Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, Philologica, **1**, 2 (2009) 241-254

Children's Literature Didactics, a Special Didactics

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Abstract. The content of children's literature didactics for the elementary school course was elaborated and organized according to the principles specified in the current curricula documents, namely, providing an adequate balance between the theoretical-applicatory themes with operational value and those centered on intra/inter/cross-disciplinary correlations and openings and the advancing of a thematics able to fundament innovative didactic practices and stimulate differential application and creativity in the didactic process, by emphasizing the practical-applicatory nature of the proposed themes. In this sense, children's literature didactics, as a special type of didactics, offers multiple solutions in the application of school programmes. The main characteristic of the outline of this course is the structuring of its problematics on modern themes, corresponding to innovative dimensions and perspectives of approach: the conceptual dimension, the curricular and didactic dimension, the textual-thematic and functional-discursive dimension, the inter- and cross-disciplinary dimensions. The study of the proposed contents is based on highly-regarded bibliography sources and references. Thus, the bibliography comprises the most recent studies corresponding to the new curricular vision and to the problematics of the course, reference material not only for the didactics of children's literature in elementary school, but also on a more general level, represented by the most popular developments in the area of pedagogical and philological research.

Keywords: children's literature, didactics, innovative didactic practices, differential application, creativity, pedagogical and philological research, intra-, inter-, and cross-disciplinary correlations

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The general objectives of children's literature didactics for the elementary school course were conceptually and methodologically delineated with the intention of outlining the frame concepts underlying coherent didactic pathways, on the one hand, and of offering different operational strategies, oriented towards building communication and cultural competence, in accordance with the frame objectives specific to the curriculum for the "Language and communication" discipline at the level of elementary school, on the other hand. The objectives of this course are, thus, complementary to all the areas of native language didactics at elementary school level, in accordance with a series of unitary principles regarding the grounding of the problematics of children's literature in nowadays readers' horizon of expectation and the building of diversified and significant learning contexts.

The content of the course was elaborated and organized according to the principles specified in the current curricula documents, namely, providing an adequate balance between the theoretical-applicatory themes with operational value and those centered on intra/inter/cross-disciplinary correlations and openings and the advancing of a thematics able to fundament innovative didactic practices and stimulate differential application and creativity in the didactic process, by emphasizing the practical-applicatory nature of the proposed themes. In this sense, children's literature didactics, as a special type of didactics, offers multiple solutions in the application of school programmes. It offers integrating planning solutions, it presents student-centered learning-teaching strategies, oriented towards global communication activities and the moulding of values and attitudes specific to the "Language and communication" curriculum, and, last but not least, it presents alternative methods of assessing acquired knowledge and skills.

The theoretical background and the strategies presented are based on recent theories from key disciplines in the linguistic and pedagogical sciences area, among which pragmatics, didactic rhetoric, socio-psycholinguistics, text theories, reception theories, on the one hand, and curriculum theory, assessment theory, cognitive psychology or communication sciences theories on the other. This leads to the development of a well-shaped strategy and the structuring of coherent operational pathways focused on the comprehension and interpretation of children's literature texts.

At the end of the children's literature didactics course, the students will be able to:

- master, procedurally, the modern concepts and theories on the development of schemes of action and learning capacities;
- apply the modern concepts and theories on the development of learning capacities;
- identify the specific of the children's literature curriculum for elementary school;

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- plan, organize, and conduct didactic activities adequate to the educational-instructive specific of didactic communication during literature classes for children in elementary school;
- innovatively apply basic specialty knowledge in various adequate contexts, displaying, professionally, an innovative methodological conduct at all times;
- acquire the didactic skills prerequisite to the teaching of children's literature in elementary school;
- create specific learning situations for the teaching-learning of children's literature in elementary school;
- operationalize the notions specific to the reception of the oral and written literary message and of the oral and written expression in the children's literature area;
- adopt pertinent strategies for students and class assessment, in order to maximize the educational-instructive process within the parameters of the study of children's literature in elementary school;
- stimulate both individual and group creativity and promote originality in the didactic process by the formative implementation of the models provided by children's literature texts (integrating skills through formative exercises, establishing analogies based on internalized formative structures);
- recognize and use the values and functions of the study of literary text in elementary school, for their conveyance in the didactic process;
- elaborate and effectively and imaginatively apply the educational materials and means characteristic to the study of children's literature in elementary school;
- display a reflective (self) conduct as to one's own—elementary school specific—didactic activities.

The general framework of this course, both at the level of initial and continuous formation, is set out by the following orientative thematic structure:

1. **Considerations on and current approaches in the field of children's literature. Theoretical dimensions and perspectives on the condition of children's literature;**
2. **Conceptual delimitations and reference terminology:**
   - The concept and area of extension of children's literature
   - Basic concepts in the study of children's literature
   - Current reference terminology;
3. **Founding conventions at the heart of children's literature:**
   - Founding conventions: the object and the importance of the children's literature discipline

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- The specific of children's literature; defining traits
- The literariness of children's literature. Children's literature, a literature of its own;

4. Curricular dimensions and perspectives in the field of children's literature:

- Curricular readings in the language and communication area; modern and traditional in the curricular organization of the study of children's literature (a contrastive curricular approach)
- The place of children's literature within the new curricular framework; curricular and terminological points of reference: general background, education frames, the curriculum for the discipline (school curricula), reference books, methodological norms, support materials and children's literature textbooks (a contrastive curricular approach)
- Children's literature as compulsory course and as optional course; curricular perspectives of the discipline;

5. Textual-thematic dimensions and perspectives:

- Textual founding conventions;
- Textual-thematic perspectives specific to children's literature;

6. Textual thematizations and reference points emblematic of children's literature:

- Particularities of the genres of children's literature. Examples;
- Particularities of the species of children's literature. Examples;

7. Textual thematizations and reference points emblematic of children's literature:

- Special requirements in the reception of narrative texts. Examples;
- Special requirements in the reception of lyrical texts. Examples;
- Special requirements in the reception of dramatic texts. Examples;

8. Functional-discursive dimensions and approaches. Functions, theories and discursive practices specific to children's literature;

9. Functional-discursive dimensions and approaches. Approaching the narrative discourse;

10. Functional-discursive dimensions and approaches. Approaching the lyrical discourse;

11. Functional-discursive dimensions and approaches. Approaching the dramatic discourse;

12. Discursive functions, theories and practices emblematic of children's literature;

- Literary functions – children's literature functions (taxonomical dimensions and the summary of children's literature main functions);
- Discursive theories and practices;

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13. **Didactic dimensions and practices, methodological approaches and alternatives regarding the children's literature discipline:**
    - The triad devising/planning—teaching/learning—assessment/self-assessment in children's literature didactics;
    - Lesson systems in the teaching-learning of children's literature;
    - Planning lessons and selecting content units: principles, models, stages; adequating configuration models to the specific of children's literature; interpretation, comprehension and explanation of content units strategies (LSDGC and effecting intersubjective consent);
    - Modern assessment strategies of the skills created/developed; specific criteria and types of assessment; traditional and alternative methods of assessment;
14. **Children's literature didactics, a special didactics:**
    - Discourses of children's literature didactics;
    - Elements of didactics for narrative, lyrical and dramatic texts; specific concepts and strategies; analytical algorithms and frames of interpretation;
    - Didactic references in planning, organizing and assessing children's literature as an optional study discipline; methodological alternatives.

The main characteristic of the outline of this course is the structuring of its problematics on modern themes, corresponding to innovative dimensions and perspectives of approach: the *conceptual* dimension (module 1), the *curricular and didactic* dimension (module 2), the *textual-thematic* and *functional-discursive* dimension (modules 3, 4 and 5), the *inter-* and *cross-disciplinary* dimensions (module 6). Through its last theme, the course aims at values and intercultural aspects children's literature can capitalize on, and that promote the capacity of establishing analogies based on internalized formative structures, the development of independent attitudes, reflective and creative, as well as cultivating originality. Some of these activities contemplate the development of strategies for establishing correlations between children's literature and the other arts, between Romanian literature and the foreign literatures the students are familiar with, the opening up of intercultural borders respectively, through the contrastive correlation of native language and literature study and foreign languages and literatures study. The study of the proposed contents is based on highly-regarded bibliographic sources and references. Thus, the bibliography comprises the most recent studies corresponding to the new curricular vision and to the problematics of the course, reference material not only for the didactics of children's literature in elementary school, but also on a more general level, represented by the most popular developments in the area of pedagogical and philological research.

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As mentioned previously, the content of the course was structured so as to cover all the areas of Romanian language and literature didactics for the elementary school level, which it aims to configure according to unitary and coherent actional-pragmatic principles. The following are included among the main thematic tropes suggested, subsequent to a negotiation between the course and the seminar syllabus:

1. Current considerations and approaches in the field of children's literature didactics. Conceptual delimitations and reference terminology; specific founding conventions

- the concept and area of extension of children's literature from a didactic-theoretical point of view;
- basic concepts in the study of children's literature; didactic and terminological points of reference;
- the condition of children's literature (current considerations and approaches);
- founding conventions: the object and importance of children's literature as a study discipline;
- the specific of children's literature; defining traits; children's literature, a literature of its own.

The theme and (sub)themes in point tackle from a theoretical point of view the problematics of the condition and the specificity of children's literature as a distinct type of literature. The modern considerations and approaches in the field of children's literature center around the object and the importance of the discipline, with reference to its specific basic concepts. The students are asked to account for the conceptual delimitations operated and the importance of terminological clarifications in order to understand the relationship between the children's literature area of extension and the basic concepts in the study of the latter, by referring to their reading and their professional experience. Through the analysis of the specific founding conventions, the students identify a series of defining traits of children's literature, as well as the didactic competences required for the interpretation of literary texts specific to preschool age, for the foregrounding of the adequate means and methods of connecting the child with the literary text, and for the acknowledgement and implementation of the values of children's literature, that are to be conveyed in the didactic process. Furthermore, the students can bring up in discussion and debate on the adequate methods for the implementation of the methodological knowledge underlying the planning, organizing, conducting and assessing of didactic activities, in order to maximize the educational-instructive process within the children's literature specific conceptual parameters.

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2. Curricular dimensions and perspectives in the field of children's literature

- curricular readings in the language and communication area; modern and traditional in the curricular organization of the study of children's literature/a contrastive curricular approach;
- the place of children's literature within the new curricular framework; curricular and terminological points of reference: general background, education frames, school curricula, reference books, methodological norms, support materials and children's literature textbooks (a contrastive curricular approach);
- children's literature as compulsory course and as optional course; curricular perspectives for the discipline

The theme and (sub)themes in point deal with the setting up of a system of curricular readings in the language and communication area, in a contrastive curricular approach. The students can make use of a series of terminological delimitations within the established curricular frame of reference. In order to understand the curricular perspectives of the study discipline, one can analyze, for instance, different concepts, such as: the suggested curricular components, in a systemic approach, their characteristics and their interplay, taxonomy and quality criteria, the notions of adaptation, differentiation and accessibility. Likewise, one can identify, through problematization, the curricular perspectives of the subject of interest—a theoretical and/or methodological endeavor (analytical, synthetical, contrastive, comparative, problematizing etc.) that can be constantly supported through examples of recommended didactic practices and paradigmatic professional experiences.

3. Textual-thematic dimensions and perspectives. Textual thematizations and reference points emblematic of children's literature

- founding textual conventions;
- textual thematizations and reference points emblematic of children's literature; examples;
- particularities of the genres and species of children's literature; examples;
- special requirements in the reception of narrative, lyrical and dramatic texts; examples.

4. Functional-discursive dimensions and approaches. Functions, theories and discursive practices specific to children's literature

- discourses of children's literature didactics;
- literary functions—functions of children's literature (instrumental, informational, formative-educational, cogno-affective, integrating, motivational, aesthetic, axiological)

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- discursive theories and practices characteristic to children's literature;
- approaching the narrative discourse;
- approaching the lyrical discourse;
- approaching the dramatic discourse.

The themes and (sub)themes from above (4-5) regard a modern collection of thematic-textual and functional-discursive reference points characteristic of children's literature. They contain examples such as a series of special requirements regarding the understanding of the narrative, lyrical and dramatic texts, which also in their turn contain exemplifications. Students are required to recognize features, to explain theories and to create a hierarchical ladder of the discursive methods characteristic to children's literature. The content of the themes and of the (sub)topics chosen for discussion has been structured both according to *(a)* the requirements of the reform (the emphasis is laid on the teaching-learning activity in order to develop a communicative and a cultural competence; the approach focuses on developing attitudes and values; an integrative teaching of the three areas belonging to the discipline), and to *(b)* the results of the current researches that took place in the following areas of reference: psycho-pedagogy sciences (the constructivist and cognitive theories) and literature and language knowledge (linguistic pragmatics, textual linguistics, textual genetics, on reception theory, on socio-psycholinguistics, the didactics of rhetoric, etc.).

5. Dimensions and teaching practices, methodological approaches and alternatives as regards the literature for children

- the didactics of children's literature, a special didactics;
- the triad design/planning—teaching/learning—evaluation/selfevaluation in the didactics of children's literature;
- lesson planning in teaching/learning children's literature;
- designing the lessons and the units with their content: principles, models, stages; the adjustment of the configuration models to the requirements of children's literature; strategies to link units and their content;
- modern strategies for assessing the thought/developed skills; criteria and specific types of assessment; traditional methods and alternative procedures of evaluation; extra-curricular methods of evaluation;
- didactic elements of narrative, lyrical and dramatic texts; specific concepts and structures; analytical algorithms and interpretative grids; methodological alternatives;
- guidance points in designing, organizing and evaluating children's literature as an optional discipline.

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6. Inter- and transdisciplinary opportunities in the domain of children's literature; intercultural didactic perspectives

- interlinguistic opportunities in the domain of language and communication and interdisciplinary perspectives inside the curricular areas;
- children's literature found between the literary and the non-literary; trans-curricular perspectives;
- elements of intercultural and interlinguistic didactics;
- children's literature and other arts; proposals of didactic scenarios;
- cultural and intercultural values and attitudes developed through children's literature; proposals of didactic scenarios;

While discussing the themes and the (sub)themes mentioned above (5-6), students can put into practice the investigation of some didactic guidance points in the form of methodological alternatives by (re)considering the didactics of children's literature from the point of view of special didactics. Some of these proposed themes/(sub) themes can be approached by choosing some strategies that aim to establish correlations between literature and other arts, between the Romanian and non-mother-tongue or other modern languages known to the children of early school age, namely the achievement of perspectives through linking Romanian literature to the respective non-mother-tongue literatures. The purpose of this approach is to emphasize the constants and the differences specific to children's literature.

While discussing the themes/(sub) themes/projects or during the accomplishment of projects created for the final evaluation, students *(a)* may provide multiple solutions for integrative design, namely solutions for implementing school syllabuses and for using alternative textbooks, *(b)* may present teaching-learning strategies focused on preschoolers (oriented towards creating attitudes and values and organized according to the discipline's areas), (c) can tackle ways of integrating the contents according to the expectations specific to preschoolers and also ways of discarding the didactic characteristic from global communication activities, or *(d)* may present alternative methods of assessing the knowledge and capabilities specific to preschool education. By tackling these topics and sub-topics an integrated methodological perspective is presented to students, specific to the didactics found in reading classes and to the understanding of the literary narrative, lyric and dialogue text, through a comparative analysis of the methodological alternatives. They have been analyzed as regards their conceptual level and their specific epic, lyrical and dialogue discourses. Besides the inter- and intra-cultural correlations that have been created, the stake of the last issue discussed does not lie only in the proposals of various didactic approaches related to the report between literature and other arts, but also in the formation of cultural and intercultural competence, namely in the tackled trans-disciplinary

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perspectives. The topics deal with a modern collection of thematic-textual reference points specific to the study of children's literature in elementary education, with examples and a series of special requirements regarding the understanding of the narrative, lyrical and dramatic text, containing examples as well. During the debate of all the themes and sub-themes proposed, students are requested permanently to recognize functions, to explain theories and hierarchical discursive practices characteristic to children's literature in the elementary education.

At the same time, tackling the themes chosen for debate concern, in turn, the practical investigation of some concrete teaching benchmarks in the form of methodological alternatives by (re)considering the didactics of children's literature in elementary education, from the point of view of special didactics, namely the shaping of some strategies which seek to establish correlations between literature and other arts. The theoretical and methodological views presented by the students, while debating all the proposed thematic areas (1-6) or the seminar activities, namely during the projects that are part of the semester portfolios, can be fulfilled in a wide variety of approaches, among which we mention further on some of the most important ones:

The theorization of an approach/experience by making use of the contrastive approach: "Functions of children's literature in preschool/elementary education," "Traditional and modern perspectives in organizing the curricula regarding the study of children's literature") namely "Children's literature seen as compulsory and optional subject";

"Children's literature, a literature on its own path," "Inter- and trans-disciplinary perspectives in the field of children's literature"; "Functions, theories and discursive approaches characteristic to children's literature";

The construction of models: "Didactic milestones in planning and evaluating children's literature as an optional discipline"; "Methodological milestones of a successful teaching activity";

Case study: "Founding conventions: the subject and the importance of the discipline of children's literature," "Special requirements for understanding the narrative, lyrical and dramatic texts";

Critical Analysis: The analysis of programs and manuals, the contrastive analysis of some design/planning approaches, the critical analysis of some structured teaching scenarios according to different design models;

The design of some learning situations, of some study units and of some teaching scenarios adapted to the characteristics of the discipline;

Problematization: "Children's literature between the literary and non-literay, trans-curricular perspectives," "Children's literature and other arts"; «Recommend 5-10 texts belonging to the children's literature and present

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the criteria/functions/values that they recommend for the didactic activities with preschoolers and with pupils of early school age»

Didactic essays: «What does children's literature mean for me»; «The last book of literature for children that I have read»; «The most interesting personal experience of reading literature for children».

The construction of a syllabus for the didactics of elementary education has to respond to some needs that regard the training and skill development, that ensure the reflective application of the communicative-functional teaching model, namely knowledge and understanding skills, interpretation and explanation competencies (hermeneutics), instrumental-applicable skills and attitudinal competencies:

- planning, organizing, conducting and evaluating the educational activities;
- supervising and establishing the training-educational process as a didactic/pedagogical/educational communicative approach;
- stimulating creativity and the learning-type training, through encouraging the specific motivational psycho-pedagogy behavior;
- mastery of modern concepts and theories regarding the development of training schemes and of knowledge competencies;
- manifestation of an innovative methodology conduct as regards the profession's level (manifestation of empathy and of "helping orientation");
- developing tools for assessment and managing the evaluation tests depending on the purpose and the characteristics of the individual/group;
- applying the methods and the students' understanding and activation techniques;
- implementing didactic strategies for using effectively the resources/ teaching auxiliaries in the process of education;
- continuous professional development through encouraging the characteristics of the (self)reflective psycho-pedagogical conduct in order to improve the continuous educational activity.

This view—that derives from the awareness of the new curricular visions (of the action-pragmatic features of the communicative-functional model) and also from the knowledge and application of the teaching principles incorporated in the development, implementation and creation of the study units—determined the selection and content structure, as well as the formulation of the practical activities.

Through these it is intended to train/improve/develop the skills requested by the exigencies imposed by pragmatics on the didactic communicative-functional approach:

- the ability to apply the rules of the literary language in any instance of communication;

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- the ability to apply innovative knowledge fundamental to the area of specialty, in various appropriate contexts;
- the ability to develop teaching skills necessary for interpreting literary texts specific to preschool age;
- the ability to stimulate individual and group creativity and to encourage originality in the teaching process by exploiting formative models offered by literary texts for children (integrative skills through training exercises, the establishment of analogies based on acknowledged structural training);
- the ability to create learning situations specific to preschool pupils starting from children's literature texts (through describing the ways and methods of gathering the children close to the literary text);
- the ability to put into practice the notions of literary theory specific to the study of children's literature;
- the ability to recognize and exploit the values of children's literature in order to apply them in the teaching process;
- the ability to design consistent teaching approaches, to achieve a progression in learning and to articulate the areas of discipline, according to the principles of integrative teaching;
- the ability to exploit from a creative point of view the procedural approaches of teaching-learning courses in order to create communication competence and cultural competence (the methodology of global communication and its application is varied, innovative and creative);

In the teaching activities carried out, there will be used teaching strategies and training- participatory methods, as well as methodological elements specific to a teaching based on tasks: interactive lecture, theorization of an approach/experience, debate, modeling (creating models), case study, critical analysis, contrastive analysis, problematization, conversation, learning through cooperation, demonstration, exercise, simulation, concept mapping, didactic workshop (workshop carousel). Among the alternative or complementary assessment methods used we mention: the investigation, the project, the portfolio, self-evaluation/inter-evaluation, the didactic essay, the experiment, the direct observation of students' behavior and attitude (interest and participation) in teaching activities, the simulation of colloquy evaluation (self-evaluation, inter-evaluation, feedback and discussion), the methods of analysis and evaluation of practical work and course and seminary activities of the type SWOT and INSET, the questionnaires before and after the seminar, the observation protocol, the scale of observing the students' activities, monitoring and practical testing of the skills acquired through educational activities during the course and seminar, in the fields of competence referred to above, namely: cognafective skills (knowledge and

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understanding), hermeneutic skills (reading and interpretation), instrumental-applicative skills, attitudinal competencies and communicative skills.

All the organization forms specific to student activities will be used during teaching: frontal activities, group activities, debates in teams, individual and combined activities in teaching workshops, etc. The methodological system is specific to initial teaching training and it makes use of the possibilities offered by the modern methods of participatory and communication training. The favorite ways of teaching during the course and seminar activities are the interactive ones. These are based on the alternation between the analysis workshops that take place during teaching, testing (simulation) experiences of new practices, and group discussion of the projects created during the practical activities. Each student will have in this way the opportunity to submit his/her contributions and to discuss the results that can be applied in the teaching method itself. These analyses of problems, experiences, professional approaches and results will take place permanently, throughout the courses and seminars for teaching children's literature.

Moreover, the very cumulative assessment is carried out not only as a result of writing a written exam, in terms of proposed thematics, but also through evaluating the term portfolios, respectively by the cumulative monitoring of the quality of the seminar projects conducted individually or in groups and of the skills gained as a follow-up of these practical activities. In this regard, a number of key criteria are taken into account, namely: the quality and relevance of the scientific projects performed during the seminar (adequateness and bibliographical and thematic relevance, the novelty of the approach, personal contributions, the quality of writing and the collaboration between students, in case of projects involving pair cooperation or team work, etc.) the quality of answers (their organization and coherence, their originality and creativity) as well as the active involvement and the students' responsive attitude relevant in all the educational activities, carried out through participation in discussions, debates, investigations, experiments, simulations or research projects, to other activities and practical assignments that are relevant for the quality of the global communicative competence.

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