

Acceleration of development of children's interests in a written word

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"A young child is an extremely receptive and intellectually developed being (...), and surpasses the most complicated computers"

Tony Buzan

Educational goals in the era of information revolution

The accelerated development of civilization brings more and more requirements for a modern human. Facing a great amount of information, the members of the so called information society must be able to find and process information in the scale that has not been known before. It happens during all their lifetime in the changing conditions and very often in the new fields of their activity.

Nowadays, facing the changing civilization conditions requires possessing perfect language competences. They seem to be the fundamentals of existence in the modern world. The more competent an individual is, the more chances they have for self-development and wider access to the scientific, technical and cultural heritage. An individual that is not able to learn individually and creatively is helpless when facing the stream of information and is bound to become a functional illiterate. There is a danger that they will become dependent on others and exist on the margin or even on the outskirts of the society (Prucha 1992: Kapica, 1996). "Everyone must be prepared for lifelong learning in order to widen their knowledge, to gain new qualifications and abilities to adjust to the changing world. (...) Education that is not limited by age and place becomes the life essence" (Delors (ed.), 1998).

The above ideas make us look critically at the whole process of modern education and draw theoretical and practical conclusions. They are connected with the process of teaching children to read and write. This process must gain a totally new dimension –due to the main challenge of modern civilization, where the written language is dominant over the spoken language. We must change the model of the education process and take into consideration some of its psychological, educational, pedolinguual, glottodidactic and praxeological aspects. We must also give up the traditional understanding of educational role of the following institutions: family, nursery school and school, and especially the mass media here. First of all, we must be able to look at this fragment of educational process through the aspect of children's personality developing in the new reality. The civilization changes that are faced by a few years old child led to the conclusion that the traditional solutions in primary reading and writing education seem to be unsatisfactory. They no more stimulate the children's personality development. They do not meet the children's growing intellectual abilities, they do not suit to the modern times needs and to the future requirements.

A nursery school child in the world of the written language

"A reading four year old child is no more a miracle, it is a norm"

B. Roclawski

The new conditions of forming the personality of a modern child are mainly the consequences of technical achievements, like massive, fast and dynamic stream of information, virtualisation,

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the almost unlimited access to knowledge which enables earlier contact with the written language. Reading and writing skills are the fundamentals on which the process of gaining knowledge will be based. Acquiring those skills is a breakthrough moment for a child that has been expressed most accurately by Philippe Eisenberg: "The child who masters the art of reading enters the heritage of the whole world".

In the recent years we notice the systematical growth of number of the children who acquire the reading skills in the early childhood. Acceleration of their development makes them ready to master the art of reading which seems to be difficult for them. In this way the children become more independent on the adults, they are independent in using different sources of information and in generating and processing of information. By making a delay in the beginning of primary reading and writing education we miss this genuine chance. As it is known, the mind of a 6 year-old child is the most receptive and it develops very fast. "Although many of us judge so — a small child has nothing in common with a helpless individual. A young child is a being that is extremely receptive and intellectually developed (...), and it surpasses the most complicated computers" (Buzan, 1997).

D.K. Moor who makes research into the process of teaching reading at nursery school notices that it is easier to teach reading to the 3 years old children than to 4 years old, then it is easier to teach to 4 years old children than the 5 years old, 5 years old children than the 6 years old. Research into the children with brain damage that were made in the Institute of Achieving Potentials of Human Abilities in Philadelphia, USA has led to a question: "Aren't we too late in teaching reading to healthy children?" (G. Doman, J. Doman, 1992).

The modern children being raised in the strongly stimulating environment look for the sources of information and much earlier use the cognitive and linguistic skills in connection to the written material (cf. Meadows, 1996).

To confirm this hypothesis we can notice quick progress of 4 and 5 year old children in the range of elementary skill of reading that has been made within the last 13 years.

The research that we made in spring 2000 among 396 children made us possible to describe the growth of number of 5 year old children able to read in comparison to the group of children who were able to read in 1986 (Puślecki, 1986) and the progress that the children at the same age made in the elementary skill of reading.

These are the following results of the research:

- The percentage of 5 years old children able to read has grown up 22,5% that is up to 43,2% in 2000 (in the city environment — 63,3%).
- Children were able to read correctly 75,1% of words so it is 34,4% more than in 1986 (in the city environment it is 90,7%).
- The average amount of words that were read was 22,3 words (out of 30 maximum) and it was 10,1 words more than in 1986 (there were 12,2).
- Every third word was recognized totally (34,5%) every second word was recognized by reading it by speech sounds (42,2%).
- no differences have been noticed between the achievements of the only children (that are usually raised in better conditions) and the results of children who had brothers and sisters (the percentage is as follows: 71,6% and 68,2% and the arithmetical average is 21,5 and 20,5 words).
- 83,3% children have high or very high level of motivation to learning to read.
- The researched 5 year old children are very mature as far as their motivation to be able to read: they need to become independent on the adults (37,0%), they have the prospect of better school marks (28,1%) and they are aware of the possibility of individual access to knowledge from the written sources (24,5%).

Conclusions. Implications for further educational theory and practice

In the era of information al revolution it is high time to end up the discussion about the age limit of learning reading and writing. It is far more important to work out the ways of optimal support of the comprehensive and harmonious development of children personality by introducing them to the world of written language. Therefore, it is necessary to find the means that will assure adjusting the process of teaching to read and write, to the actual pace of development of the modern children, to their psychophysical abilities, to the range of experience, level of motivation and their new needs. One thing is for sure — features of children personality and the progress the children make should be the main fundamentals of the organization of the process (cf. Kapica, 2000).

It has been more and more convincing to give up the primary reading book as the one and only textbook for learning to read. It forces the children in class work with one pace that limits teacher's and children's creativity. The teaching materials should consist of stories, descriptions, dialogues, cartoons, riddles, leaflets, advertisements, etc. and the texts should have different fonts. It is easy predictable that the entire revolution will take place with help of special computer programmes for children that fascinate children and that are so much more attractive than the primary textbooks and student's books. The interaction of a child and a computer without being anxious about success makes the motivation higher and it turns the process of learning into fun.

What is more, applying the computers with a keyboard and a printer will lead to unification of reading and writing skills. The children will be able to enter very early the non-graphic phase, long before they are able to use handwriting and write letters, words and sentences.

It is also necessary to promote the communicative aspect of linguistic competences. Learning to read and write should not be the aim in itself but it must be the stimulating and supporting factor of cognitive development, especially the linguistic development which is the new field of activity for the children. Introducing the elements of reading and writing teaching into the process of playing and creative activities will eliminate time consuming and exhausting exercises, it will eliminate the effort, and it becomes the source of positive motivation to learning. And the emotional and motivational aspect is very important, if not deciding about progress in this field. A student who does not like reading since the childhood years and who will not realize the importance of this activity without which the whole development future is impossible, this person will not become fond of books who finds reading pleasant.

We consider as necessary:

- to follow the European standards as far as the organization of education is concerned: starting school at the age of 6;
- 5 years old children should have obligatory and charge free care at the nursery schools;
- to take special care of village children and make their chances equal to the city children;
- to modernize the process of teaching children to read and write, giving up the routine solutions in the process of reading and writing education, making them individual and creative;
- to make primary school and nursery school teachers to review their knowledge of development of a modern child, because not all of them know the foundations of modern developmental psychology.

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