expressed in text.

Thus, beginning with the IIIrd grade, after pupils have formed their reading and writing skills, they continue the process of developing positive attitudes to learning. Pupils continue to play an active role in the learning process and begin to participate to the process of developing their communicative skills in order to gain self confidence when communicating and to develop learner autonomy. The school environment continues to stimulate the pupils' interest to acquire valuable knowledge through reading books for their age. Literature is a source of knowledge about 'the real world'. Literary texts contribute to construct the pupils' basic scientific outlook on the world

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and life. By reading literary works, pupils have the opportunity to discover many of the characteristics of life, of nature and society, to form moral beliefs and feelings. Literature is a powerful tool for broadening intellectual horizons of pupils.

The literary analysis, a powerful way of working used in the study of literary texts, usually in higher classes, can also be used with primary-school pupils as a means of getting them in direct contact with the book, of teaching them to discover and even appreciate the multiple valences of printed expression. It is the only way in which the message of a text can be incorporated into the readers' consciousness, influencing their behavior. Any text, no matter how simple it may seem, cannot be fully exploited only by a simple reading, but when it is thoroughly analyzed. To analyze a text is similar to dissecting it, by delimitating its components, by extracting and exploiting the main ideas, feelings and artistic means.

We present further the steps that the teacher has to go through with his/her primary-school pupils to enter the substance of literary texts in order to exploit their content during the learning process, by mentoring and motivating pupils for reading.

How to approach narrative texts

By reading literary texts, pupils develop their ability to discover important contents and different forms of reality, that authors describe through a variety of means of expression, to pair them with previous information and thus broaden their knowledge, from concrete to abstract facts, from intuition to fantasy, and acquire useful tools to satisfy their desire to understand the surrounding reality. The ways in which teachers lead their pupils to understand the message of a literary text depend on the thematic content of the respective text, as well as the literary genre and species it belongs to. The mixture of genres in a literary work increase pupils' responsiveness. Thus, if at their early contact with literature, they are drawn to epic works (by discovering the moments of action: exposition, plot, progress, climax and denouement - that the teacher will address in detail and carefully), along the way, as they develop their abilities to perceive literary texts, pupils will become sensitive to poetic expressiveness, they will identify "beautiful expressions" (figures of speech) in poetry and begin to understand their role in highlighting the poetic ideas and feelings expressed in text. The literary characters become symbols of good and evil that pupils compare and identify themselves, they meet creatures endowed with human features and patterns of social behaviour, which they start to imitate, if positive, or reject if negative.

Primary-school textbooks introduce pupils to a wide range of narrative texts, most of them belonging to the epic genre, which is more accessible to them, from various literary species - fairy tales, stories, legends, ballads, sketches, anecdotes, fables, short stores, and novels. Those literary works tell the lives of children and adults, small creatures, moments from past history, aspects of personalities' lives, etc. The narrative texts intended for the study of primary-school pupils have well-built topics and logical deployment of actions, which gives the teacher the opportunity to guide pupils, by using their intuition, towards the understanding of the artistic message.

Pupils will love and value narrative texts if they are led to infer the sequential development of the action towards the climax and denouement. The basic method used to explore narrative texts, which follow the natural path traveled by the experienced reader is *explanatory reading*. "The explanatory reading is a teaching method which gives the student the tools he/she needs for correct decoding of a literary text. (Hobjilă, 2006:94)" "The use of this method facilitates the student's transition from one type of

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passive reading (which is possibly intended to follow the storyline of the events or to *hunt* dialogue fragments, ignoring the descriptive passages) to active reading (observing significant details and even a critical perspective, interpreting the text." (Hobjilă, 2006:95). The explanatory reading is a form of literary analysis, a combination of reading and the explanations necessary to understand the text, tailored to the age and intellectual features of pupils. This method is actually a mixture of traditional teaching methods, comprising: reading, explanation, conversation, narration, demonstration, exercise. It can also be applied to non-literary texts for understanding and to give students the possibility to compare, analyze and synthesize, involving both thinking and their emotions. Through the use of explanatory reading, the teacher should ensure that students are not limited to listening to his/her explanations, but to be actively involved in the development of this intellectual process "Only through practice and by putting students in permanent contact with the method of explanatory reading students will become aware of its stages, and thus it will eventually become the best technique when working with books." (Ungureanu, 2003: 213)

How to approach poetry

The approach of poetic texts must take into account the peculiarities of this genre, and use the method of explanatory reading in a specific way. Primary-school pupils will be guided to discover the characteristics of this type of literary texts, in comparison with the narrative texts, without naming notions of literary theory (figures of speech), in order not to hinder their understanding by pupils. These texts are usually devoid of action or subject, of characters who embody concepts, feelings, attitudes or certain behavior. Most texts are in verse and render the author's lyrical feelings and thoughts directly through visual or auditory artistic images through beautiful expressions (elements of prosody). Poetic texts call for readers' sensitivity and emotional and aesthetic experiences and, therefore, their methodical approach must start from disclosing the different ways of expressing feelings and by understanding the significance of artistic images and their use by pupils in new contexts. Pupils will learn to decode the author's message, by penetrating the meanings of words that mean something different than what they show.

In literature, the poetic genre covers the field of poetry. The world of sound and rhythm of a poem forms an autonomous discourse, where the representations, ideas, thoughts and feelings of the author are expressed directly without the use of characters. It is the most subjective literary genre in which the author communicates his/her own self, he/she expresses feelings through metaphors and symbols to bring emotions to the reader, using verbs in the first person singular. In short, the intrinsic features which define the poetic nature of a literary text are the following: the subjective nature of the discourse, the specific form (the principle of versification), the autotelic nature (which contains in itself the purpose of communication), and the fictional nature of the referent. The poetic language is peppered with figurative literary terms which trigger the reader's fantasy and thus conferring him/her the ability to represent the plastic image of the poetic universe. The discursive strategies that make the poetic language unique are: ambiguity, suggestion, symbolisation, deviation (from norms of the literary language and the patterns of pragmatic communication) as a mechanism to produce metaphors and new meanings.

The literary analysis of a poetic text is slightly more difficult than in narrative texts. The division of the text in fragments does not coincide with the delimitation of the

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stanzas, often a fragment may consist of several stanzas or whole poems. The analysis of each fragment is not similar to that of a narrative action, we cannot formulate questions about the place of the action, about characters, and we can no longer ask pupils to retell the story or formulate main ideas of the text. When making a literary analysis of a poetic text we lead the pupils through the reverse way that the author has taken while creating the poem, i.e. from the disclosure of the artistic images to the feelings that they have suggested. The lyric poetry, though apparently less preferred by young learners, when properly analyzed with a focus on the revelation of the figurative sense of the words, can become not only accessible to pupils, but also one of their favorite literary creations. If a specific type of explanatory reading is used correctly, it does not overload pupils, and it facilitates the reception of the poetic message, cultivating the skills they need to decode text. Through an appropriate methodological approach, pupils will be able to understand, retain and then use beautiful expressions in their communication, both orally and in writing.

In primary school, pupils will be exposed to poetic texts on various topics: pastels, patriotic poems, odes, carols, lyrical prose texts, etc. If in the IInd grade, the study of poems mainly aims at the correct, coherent, fluent and expressive reading, and at educating pupils' sensitivity, starting with the IIIrd grade, the content of the text will be analyzed more deeply, while explaining pupils the beautiful expressions, taking account of previously acquired knowledge, and doing exercises using tropes in new contexts, thus positively influencing the pupils' language. The poems are analyzed from the point of view of versification, but without naming the concepts of rhythm or rhyme, and leading the pupils to the intuition of these notions of literary theory. Thus, one can determine the number of syllables in a line, or identify similar endings of lines (rhyme), or the accents and successions at equal intervals (rhythm). This way, pupils will find other sources of musicality in the poetic text, which will allow them to better understand the poetic message.

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