

# Linguistic Competence in Propaedeutic Self-Education of Pupils in Early Years of Primary School

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## Introduction

The rapid progress of civilisation at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and especially the development of information technology and wide access to the Internet, create many new possibilities of education as well as set new challenges.

A man living in the contemporary world may sometimes feel completely lost in the enormous amount of incoming information. In order to adapt himself to the constantly changing reality, he must be ready to continue education the whole life. This challenge will never be fully met without the ability of self-education, which has become really important recently.

Nowadays, if we confine ourselves only to the knowledge we have already acquired, we are doomed to fail. However, if we possess the ability to refresh the knowledge and know how to learn on our own, we may feel rather confident. The problem of self-education is "closely related to the problems and targets of the school" (Okoń, 1995). It is a challenge which is present in all the levels of education at school, being an essential supplement to the process of learning. That is why self-learning activities must suit the capabilities of their participants. If we refer to the pupils from early classes of primary school, the propaedeutic definition of self-education seems to be the most proper one:

The propaedeutic self-education is understood as children's independently undertaken individual and (or) group studying, properly directed and supported by the teacher (and the children themselves), connected to other entertaining forms of activities, having at least a minimum share in the planning of their own self-educational targets, and constantly increasing a share in the planning of the course and method of their realization, and at least a partial share in the evaluation of the results — propitious for the development of 7–9 year old pupils and the improvement of their nearest environment (Kujawski, 1995).

We may observe in education a new tendency to the systematic strengthening of the autonomy of the individual. Also much attention is devoted to the new concept of general education. Attitudes and competence, followed by ability and knowledge, seem to be the most important elements. It is a remarkable change, which has an enormous influence on the concept of education in itself, and on the teaching programmes in particular. This new hierarchy derives from educational needs (Wojnar, 1992). From among the so-called "key abilities", the ability to communicate in different situations seems to be the most important, as it enables us to function in the contemporary world. The crucial part is played by the linguistic skills, and especially by the ability to read, which is fundamental in the whole process of education. Without mastering the skill of reading, a pupil will not be able to gain necessary information and develop his own interests. If the results in reading are satisfactory, they determine the progress in school education and develop the ability of self-learning. Hence, they indicate whether the tasks and challenges imposed on contemporary school are fulfilled in a proper way (Plankiewicz, 1994).

Monitoring of the progress in reading should be inseparable from the didactic work of every teacher dealing with integrated education.

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Problems connected with the author's own research, methodological remarks.

So far the research on the efficiency of reading has been of quantitative character, but as the philosophy of pedagogical experiments is constantly changing, at the moment more attention is devoted to quality.

The qualitative research seems to be especially useful in integrated teaching, mainly because there is no division into subjects, and instead of marks pupils are evaluated by means of written opinion about their progress in various skills.

Following the basic assumptions of the teaching programme, we may speak about the standard accomplishments of a pupil who has finished the third class of primary school. It means that children do not have to fully develop their reading skills in the first class. The teacher, however, is obliged to make a continuous evaluation of pupils' progress. He should know exactly at what stage his pupils are. It is necessary for the elimination of emerging obstacles and it stimulates successes.

As the quality of teaching dominates in the integrated education, it is essential to employ qualitative pedagogical research, in which acquiring data is made directly by the teacher and evaluation is presented in the form of an essay (Komorowska, 1983).

From among different types of qualitative methods of investigating the process of the development of reading skills of pupils in early classes of primary school (classes I–III), hermeneutics has been selected as the most adequate one, mainly because it is particularly concerned with interpretation and understanding of human behaviour. Hermeneutics also draws our attention to the examination of aspirations, motivation and a phenomenon defined as "reading between the lines" (Pachociski, 1997).

Being a methodology consultant in integrated education for the last two years, I had the possibility to observe about 100 integrated groups in both town and village schools situated in and near Racibórz.

The main subject of my research was the analysis of the reading skills development process. The research included the following questions: How do teachers understand the essence of developing reading skills? Which categories of reading do they prefer in the process of education? Which forms of reading appear most frequently in their lessons?

## The analysis of the research material.

Generally it may be said that although teachers understand reading as a process which is essential for mastering the language, they do not devote enough time to the proper development of reading skills in their pupils. We must remember that if reading is defined as a process, it must consist of systematic and not only occasionally performed activities. A child during the process of acquiring reading skills must go through various stages. Each stage requires the involvement of both the teacher and the pupil. Teachers rarely include reading exercises in various forms of children's activities. Children practise reading usually during literature classes, when they try to interpret particular texts. But they seldom use reading as a tool to gain knowledge in other subjects. Thus reading often becomes "art for art's sake". Good results in reading literature do not necessarily mean that pupils have the ability to read in order to learn something.

The teachers usually practise receptive reading, which aims at searching for information and sometimes exercise critical reading, but it is usually confined to the evaluation of some literary protagonists. However, they seldom introduce the creative reading. It may be connected with the problem of asking improper questions, which do not make pupils think. In most of the cases the questions are somehow "closed", and as they usually contain the answer, they do not require complicated mental operations. The level of such questions is not very challenging.

Considering other techniques of reading, pupils often practise reading aloud. Sometimes they are asked to read something in silence, and rather sporadically to read the text by dividing it into particular roles.

From early classes of primary school many pupils have difficulties with understanding and completing written tasks. Almost immediately they ask numerous questions, or simply say that they have no idea what they should do. Also, while working with a piece of literature, they are not able to analyse the text. After such experiences, most of them feel rather discouraged towards reading.

## Final remarks

In order to develop the skill of self-education, pupils must get some preparation during their integrated learning. Without systematic exercises which treat reading as a tool for gaining knowledge, very few pupils develop learning abilities properly. That is why teachers ought to make sure that the pupils do not only read, but read particular texts with comprehension.

It is advisable that teachers introduce various techniques of reading, depending on the assumed objectives, as all of them contribute to the intellectual, emotional and social development of the pupils. It is also important for the pupil to know what he reads and what is the purpose of his reading. Teachers should also convince their pupils that reading is something pleasant.

Bearing in mind the interest of the children, the teachers should find a point of balance among various forms of reading. Reading cannot be practised only for its own sake. A pupil must be aware of what he reads, irrespectively of how he reads.

If school is to teach pupils how to develop self-learning skills and use them lifelong, its staff must consist of teachers who are highly qualified professionals. Those who deal with integrated education should be particularly creative and use efficient and approved methods of teaching. They should be friends of the children and accompany them in the difficult, but at the same time important process of reading skill acquisition.

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