THE BARRIERS OF SCHOOL SUCCESS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL PUPILS

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Abstract

The paper is about the selected aspects of communicative competences of pupils in the primary education focusing on speech skills and reading literacy. The text deals with the reading literacy within the context of communication competence. It focuses in detail on the processes of reading comprehension and reading intentions in the selected group of pupils of various kinds of primary schools in the primary education. It also presents the results of current research findings. Comparative analysis procedure was used to assess an educational progress in pupils of 3rd classes in the selected areas of literacy. There were described the strengths and weaknesses of the educational reality related to the curricular postulates. Based on the results of the research there were submitted proposals and measures for the special pedagogical theory and practice at a general, legislative and curriculum level.

Key words: *pivotal jurisdiction, literacy, communications jurisdiction, reader's literacy, pupil in primary level, pupil with light mental infliction of, pupil with intelligence in border, pupil social disadvantaged, processes understanding, reader's intentions*

I. INTRODUCTION

Current ongoing transformations in the Czech education system affect all stages of education and in certain aspects represent a radical reconstruction of ingrained and previously generally positively assessed concepts and their objectives. We intentionally aim at primary school education and the key priorities of the expected changes in the educational reality. These are anticipated by the current national strategic document of Strategy of educational policy in the Czech Republic by 2020, which puts emphasis on the following triad of areas in education:

1. Improving the quality of teaching, pedagogical skills of teachers and effective management of the education system.
2. Personality development of the educated pupils, equipping them with positive human and civic attitudes.
3. Preparing for a job.

These areas of school practice are currently subject to the processes of defining and designing the final, and for the educational terrain specific, binding form. They concurrently affect the phenomenon of inclusive education and its quality, determine social equality and social justice, and thereby shift the interpretation of the issues of equal opportunities in education (see Kaleja, M. 2015 Kaleja, M., Zezulková, E. et al. 2015 Zezulková, E. 2015).

II. EQUALITY OF EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES AS A RESEARCH TOPIC

Equality in opportunity requires consideration of the individual characteristics of pupils in comparison with other pupils of non-target groups with a clearly defined objective, and that is **personality development of the educated pupils and equipping them with positive human and civic attitudes.** By the recently frequently used term "inclusive education" we put all the pupils into one group, thus creating a combined education of heterogeneous groups of pupils. We do not want to put emphasis on the differences between them, though we take into account their handicap or their special educational needs in order to determine the degree of support in their educational path and set optimal supportive internal and external mechanisms along the lines of social justice. Inclusive trends in education

include a wide variety of strategies, activities and processes which are trying to implement justice at the level of quality, pragmatic and optimally designed education of pupils with special educational needs. However, general education pupils are not neglected. In contrast, all inclusive educational practices implemented in the class must serve all, being beneficial to all. Segregation, marginalization or any procedures having the character of exclusion, are eliminated (cf. Hájková V., Strnadová, I., 2010 Pipeková, J., Vítková, M. et al. 2014 Adamus, P. 2015. Bartoňová, B., Vítková, M. Vrubel, M. 2014, Lechta, V. 2010, Krupová, I. 2010 and others).

These (sometimes closely, sometimes more widely defined) questions are dealt with in our long-term research. In the years 2014 - 2015 (15 months), we implemented a national research project called *Sociological Monitoring of Educational Inputs and Outcomes of Children and Pupils, Including Children and Pupils with Special Educational Needs in the Czech Republic.* It had features of sociological monitoring of educational indicators in the education of children and pupils, including children and pupils with special educational needs in all regions of the Czech Republic, except for the capital city of Prague. More specifically, it was a **comparative analysis, taking into account the educational progress of pupils of three target groups** (pupils with mild mental disabilities, pupils with intelligence in the border zone, socially disadvantaged pupils) **in their own educational trajectory, where the educational progress was observed in the area of reading literacy.** The research also focused on identifying additional educational indicators, e.g. attitudinal constructs of the teaching staff of target group pupils, interpersonal relations in the school environment, the overall school climate - in order to define the criteria for evaluating the quality of inclusive schools.

Individual results of all research lines were subject to the proper strictly critical procedures of methodological diction processes of selected research orientation and their publication was held in the following publications:

- KALEJA, M., ZEZULKOVÁ, E. a kol. *Etnografie školy jako edukační realita současnosti.* Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-167-9.
- KALEJA, M. *(Ne)připravený pedagog a žák z prostředí sociální exkluze.* Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-191-4.
- ZEZULKOVÁ, E. *Vybrané faktory komunikační kompetence žáků v primárním vzdělávání.* Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978-80-7510-189-1.
- KALEJA, M., ZEZULKOVÁ, E. *Sociologická analýza zaměřená na porovnání dosažených výsledků žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami v různých typech škol. Závěrečná zpráva klíčové aktivity 1.* Opava: Centrum empirických výzkumů FVP SU, 2015. ISBN 978–80–7510–159-4.

III. COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS A PREDICTOR OF COMPETENCE FOR (LIFELONG) LEARNING

In primary school education, emphasis is placed on the development of versatile, effective and open communication, developing the communication skills of pupils, which have, in relation to learning, priority status. The ability to master the spoken and written form of language is related to the development of cognitive processes which are a reflection of the quality of knowledge about the world, a prerequisite for understanding the environment and **development of competence towards learning**.

Weaknesses in communication skills may be reflected negatively in learning the basics, in competencies towards learning and relation to lifelong learning and they also have a social significance. Increased fatigue, exhaustion, increased sickness and other problems may occur. There is a high risk of school failure, which many pupils have experienced as traumatic. Children may develop the so-called ‘unsuccessful child syndrome’ with a wide range of school phobia symptoms, e.g. eating disorders, behavioral disorders (negativism, increased aggression, etc.) and other psychosomatic

symptoms. These factors may adversely affect the formation of self-image and self-esteem of the child.

IV. SELECTED ELIGIBILITY FOR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Language, communication and pre-reading skills of the pupil are justifiably important measures of school preparedness. Basic components of language (formal and content-related) in compulsory education are strongly supported by teaching reading, and this is a feedback response. In scientific literature, reading is characterized as a type of speech activity, possibly as an act of communication, and it can be assumed that the quality of **speech and reading literacy significantly affects the process of lifelong learning.**

Speech literacy

The basic condition for language and speech acquisition is on the one hand the ability to differentiate sounds of speech and on the other hand the skill to grade motions of the complex articulation system elements in the finest way so that the produced sound reaches the form of intelligible speech. In the background of these two mechanisms, which simultaneously represent necessary internal conditions for the acquisition of speech, is the *differentiation ability of the brain*, especially in the field of hearing and motor skills. Gradually, the child acquires verbal experiences across linguistic levels (phonetic-phonological, morphological and syntactic, lexical-semantic and pragmatic) and adopts verbal and non-verbal means of communication (Sovák, M. 1989 Kulišťák, P. 2003 Nelešovská, A., 2005, Belz, H. Siegrist, M. 2011 and others).

The ability of inter-modality, i.e. the ability of linking content from one sensory area to the contents from other sensory areas (e.g. linking sound to a visual image), and making links between different sensory perceptions is a prerequisite for mastering spoken forms of speech. Specific competencies mingled with receptive and expressive component of speech and expressed in its spoken form (the level and scope of vocabulary, understanding semantic relationships in sentences and complex sentences, ability to capture the correct sentence syntax and its structure using different parts of speech, their declensions and conjugations, understanding the sound structure of words, articulation and acoustic performance of sounds, the ability to request information, to express relationships, knowledge, opinions, the ability to keep the topic of conversation, adequate exchange of roles of speaker and listener and others), in our view, overlap with the concept of **speech literacy**. Language and speech control forms the basis for learning read and written form of speech, speech literacy is therefore the initial competence for the reading literacy and competence towards learning.

Reading literacy

Reading literacy as a form of communication is a part of linguistic competence.

"Reading literacy is a complex of knowledge and the skills of the individual, enabling him/her to deal with written texts commonly found in everyday life (e.g. a railway timetable, an automatic washing machine manual, an editorial in the newspaper etc.). These are not only reading skills, i.e. being able to read texts and understand them, but also the skills to find and process information contained in the text, reproducing the text content and others." (Průcha, J., Walterová, E. Mareš, J. 1995: 40)

In the international PIRLS (2001) research, reading literacy is defined as *the ability to understand written language forms required by society and/or valued by individuals, and to use these forms.*

Young readers can derive meaning from a variety of texts. They read to learn, to participate in readership, and for pleasure[1].

The definition of reading literacy includes the constructive nature of reading (understanding and using written language required by society) and its functional nature (serving as a tool of knowledge, enabling functioning in society, the development of individuals and society). Thus, reading literacy is not just reading comprehension, but the functional use of written information for its own purposes. It also allows for the active role of the reader in understanding and further work with the text. The well-established term of reading literacy is supposed to differentiate between new quality of reading and the traditional understanding of reading as a fundamental skill. Reading is the basis for subsequent work with text information, i.e. the initial activity of reading literacy and competence towards learning. (Doležalová, J. 2014)

Teachers in primary schools will encounter in their daily practice not only pupils undergoing development of partial skills of **speech and reading literacy** naturally and without any apparent deviations from the norm but also with those where there are deficiencies of varying scope. In some pupils it is only an extended period of physiological problems, however, in others the development of expected skills not only differs from the norm but also uses different means, or a combination of various factors mentioned above.

V. THE RESEARCH OF PREPAREDNESS OF PUPILS OF PRIMARY SCHOOL EDUCATION TO USE READING AS A MEANS OF GAINING KNOWLEDGE

For the research investigation according to the assignment of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports with the help of comparative analysis we set the aim of the research to evaluate whether there was achieved an educational progress in pupils of 3rd year of different types of schools in the monitored areas of literacy in the period of 2nd half of the school year. And further on the basis of in-depth comparative analysis to describe the strengths and weaknesses of the educational reality in the context of curricular postulates. The 3rd year was chosen because it represents an important milestone in the development of the child as a reader because it is focused on the beginnings of a functional usage of grammar skills, i.e. the acquisition and automatization of the skill to read and write with understanding. We expect that the pupils from the 3rd year could start using the reading as a means of gaining knowledge, it is sc. stataric reading. The basic set of the national research (except the capital Prague) was formed by pupils of 3rd year of primary schools, the selective subset then by the pupils of 4 target groups: pupils with mild mental disability[2], pupils with intellect in the border zone, pupils with social disadvantage and pupils of intact population[3]. On the basis of another criterion defined by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports the research investigation had to reckon on the minimum of 1 000 involved pupils.

The outline of the research is based on the analysis of methodology of international research of literacy PIRLS done in years 2001 - 2011[4]. Own methodology and means used for the research were on the basis of the analysis of pilot tests in pupils with mild mental disability modified with respects to their educational-psychological characteristics.

In order to evaluate the level of chosen processes of understanding and reader's intention (low level,

[1]The Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) is organized by the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievement - IEA. In the Czech Republic the study is organized by the National Coordination Centre, which operates under the Czech School Inspection.
[2]The pupils are educated according to the annex of Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education specifying the education of pupils with mild mental disability.
[3]The pupils are educated according to the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education.
[4]Source: Modified translation of the publication Framework and Specifications for PIRLS Assessment 2001 issued by international centre of the research PIRLS at Boston College in 2000), the Institute for Information on Education, 2002. Available on: http://www.csicr.cz/getattachment/cz/O-nas/Mezinarodni-setreni-archiv/PIRLS/PIRLS-2001/Publikace-Koncepce-hodnoceni-PIRLS-2011.pdf

middle level, high level) the questions were classified on the basis of the methodology of international research of reading literacy PIRLS. The results were calculated from the perspective of achieved score for an individual pupil according to given criteria and in the context of expected outcome of curricular documents[5].

VI. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the survey point to a demonstrable occurrence of low and intermediate level in monitored areas of reading literacy (comprehension processes and reading intentions) in pupils with intelligence in the border zone, socially disadvantaged pupils and pupils with mild mental disabilities in primary school education. At the same time they call attention to a lack of educational progress in pupils with intelligence in the border zone and socially disadvantaged pupils, educated according to the Framework educational program for basic education. **A higher risk of school failure** can be assumed in these pupils.

The teachers must adjust their work, based on knowledge of the curriculum, to the expected pupils' competence development and educational conditions to the educational-psychological dimensions of the at-risk pupils. **The specific individual needs of the at-risk pupils in the context of school failure** emerging from the weak internal qualities (properties) include:

- different anatomical and physiological bases for the formation and development of reading skills (mental and sensory functions),
- slower, or limited creating differentiation contingent connections in all analyzers influencing the creation and quality of intermodal connections[6],
- delayed, alternatively limited speech development in all language levels,
- weakening of volitional qualities, interests, imagination, concentration and motivation for reading,
- less experience related to the development of reading literacy and influencing attitudes to reading,
- weakening of the ability to understand spoken and written form of language and others.

Based on the evaluation of the course and learning outcomes, the teacher systematically reflects a planning process, the teaching itself and its impact on pupils in order to improve their work and thus increase the effectiveness of the pupil's learning. The teacher must **individualize teaching** with regard to the above dispositions, capacities, needs and interests of individual pupils through acquired competencies:

- use a wide range of teaching forms and methods that encourage active and cooperative learning,
- enable pupils to acquire internal motivation for acquiring the desired skills and lead them to being accountable for the course and the results of their own learning,
- affect the learning environment in the classroom and encourage a social climate based on mutual respect and cooperation, that is by applying supportive methods and techniques.

[5]The Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education and the annex of the Framework Educational Programme for Basic Education Specifying the Education of Pupils with Mild Mental Disability.
[6]The ability of linking content from one sensory area to the contents from other sensory areas (e.g. linking a sound to the graphic symbol of the letter), and making links between different sensory perceptions

By individualization of teaching it is possible to support significantly the weakened internal qualities (properties) in pupils with the risk of school failure and thus affect the development in the areas of:

- spoken and written forms of speech (speech literacy),
- understanding written and spoken form of speech (reading literacy),
- awareness of the requirements of reasonable difficulty, competence towards learning:
- ability to organize and manage their own learning (search, sort and effectively use information, combine knowledge from different educational areas, based on comprehension putting things and phenomena in context),
- relation to lifelong learning (draw conclusions for the future, assess their own progress, plan and predict possible obstacles) and others.

In order to use the period of primary school education for encouraging the preparedness of pupils to use reading as a tool of knowledge effectively, we propose the concrete measures to optimize the educational conditions in selected target areas of the 2020 Strategy:

a) In the area of innovation of framework educational programs:

- to define the term *reading literacy* among educational goals,
- to diversify the expected outcomes of reading skills in the context of developmental stages and specific characteristics of pupils,
- not to restrict the development of reading skills only to the "reading subjects", to promote the use of other subjects to support the functionality of reading,
- to facilitate setting of different lengths of lessons,
- develop a methodology for the systematic development of reading literacy in primary school education.

b) To put emphasis on increasing teachers' competence in the area of undergraduate teacher training and further teacher education:

- to develop pupils' reading literacy, deliberately and in an integrated form promote all forms of communication,
- to apply the principles of differentiation and individualization of the educational process when organizing activities and determining the content, forms and methods,
- to adapt and modify the educational content of basic education for children with a risk of school failure so as to achieve consistency between educational requirements and real capabilities of these pupils,
- to implement support measures for the education of the pupils,
- to apply an individual approach and work with an assistant teacher in the classroom.

c) In the area of managing the education system:

- to create personal and material conditions for inclusive education.
- to anchor the status of a special needs teacher in the statutory instruments and implementing regulations of the Ministry of Education as a valid member of the school's counseling team[7].
- to create conditions for the introduction of speech therapy with a direct link to the educational process in schools with an emphasis on pre-primary and primary education in order to positively influence the development of speech literacy, pre-reading skills and reading literacy[8].
- to strengthen the efficiency of cooperation between educational psychologists and school counseling centres (EPs, SCCs).
- to strengthen the partnership of teachers and parents in the education process, to engage parents in teamwork and motivation of pupils to education.
- to incorporate subjects of special educational care appropriate to the needs of pupils.
- to ensure teaching the subjects of special educational care by professionals who will apply the principles of individualization and differentiation of education.
- to establish a clear system of support measures for pupils at risk of school failure.
- to create a concept of preventive and corrective measures for speech and reading literacy development in pre-primary and primary school education.

VII. SUMMARY

Developing speech and reading literacy skills requires a lot of patience on the part of adults, moreover, at the right time and in a useful form. Both processes expect from pupils a demanding level of active thinking, conditioned by concentration and considerable effort to overcome obstacles associated with understanding. We cannot expect more advanced mental processes in a conversation related to a certain topic, book or text from a child with a lack of verbal experience or weakened speech and reading appetence (is unable to express himself/herself by spoken language, has not acquired pre-reading skills or a positive attitude to reading etc.). The mission of the school is to deliberately and in an integrated way promote all forms of communication (speaking, listening, reading and writing) as well as thinking and create an environment of "*the kingdom of speech*" for pupils. It is one of the ways to equality of educational opportunities of pupils. If the school is able to develop the expected communication skills in pupils, it fulfills one of its key tasks, which is to equip pupils with the necessary skills for lifelong learning. The level of communication skills (speech and reading literacy) is also a critical determinant of educational and social integration, while the cultivation of a child at the level of primary school education plays an essential role in the system of lifelong learning.

Equal educational opportunities assume creating optimal conditions for each pupil in all phases of the educational process (at the admission to education, in the course of education and at its completion) with using the principles of internal differentiation of education and individualization of teaching respecting the capacities, abilities and needs of each child, pupil and student.

[7]A special needs teacher must be competent to provide special educational intervention, including counseling services to children and pupils at risk of school failure, their teachers and legal guardians.
[8]The starting platform is represented by *the Methodical recommendation ref 14712 / 2009-61 to secure speech therapy in schools.*

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