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Monitoring the use of innovative psycho-didactic processes in reading literacy development

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Abstract

The text will present the ways of a development of reading literacy at the Czech primary school. The first part presents the trends of the innovative process at school on the field of reading literacy. The second part includes the results of the wide research organised at the Czech primary school in 2001/2. The similar research was organized in 2002 for the first time. The results of the both researches have been compared in the end of the second research. The results of comparison inform us about the real situation at the school teaching process on reading.

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1. Literacy, Reading Literacy, Reading

1.1. Literacy

The issue of literacy of individuals and specific social groups is one of the current society-wide issues. An adequate level of literacy level is considered one of the necessary preconditions for lifelong learning, economic welfare and in general aspect also for the functioning of the individual in society. In this context, it is obvious that the term “adequate level” is rather relative, influenced primarily by socio-cultural and economic factors, but also historical tradition, regional aspects, etc.

In Czech technical terminology, the term literacy appears at the end of the nineties of the 20th century in connection with international surveys on reading and functional literacy. It was the findings of these surveys that drew Czech experts' attention to the fact that Czech pupils (in the surveys on functional literacy – Czech adults) significantly fall behind their peers from other monitored countries in the level of reading literacy. These findings were examined in detail with the aim of finding the causes of this state and ways of its improvement. In

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connection with these activities, the term “literacy” has become embedded in the Czech technical terminology and began to be further explored and defined by means of research methods.

The beginning of the new century is marked by rapid development of various literacy fields. Besides reading literacy, we could mention mathematical literacy, environmental, information and communication literacies, but also e.g. financial, ecological literacy, etc. Due to the fact that all these literacies are built on the skills developed through reading literacy, it is this literacy that can be considered as a central core of the cluster of literacies for an individual and thus as a base of one’s lifelong learning. We may hence presume to a certain extent that reading literacy level significantly affects the extent and level of other literacies as well.

In specialized literature we may encounter a number of structuring and classifications of literacies. For the purpose of our paper we choose the ontogenetic viewpoint of classifying reading literacy, which is the focus of our interest. Applying this viewpoint we distinguish pre-literacy (developing literacy at pre-school age), basic literacy (developing literacy skills during compulsory school attendance), and functional literacy (developing adults’ literacy skills – from the age of 15).

A distinctively specific period and also a period which is paid a special attention to nowadays is the period of building “the foundations” of literacy, which is in the context of reading literacy marked as the period of initial reading literacy.

1.2. Reading literacy and reading practice – definition, concept

In the previous part of the text it was stated that reading literacy is considered as a base of the cluster of individual’s literacies and hence as a base for their lifelong learning (education).

When following home and international sources, we come across a wide range of definitions of reading literacy varying primarily in the point of view, from which reading literacy is explored (e.g. linguistic, sociolinguistic, or socio-cultural view).

Defining reading literacy from a didactical and psycho-didactic point of view meets the purpose of our text. Their common denominator perceives reading literacy as an ability to understand, use and react to the stimuli gained through written language in order to pursue an individual’s personal and social fulfillment.

PISA 2000, an international survey on reading literacy, defined reading literacy as an ability to “understand, use, and reflect on written texts, in order to achieve one’s goals, to develop one’s knowledge and potential, and to actively participate in society”.

1.3. Reading literacy in school education

Reading literacy development is one of the fundamental objectives of education provided by compulsory schooling. This general objective is common to European countries as well as the Czech Republic. Although the Czech Republic has always traditionally paid special attention to reading development, international surveys on reading literacy showed that on one hand, Czech pupils have good reading skills and that they read quite often, on the other, they struggle with completing reading tasks involving understanding the links in the text, locating pieces of information and their critical evaluation, constructing their own texts etc. When investigating the reasons for this state, school reading instruction was analysed and it was found out that it is too much centred on initial reading instruction (primarily the reading techniques) and comprehension, i.e. on the development of the lowest levels of reading literacy. Higher levels – metacognition, extracting meaning etc. are involved insufficiently in instruction, often they are missing completely. When analysing textbooks used not only for reading but also for the instruction in other educational areas, it was found out that this type of tasks is completely absent and therefore pupils’ reading literacy is developed insufficiently in this area.

Reaction to this situation involved several levels:

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