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Competencies of Teachers and Student Teachers for the Development of Reading Literacy

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Abstract

The quality of reading literacy of students, an important means of education, lies in the competence of teachers for the development of this phenomenon. For this purpose, an empirical investigation was conducted concerning the determination of the state of development of appropriate competencies in future teachers and teachers in pedagogical practice. Furthermore, we monitored the conditions for the training of teachers in this area. The text presents the results of this investigation, in which questionnaires, interviews, observation and analyses of documentation were used.

Keywords: Competencies of teachers; student teacher; reading literacy;

1. Why Focus on the Competencies for the Development of Reading Literacy (CDRL)

Reading literacy is an important transversal competence for private, professional and public life. It is considered as a means of development of personality and society as a whole. We perceive it as a broad and varied set of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the area of work with text information. It becomes a means of education and an important mediator of education in the lifelong learning concept. Reading literacy is a transcurricular competence. Teachers of all subjects should contribute to its development, and thus everyone should be prepared for the development thereof. Recently, the reading literacy (RL) of our students shows a relatively low level in international research, which is also the reason why it is necessary to pay attention to factors that affect it. One of the many causes may lie in the competence of teachers in the development of this phenomenon, in their knowledge, experience and attitudes towards reading literacy, i.e. in the competence of teachers to shape the reading skills of students. In Czech literature, however, they are not comprehensively processed. Therefore, we would like to try to contribute with this text to the clarification of the topic in terms of theory and to understand the situation in pedagogical practice.
1.1. Competencies of Teachers for the Development of Reading Literacy as One of the Factors in Shaping Quality Output from Education

In specialised literature we do not find a separate and comprehensive discourse on CDRL, only partial information. Authors either deal with general teacher competencies for the performance of their profession (Průcha, 2002, Spilková, V. & Vašutová, J. a kol., 2008), partial, sectoral competencies or they expand the existing list of teacher competencies with other competencies.

CDRL could be defined as a set of knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as dispositions of the teacher to develop reading literacy effectively in teaching.

If teachers do not have the opportunity to inform themselves of these competencies and are not prepared even in the course of studying at faculties of pedagogy (with the exception of grade 1 primary school teachers), what idea and knowledge can they have about it? This situation also complicates the self-improvement of teachers. We agree that it is not possible to indefinitely keep increasing the number of skills teachers have to be equipped with (see Průcha, 2002), but given the importance of reading literacy, it appears crucial to implement this task.

It is not an easy task to create the structure of CDRL, as the key competencies of teachers (even reading literacy itself) are considered as amply structured and comprehensive phenomena, which, moreover, are not clearly defined. CDRL are not isolated, they include skills from various other teacher competencies. They are partly specific to different disciplines (e.g. types of texts). Therefore, in describing CDRL we consider the penetration between sectoral competencies (i.e. the competencies of individual subjects and the Czech language), didactic and psychodidactic (the basis is competent leadership of educational processes in terms of didactic and psychological), personality traits and dispositions of teachers (presented by e.g. teacher attitudes to books and reading literacy) and finally, communicative and diagnostic competencies.

1.2. Proposal for the Specification of CDRL Content

What should CDRL specifically comprise? The priority is knowledge of the essence of the new concept of reading literacy (it is not just about an understanding of text, but also about thinking about the text, its evaluation and creative processing of text information, learning from text, evoking a positive relationship to reading). Moreover, the means of its development should be mastered, as well as the specifics of texts and work with them in individual areas of education. It is always about a level of knowledge, skills, attitudes and experience.

The attempt to define the content of CDRL is led by the effort to create a structure, which would become the mainstay in the evaluation of the situation in pedagogical practice. It will be used as a basis for confronting this structure of requirements in ideal form with the results of real testimonies of teachers from pedagogical practice.

A. Professional competencies for CDRL:

- To know the essence of the concept of reading literacy, the importance of reading literacy and work with text; to know the degrees of reading literacy; to know the conditions (pedagogical, psychological and social) and means of their formation; to have the skills to apply them in pedagogical practice; to know the various carriers of text information (their positives, negatives, specifics, to be able to choose them appropriately and present them to students);

B. Psychodidactic basis and conditions for shaping and developing reading literacy:

- To understand the psychological processes when reading and working with text information, to know how to create conditions for improving the quality of reading literacy; to diagnose, assess and develop; to know varied and effective procedures for shaping and developing reading literacy skills and to know how to apply them adequately in situations, e.g. given the general aims of education, the key competencies, the goals of fields of education, with regard to the subject matter, text, the possibilities of students, their learning style, age and individual differences; to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of didactic means;

- For work with text: to select text appropriately (in terms of the interests of students, difficulty and adequacy, appropriateness to subject matter); use the diversity of texts (e.g. authentic); to select text
suitably for different purposes (to adopt new curriculum – for self-reflection, to create the skills to learn, to motivate); to know how to induce appropriate activities with text and questions to the text;
- To know how to prepare, implement and evaluate lessons using text; to analyse and identify reading literacy in curriculum documents; to know how to apply work with text information to curricula of one’s own teaching qualification subject; to know how to motivate students to work with text information;
- To apply the principles of modern teaching: open teaching (induce and implement, among others, actions with other institutions that facilitate the development of reading literacy); constructivism; activity approach teaching; personal experience; use of social factors – cooperation, discussion and communication, contacts, respecting the autonomy of teacher and student, cooperation with other teachers; complexity in teaching (so-called integration of content) and authenticity.

C. Personality competencies
- To create, think, be motivated to work on yourself, for the development of others in this area; to be independent; to understand yourself (self-reflection, self-assessment, self-education); to have positive attitudes to students, to new contents, conditions and means of reading literacy;

We consider this attempt at a concise definition of the content of CDRL to be an open system that can become, in addition to the other above mentioned, a guide for the didactic focus of pedagogical texts, for the content of teaching of future teachers, as well as teaching within the scope of further education of teachers.

2. Empirical Investigation

2.1. Problem

Knowledge of the situation in pedagogical practice is a prerequisite for subsequent measures. Therefore, we ask ourselves questions concerning the situation among teachers in this area and among students of pedagogical faculties. The opinions, knowledge and attitudes of existing and future teachers have an impact on pedagogical practice. The information obtained will help us form a picture of the situation among teachers of various subjects, of the depth of thinking and the attitudes on the given issue. The opinions reflect the degree of knowledge of the importance of reading literacy in discipline, which is taught, the level of knowledge and the experience of teachers with reading literacy, their attitudes to it, and their degree of motivation to develop it in teaching. In terms of pedagogy students, their experience and attitudes to the given topic form the starting point for preparation in pedagogical practice in regards to focus and content of teaching.
Specifically, we are interested in the following:
1. What opinions, experience and ideas do educators have about the competencies of teachers to form reading literacy?
2. How do teachers reflect their competencies for the development of reading literacy in students?
3. What attitude do pedagogy students have to reading literacy and to its application in teaching (teaching qualification) subjects?

2.2. Objectives of the Empirical Investigation

The general objective is to identify and analyse the situation in the area of CDRL of teachers in teaching practice and pedagogy students in undergraduate training.

The specific objectives are:
1. Identify and evaluate teachers' opinions and suggestions on the content of teacher competencies for shaping the reading literacy of students.
2. Find out how teachers assess their own competencies for the development of reading literacy of students.
3. Determine the attitudes of pedagogy students to reading literacy and its future application in teaching (teaching qualification) subjects.

2.3. Methodology of Empirical Investigation
In the empirical investigation, questionnaire surveys, interview and analyses of documentations were applied. There were two different questionnaires of own design – one for teachers in teaching practice and the second (different) for pedagogy students.

2.4. Structure of the Examined Sample of Respondents

Of the 71 teachers in total, the largest group of respondents was formed by language subject teachers (32 persons), grade 1 primary school teachers (26 persons), the lowest number was teachers of non-language subjects (13 persons).

Table 1. Structure of the examined sample of respondents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of years of teaching practice</th>
<th>Grade 1 primary school teachers</th>
<th>Grade 2 primary and secondary school teachers – language teaching qualification</th>
<th>Grade 2 primary and secondary school teachers – non-language teaching qualification</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>M</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1–5</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1)*</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6–10</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>(1)*</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 and more</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*number of secondary school teachers

3. Results of the Research Investigation

3.1. Opinions and suggestions of teachers on the content of teacher competencies for shaping the reading literacy of students

We have categorised the proposals that the teachers made into five groups according to content relatedness, as shown in Table No. 2.

Table 2. Opinions and suggestions of teachers on the content of teacher competencies for shaping the reading literacy of students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opinions and suggestions of teachers on the content of teacher competencies for shaping the reading literacy (RL) of students</th>
<th>Number of responses</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Ability to plan and apply RL to teaching</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>38%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. General competencies of teachers (universal)</td>
<td>79</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Qualities and skills of teachers</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Knowledge of reading literacy</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Ability to diagnose and evaluate RL of students</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total responses</td>
<td>371</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Respondents most frequently commented on the skills of the teacher to plan and apply reading literacy in teaching. Within the scope of more detailed analysis of this group No. 1, means of application (teaching methods) were mentioned for work with text. Of the total of 140 statements, methods were mentioned in 95 cases. Often, however, they were not specified in greater detail. We can assume that in this regard teachers do not have clear and required knowledge of reading literacy.

The next partial highest score in this category concerned the requirements for teachers in the area of texts (a total of 36 cases). Teachers should know how to assess them, as well as know how to properly select them with regard to the
needs of students. Teachers should also know authors and book titles from the field.

Table No. 2 shows other frequently made statements related to general competencies, qualities and skills of teachers. There are 71 interesting statements, according to which a teacher him/herself should be able to master reading literacy. We believe that this is happening (see international research SIALS, Matějů, 1998). Another question is, however, to know how to apply reading literacy to pedagogical practice, and make this phenomenon didactic.

The least number of teachers mentioned the relationship of reading literacy to the curriculum (only 5 responses). The analysis of results in terms of teaching qualification structure of the respondents and the number of statements on the given subject will also provide an interesting view. From this perspective, we can say that most statements on the competencies of teachers in the development of reading literacy of students on average were stated by language subject teachers (5.9 statements on content). This was followed by grade 1 primary school teachers (5.1 statements per person). The least statements with a large gap from others are found in teachers of non-language subjects (3.7 statements per person). This is probably due to the fact that they do not teach language subjects, they do not pay attention to reading literacy and apparently were not even prepared for this task, which is why they do not express themselves so much on the subject.

Furthermore, the analysis of the statements with regard to curriculum competencies in relation to the teaching qualification of respondents is interesting. Grade 1 primary school teachers and teachers of language subjects of grade 2 primary and secondary school most commonly express themselves on the subject of methods of work with text and the qualities of teachers. The teachers of non-language subjects most frequently expressed their opinions on general competencies. It is evident that this group of teachers does not have the required knowledge of reading literacy of students and deeper notions. Given that all teachers are to develop this competency, we can not be satisfied with this situation. Therefore, teachers of non-language subjects require assistance in this area.

3.2. Self-assessment of skills, which teachers manage well and in which they would like to improve

After drawing up a list of knowledge and skills required for the development of reading literacy of students, the respondents identified in their list, which they manage well and which they could use improvement in. The teachers did not express their opinions on all statements, therefore, the sum of the identified skills is lower than the total number of written statements. We categorised the statements into areas according to relatedness of the content of statements. The results are presented in Table No. 3.

Overall, teachers expressed themselves both positively and negatively to the use of reading literacy means, mainly texts and methods (activities with texts). It is apparently because reading literacy is most clearly manifested in activities with texts. They expressed their opinions the least on the evaluation of students in this activity and on cognition of the personalities of students. This is worrisome as therein lies the success, motivation and effectiveness of the development of reading literacy of students.

As has already been suggested, the groups of teachers of various teaching qualifications also differed in their focus on different topics.

Grade 1 primary school teachers were the largest group to express that they have general teacher competencies. This is consistent with the scope of subjects they teach and also expresses the basic competencies of teachers, which are highly required for the youngest students – motivation to their profession and communication (various forms). In their opinions, they are most in need of expanding their knowledge of reading literacy and methods.
Grade 2 primary and secondary school teachers with language teaching qualification most positively expressed themselves on the use of means of reading literacy (texts and methods); however, to this topic, they also stated that they need to improve.

Furthermore, teachers of non-language teaching qualifications also most frequently mentioned this aspect positively in the similar spirit as the group of teachers of language teaching qualification. Self-reflections on what they need to improve are negligible and relate to three topics (areas): general competencies, knowledge and means of forming reading literacy. As has already been stated, they refer to competencies in a much smaller scale and breadth than their colleagues.

From the results we conclude that strengthening the competencies for the development of reading literacy in this group of teachers is the most desirable. The problem that we have discovered among teachers at continuing education events for teachers is that these teachers do not consider it necessary to pay attention to and improve in this area.

Table 3. Ranking of the areas according to the number of positive and negative self-assessment statements

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Positive self-assessment</th>
<th>Negative self-assessment and needs for improvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In the area:</td>
<td>Number of statements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Methods of motivation to reading</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Qualities of teachers</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.–5.</td>
<td>Motivation to reading</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.–5.</td>
<td>Knowledge of texts and authors</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* total number of positive statements = 158 statements
* total number of negative statements, need to improve = 71 statements

3.3. Which competencies do teachers need to improve in?

As shown in Table No. 3, the teachers expressed and carried out self-assessment in a total of 229 testimonies. They positively expressed themselves in 158 qualities, negatively in 71 cases.

The highest number of positive ratings were achieved in the command of the means of motivation to reading (32 statements, i.e. 20% of the total number of positive assessments), as well as the qualities of a teacher, for example, creativity, enjoyment of work etc. in 22 cases (i.e. 13.7% of the total number of positive assessments) and in communication skills (16 statements, which represent 10.1%).

According to the self-assessment of teachers, they most commonly need to improve the overview of what’s new in literature and new authors (111 statements, i.e. 15.5% of the total number of negative assessments). It is interesting that the most common needs include the need to improve motivational methods to reading and work with text (9 statements, i.e. 12.6% of the total number of negative assessments), even though other teachers also stated them in greater numbers as a positive that they have command of. In 8 cases (i.e. 11% of the total number of negative assessments) the teachers even stated that they would like to learn more about reading literacy and to have a better command of the selection of suitable text for students. See Table No. 3 for the topics and their ranking. Other counts of statements are not so numerous, which is why we have not incorporated them into the ranking table.

Teachers stated what they have command of in greater numbers than what they do not have command of. It is
significant, particularly in terms of motivation. On the other hand, it is possible to create an idea from the overall overview, of whether they understand the essence of RL and know the means of its formation. Many important and indispensable competencies do not appear among the said statements on required knowledge and skills as in the overall list (see Table No. 2).

Moreover, from the responses we also conclude that teachers envision readership under the concept of reading literacy – thus a positive relationship to reading and literature. We draw these conclusions from the sparse data about reading from text (only 1 statement), from the absence of topics on the specifics of texts in various fields and on the particularities of work with them. An exception is the use of encyclopaedias (2 statements). This is also contributed to by the fact that respondents from the group of grade 1 primary school and grade 2 primary school teachers are mainly native language or foreign language teachers.

In terms of teachers of non-language subjects, there is no information about the specifics of texts in their fields and they do not provide closer details about reading, which they include.

By analysis we find that competencies of a more general nature, albeit important, appear in top positions. This is also confirmed by negatively assessed data, thus insufficiently developed competencies. Motivation is always at both poles.

What is interesting, but understandable is that some if the statements overlap into other key (life) competencies.

3.4. Experience and attitudes of pedagogy students to the application of RL in future teaching

It was found. For example, that the actual concept of reading literacy itself is understood by pedagogy students and teachers in practice in a very simplified way, mainly as reading with comprehension. Furthermore, the results confirm that very little guidance exists in teaching for mastering reading strategies, procedures, how to understand text, how to reflect on it, how to streamline processes of one’s own reading. Students also lack motivation to expand reading. These may be the causes of the failure of our students in PISA and PIRLS studies.

The attitudes to the fact that they should include the development of RL in their subject are not received clearly by students. We naturally find their concurring opinion among students of language subjects, and an indecisive or opposing one in other cases.

4. Conclusion

We have presented a proposal for the structure of teachers’ competencies for the development of reading literacy of students. Through empirical investigation we reached the main finding on the areas of reading literacy that teachers consider important in this field and that they have command of and vice versa. We also learned which groups of teachers have an acceptable level of CDRL and which groups need help in this area. In terms of pedagogy students, similar attitudes to the application of reading literacy in practice are reflected. Given that their knowledge and attitudes to the questions addressed were positively changed after teaching focussed on this issue, we see ways in it to measures in pedagogical faculties and measures of a more complex nature regarding the content and means for further education of teachers, infrastructure (adding methodological handbooks and popularising publication activities) and even for the curricular area and support.

References


The text presents the results of the empirical investigation concerning the given issue, which was conducted over a period of three years within the scope of specific research in 2011-2013.
Specific research No. 2102/2011 “The readiness of teachers to work with text information”
Specific research No. 2135/2012 – Use of narrative methods.
Specific research No. 2104/2013 – Information strategy of students.