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Development of Reading Literacy Based on the Work of Textbooks (Workbooks)

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1. Introduction

One of the primary objectives at the beginning of the school attendance is apart from social adaptation of the child is also to develop habits towards appropriate rules of the classroom (school), needed for obtaining of new knowledge in the field of reading literacy. Important elements for successful coping and a total development of the
child in younger school age are: teacher’s personality, forms and methods of work with the use of a game provided by a teacher, alternation of activities during lessons, individual approach towards a child and also suitable choice of teaching aids, textbooks and school equipment.

2. Theoretical basis

The proposed research was focused only on one article acting on motivation and literacy of children in the 1st up to the 3rd year of Primary School, namely on textbooks (spelling books, reading books) and workbooks published and used at schools in the Czech Republic.

The textbook is completely a unique type of a book which is intended for pupils and teachers in educational process. We classify it among school didactical texts, where e.g. spelling books, workbooks, reading books, teaching manuals or dictionaries belong. Of course during teaching there are also other teaching materials used.

Currently the science and society develop very fast and new information must be given to pupils. Because of the fact the textbooks are being updated all the time. Experts of the following field who are authors of these books very often face a problem how to transform the knowledge of science and other areas correctly into the content of the books. The curriculum must be on the first place scientifically true, but at the same time accessible, comprehensible and understandable for the pupil.

The research on textbooks around the world has generally a strong position among other researches. It is on a high level especially in Germany, Japan, and the USA and in Scandinavian countries. There exist special workplaces which deal with textbooks. Many of them even publish their own magazine. In France there is even a Special centre for information about school textbooks, since 1789 there has been a database of all French textbooks. (Bielaková, 2010)

For example IARTEM (International Association for Research on Textbooks and Educational Media) provides international coordination and information base for all countries. It organises international conference every two years. The last one was in September 2013 and was held in Ostrava in the Czech Republic called: Textbooks and Educational Media and the next one will be held in Berlin, Germany in the year 2015.

A group for research of curriculum deals with this issue, it was established at the Institute of Research for School Education of the Department of the Faculty of Education at Masaryk University (IRSE) originally as a Group for research of textbooks from the initiative of Professor Josef Maňák. Its objective is to produce quality and research-validated knowledge from the field of curriculum, educational policy and creation and evaluation of curriculum documents, where textbooks also belong. In this area theoretical basis and criteria of evaluation can be found in publications by Maňák, Knecht, Janík (2007, 2010). Bialaková (2010) from Masaryk University Brno deals with evaluation of textbooks for the 1st grade of Primary School, whose evaluation criteria can be the basis for our research investigation.

Nowadays trend of the growth of textbooks and publishing houses editing spelling books, reading books, workbooks and writing books for children leads to a certain chaos and confusion on our market, but mainly towards bad orientation of the teacher when selecting the best study material for children at the 1st grade of Primary School. Also for our graduates entering the practice is the orientation in all those spelling books and reading books confusing. Therefore, we decided to map the situation in the field of using spelling books, reading books but also the workbooks in the 1st up to 3rd year of Primary School in the Czech Republic.

3. Research objectives and methods

The aim of the specific research was to find out the most widely used spelling books, reading books and workbooks published in different publishing houses for children in the 1st up to 3rd year of Primary School which leads to the development of basic elementary and base literacy (teachers’ opinion). The evaluation criteria are based on assessed characteristics of textbooks in the Czech Republic (Maňák, Knecht, 2007). The sub-objectives were also:

- To find out the reasons which lead the teacher for selection of the given textbooks and workbooks.
- To find out positive and negative points of the used textbooks and workbooks based on respondents’ views.

A questionnaire survey was used during the research. A non-standardized questionnaire had been chosen to fulfil the objectives of the research, which is considered to be still the most frequent tool of teaching, psychological, demographic and other research (Skutil et al., 2011).
The questionnaire consisted of 26 questions, where 5 questions focused on demographic data. The rest of the questions were divided into two parts. The first part applied to textbooks for elementary teaching of reading (reading books, spelling book, live alphabet etc.) – there were 9 closed or semi-closed questions and one open question. The second part of questions (12) was related to notebooks and workbooks for elementary teaching of writing (workbooks) and a used method of reading and writing skills, again with closed, semi-closed questions with two open questions.

The created on-line questionnaires were filled by respondents with the help of social network (facebook.com, twiter.com…), or by email. The total return of the questionnaires was 614, i.e. 89%. The questionnaire was statistically processed by the program MS Excel 2010. The obtained data are presented in graphs and in percentage.

3.1. Research sample

There were 614 respondents in the research sample – made of teachers from the first grade of Primary School. (Table 1) The most teachers were from the 1st year (43%), next the questionnaire was filled by answers of teachers of the second graders by 31% and teachers from the third grade by 26%. The sample was made of 98% female and male 2% respondents, that corresponds with the situation in our primary schools, where women teach mainly at the 1st grade of Primary School.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<tr>
<td>1st year</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>43</td>
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<tr>
<td>2nd year</td>
<td>190</td>
<td>31</td>
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<tr>
<td>3rd year</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>26</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>614</td>
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Respondents’ age distribution (Table 2) ranged between 41 up to 50 years of age (40%). There were 35% of older teachers and minimum age representation (6%) is at the age of 18 up to 30. This also relates to the length of their practice (Table 3). The most abundant group were respondents with 21 till 30 years of experience (38%). Experienced practice between 11 and 20 years represent 31% of participants. Surprising fact is that electronic version of the questionnaire was filled by 15% respondents who have more than 31 years of practice. The research sample represents all regions in the Czech Republic. Středočeský county is the most represented one (16%), the least is Liberec county and Moravskoslezsky county (1%).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age of the respondents</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>18-30 years of age</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>31-40 years of age</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50 years of age</td>
<td>246</td>
<td>41</td>
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<tr>
<td>51-60</td>
<td>204</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>61 or over</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>614</td>
<td>100</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Length of experience</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Valid Percent</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1-5 years</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6-10 years</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>8</td>
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3.2. Research results - textbooks (spelling books, reading books)

The aim of the research was to find out what textbooks – spelling books and reading books are the most being used mainly in the 1st year of Primary School (Fig. 1). With the greatest prevalence, from the respondents’ answers, there are textbooks from Publishing House Nová škola (48%). The second most described publishing house is Alter (16%) and the next in the line is the publishing house Fraus (9%). The popularity of publishing houses – textbooks is linked either with marketing or with the length of the publishing its textbooks on the market. Klett belongs to younger publishing house. Also publishing house Fraus is placed on the 3rd position that also belongs relatively to the young ones.

We were interested in the reason and according what criteria the teachers select their textbooks for their pupils (Fig. 2). As we had presumed, the respondents mostly concentrate on the content and didactic views (36%). Significant criteria for selection is also the range of the textbooks (17 %), i.e. enough exercises, texts etc. The graphics for small children of younger school age is obviously important due to motivation and the development of imagination and fantasy (13 %). Striking is the answer of 8% teachers, who have no chance to take part in selection of textbooks (Fig.2). Out of all responses 85 % of respondents have further material for teaching from their textbooks.
Based on the research as mentioned in the introduction part, the most frequent are reading books and spelling books by Nová škola publishing house. The textbooks had been selected by teachers primarily by didactic and content approach (Fig.3), furthermore by sufficient range (20 %) and the graphics of the textbooks (15 %). The results correspond with the order of selection of individual textbooks.

According to the respondents, between the strongest points of the textbook are comprehensible and appropriate texts, clarity of textbooks and diversity of exercises and activities (Fig. 4).
The respondents who selected the Publishing house, 34% presumes that the textbook by this publishing house has no weak points (Fig. 5). Some of them (19 %) have a feeling that there are some tasks of the same or similar type in this textbook and some pedagogues lack more tasks for individual work (16 %). In the following question 89 % of teachers who use a reading book or a spelling book for practicing of elementary reading from the given publisher, concern it as the best out of all tested and at the same time they would recommend it to novice teachers (only two percent of the respondents would not recommend — the spelling book).

On the open question: “If you could have a chance to change something on this book, what would it be?” responded 127 respondents. For the most frequent comments of the textbooks by the publisher Nová škola were:

- The length of the texts in the textbook.
- More fill in gaps activities, crosswords and puzzles.
- More tasks for individual work.
- More practising exercise, diversity of exercise.
- More tasks for text comprehension.
- A better binding, the textbook cannot be open easily in order that pupils could write into it.
- A better compliance with the workbook.
- More interesting tasks for gifted pupils.
It is good that our teachers pay attention to gifted children and therefore ask for extra more additional material and issue tasks in the textbooks for these pupils.

The second most frequently used textbooks are by Alter publishing house. Also there the textbooks are selected by teacher mainly by didactical and content point (36%). For a limited content of this contribution we would not list all graphs and tables. Among strong points of the textbooks according to the respondents are the clarity of the textbook (40%), comprehensible and reasonable texts and interesting illustration. The total 28% of respondents consider that the spelling book or the reading book by Alter publisher does not have weak points (Fig. 6).

For negative point the respondents state the tasks of the same or similar type and a few tasks for individual work of pupils (Fig. 7). Over 80% of teacher who use the given textbook for the 1st year recommended the book to novice teachers as it suits them the best out of all tested reading books or spelling books.

On the same open question, what would they change or add in the Alter textbooks, among the most frequent comments were (responded 94 respondents):
- More exercises, variety, diversity of exercise.
- Most tasks for individual work.
- Most tasks for text comprehension.
- More gap fill activities, puzzles, crosswords.

We do not list other comments as their frequency was low. Listing of negative aspects is similar to textbooks of the publishing house Nová škola, it is only in a different order of frequency.

Third the most used books are by the publisher Fraus. Spelling books and reading books were the same as
the others, selected by teacher mainly by didactical and content view. The textbooks of the given publisher differ in listed positive aspects. (Fig.8). For the positive aspects 22 % of respondents marked the application of interdisciplinary relations. For the next positive views are quality methodological guide and comprehensible and appropriate texts.

![Fig. 8 Positive aspects – strong points of the Fraus textbook](image)

Also there 22 % of respondents consider that the textbooks by the publisher Fraus do not have weak points (Fig. 9). The others for the weak point of the book marked a few tasks for individual work and a few exercises for text comprehension and practicing. An interesting fact was that, “only” 77 % of respondents would recommend these books to a novice teacher (from the ones who use the books) and 21 % of respondents state that nor the reading book nor spelling book suits them (out of all tested).

![Fig. 9 Negative aspects – weak points of the Fraus textbook](image)

Only 31 teachers responded to a question about changes in textbooks by Fraus for the 1st year of Primary School and the most comments included:
- More exercises for curriculum revision.
- A better illustration.
- Clarity and comprehensibility.
- Simplification of text, words and phrases.
More exercises for individual work of pupils. We do not list other comments as their frequency was low. First objections appeared on illustration and complexity of the text.

3.3 Research results – working book for the 1st year of Primary School

The second group of our research represented workbooks for teaching elementary writing and their publishing houses (Fig. 10). With the greatest prevalence according to our respondents, are workbooks as well as textbooks used by the Publishing house (49%). The second most frequent known publisher, which is far away from the publisher Nová škola, is Alter (14%) and the next in the line is the Publishing house Fraus (7%). The order changes beside the spelling books and reading books up from the 4th place, where 7% of teachers work with workbooks by the publishing house Studio 1+1, furthermore with the publisher Didaktis and subsequently with publisher SPN. Until then comes the Publishing house Prodos. In textbooks the 4th place for popularity gets the publisher SPN (7%) and is followed by publisher Prodos.

![Fig. 10 Publishing houses of workbooks for teaching elementary writing](image1)

The most respondents (26%) selected workbooks from the same publishing house as textbooks (Fig. 11). Other workbooks are evaluated by the content and didactical view, the same as spelling books and reading books.

![Fig. 11 Reasons for selection workbooks for teaching elementary writing](image2)

As far as we know from the research investigation that the most widely used workbooks for teaching elementary
writing are come from the Publishing house Nová škola. Teachers have most chosen the workbooks for teaching elementary writing due to used spelling books and reading books (27%). Furthermore the educationalists determine the choice for workbooks also according to didactical and content view, namely in 21%, for sufficient range in 18% and for graphic design in 16%. Unfortunately, 6% of teacher does not have the chance to decide about the selection of workbooks for their pupils of the 1st-3rd year of Primary school. According to the respondents among the strongest points are the compliance of workbook connection with sufficient tasks and exercises as listed in Fig.12.

![Fig. 12 Positive aspects of workbooks for writing Nová škola publishing house](image)

The greatest shortage is represented by stereotyped exercises and insufficient space for practising letters and words (Fig. 13). We consider for positive aspect that 55% of teachers do not presume that the workbooks by Nová škola publishing house should have any insufficiency and even 97% of respondents are satisfied with the workbooks for teaching elementary writing by the above mentioned publisher and they suit them the best out of all tested (70%).

![Fig. 13 Negative aspects of workbooks for teaching writing Nová škola publishing house](image)

Among most frequent comments of 105 respondents in workbooks by Nová škola publishing house are:
More “blank“ lines for the pupil’s need, corrections, dictation.
- More text for transcription.
- Enlarge workbook format.
- A better compliance with the textbook.

Other frequency of comments was low.

The second most widely used workbooks for teaching of elementary writing come from Alter publishing. We shall not state the graphs according to the allowed range of the contribution. Also these workbooks had been selected by teachers mainly because of the same publishing of used textbooks, furthermore according to its didactical and content point (26 %), due to the range (16 %) and graphic design (11 %). The respondents state the strongest points in the adequacy of tasks (25 %), clarity of the workbooks (in graphic design – 23 %), sufficient space for practising letters and in adequate compliance with the spelling book (16 %). Stereotyped exercises (14 %) are the greatest shortage and the lack of tasks for individual work of pupils (13 %). Also 58 % of teachers presume that it is not necessary to change anything on workbooks and 96 % of pedagogues are satisfied with the workbooks for teaching elementary writing by Alter publishing and it suits them (62 %) out of all tested publishing houses the best.

The most frequent changes which would the teachers make in workbooks or had comments (responded 28 respondents) were the following:
- Compliance with the textbook.
- Insufficient space for practising more difficult letters and phrases.
- Auxiliary lines in the whole pack.
- Preprint for left-handed pupils.
- More blank pages, more blank lines.

The third widely used workbooks for teaching of elementary writing come from Fraus publishing house. The teachers also selected the same publishing house which they used with spelling book and reading books (30 %). Another reason of the selection of workbooks for elementary writing by Fraus publishing house is its content and didactical point (25 %). The striking fact it that in 12 % the teachers did not have a chance to take part in selection of workbooks for their pupils. In the workbooks by Fraus publishing house the respondents appreciate appropriate tasks and exercises (20 %), next the graphic clarity as for the previous publishing houses (17 %) and the compliance with the textbook – interdisciplinary relations (16 %). The teachers consider insufficient space for practising (19 %) as the greatest insufficiency that prevails among other comments, which are e.g. inappropriate tasks and stereotyped exercises – 9 %. There are 85 % of respondents satisfied with the workbooks for teaching of elementary writing by Fraus publishing. Together 52 % of teachers are satisfied with the workbooks the most from all tested.

Among the most frequent comments the teachers state:
- More space for practice.
- A better methodological arrangement.
- A better task formulation.

3.4 Summary

Based on the research results it is seen how the respondents perceive the textbooks of the Czech language for the first grade of Primary School, more precisely said for 1st – 3rd year. According to the fact that these are pedagogues of primary education who work daily with the textbooks, the findings are considered to be beneficial and interesting.

Almost a half of the respondents use textbooks by Nová škola publishing house. The textbook Alter was marked as the second widely used (16 %) and the next in the line was the textbooks by Fraus publishing house (9 %). An interesting finding is that the whole 85 % of teachers still acquire other material for the textbook. Pedagogues select the textbook mainly according to the content and didactical point. The greatest strong points of spelling books and reading books are according to the respondents comprehensive and appropriate texts. One third which uses the given book does not see any weak points.

The clarity of the books is considered to be the greatest advantage of the textbooks by Alter publishing house. For the negative aspect the respondents consider the task use of the still the same or similar type. What the educationalist appreciated about the textbooks by Fraus publishing house is the application of interdisciplinary
relations and also the methodological guide. From the three above mentioned publishing houses is Fraus the least recommended to novice teachers mainly for its sophistication during the work with textbooks.

The second goal of investigation was to make a survey on teachers’ views on workbooks for teaching of elementary writing for the 1st – 3rd year of Primary School.

Workbooks by Nová škola publishing house are also widely used (49 %). As in textbooks there is the second place for Alter publishing house (14 %) and the next is Fraus publishing house (7 %). More than a quarter of respondents choose workbooks from the same publisher as for spelling books and reading books (Nová škola). Almost all users are satisfied with the workbooks. The teachers would mainly upgrade in more extra blank lines for practicing writing letter and words.

And respondents who use workbooks by Alter publishing house select according to the listed publisher. They see positive aspects in workbooks which have well-chosen tasks and advantages. The educationalist would appreciate more exercises for individual work of pupils. Workbooks by Fraus publishing house they mainly appreciate adequate tasks and graphic design - clarity.

At the end of the questionnaire we investigated what method of training is used for pupils in 1st class who learn to read and write. Out of all surveyed, in the Czech Republic there is an analytical-synthetic method (70 %), which is most entrenched, next is genetic method (12 %) and the combination of these two methods (9 %). And a very genuine Czech method Sfumato (6 %) is coming to the fore.

5. Conclusion

The research result showed that there is a great choice of textbooks, spelling books, reading books and workbooks for practising of elementary reading and writing. The pedagogues draw from the selection of choice from work material for pupils mainly from the content and didactical view, sufficient range and graphic design. We consider that these are the right criteria of choice. For the positive aspect and also the aspect of compliance with other subjects and cross-cutting themes.

We tried to map the usability of several spelling books, reading books and workbooks of individual publishers. We believe that information from teachers about advantages or disadvantages listed in work materials would help also students – novice teachers in their future practice, in orientation of current textbooks, workbooks for teaching of elementary reading and writing in the Czech Republic.

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References