

RESEARCH INTO FACTORS INFLUENCING THE (NON)INTEGRATION OF INNOVATIVE METHODS INTO THE TEACHING OF LITERARY EDUCATION AT LOWER-SECONDARY SCHOOLS: PRESENTATION OF RESEARCH SURVEY

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Abstract: The primary goal of this contribution is to present our research survey, which focuses on uncovering factors influencing the inclusion or non-integration of innovative methods into the teaching of literary education at lower-secondary schools. We view innovative methods as approaches to teaching that target texts and are built on didactic textual interpretation. At the same time they join together the three basic elements of experiential literary education, i.e. reading, creativity and teaching. The presented research survey builds on the results of research that dealt with the constitution of a separate subject-didactics of literature in a conceptual sense, including those which centred findings on the integration of innovative teaching methods into teaching and educational practice at various stages of education. The research tool used in the presented qualitative research will be interviews with randomly chosen respondents. The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. They will be evaluated using grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin.

Keywords: research, literary education, lower-secondary schools, innovative teaching methods, integration.

1 Introduction

The goal of this contribution is to present the research survey, which centres on the study of factors influencing the inclusion or non-integration of innovative methods into literary education at lower-secondary schools. In choosing our research topics we were primarily guided by the fact that much of the expert and subject-didactic knowledge and ability that students of teaching fields acquire in the process of graduating in their various subjects, they then – for various internal or external reasons – fail to apply to the teaching and educational process at the educational level they are qualified to teach. This claim is based on the results of interviews with the graduates of the relevant fields of teacher education. We believe that, based on the results of the submitted project, it will be possible to implement various forms of targeted intervention with a focus on the transfer of students' acquired competencies from an academic environment into practice. The goal of the research survey is not to define the content of the aforementioned interventions, but rather to use basic research findings to determine the factors that influence the process of transferring subject-didactic knowledge, which will allow the determination of specific measures (in the sense of possible changes to the teaching of those subjects), at the level of cooperation between academia with schools, during the further education of teachers in practice or in the area of certain transformations of the content of the relevant subject-didactic courses taught at university pedagogical faculties.

Experts contend that literary education should become a fully-fledged field based on an aesthetic approach, of an aesthetic-educational nature, on the direct reading experience pupils have with texts or on an orientation towards literary works (Hník, 2014). Concerning this, Wildová (2005, p. 173) writes: "The transformation process is applied in practice, but for most teachers this involves only partial elements of the whole system."

1.1 Research goals

The primary goal of the presented research is to discover to what degree teachers of literary education integrate innovative teaching methods into their teaching and educational practice, in

terms of the findings of the current subject-didactics of literature and the factors that influence their decisions. At the same time we will be looking at the degree to which ideas concerning the application of these teaching methods into literary education differ within all the tested respondent groups, comprised of teachers and students of pedagogical courses at the Department of Czech Language and Literature of the Faculty of Education at Palacký University in Olomouc. Interesting conclusions can also be reached by comparing the results of the two groups, namely second year follow-up master's degree students and teachers with the shortest previous teaching experience.

2 Innovative teaching methods in connection with the teaching of literary education

The current didactics of literature frequently utilises the term experiential literary education. This is a "goal-oriented concept falling within the intentions of an innovative conception of literary education" (Hník, 2014, p. 35).

During classes on expressive subject, specifically during literary education classes, "the experience for the pupil may be that of the work of art itself" (Blokeschová, 2014, p. 39) because "art can send out novel impulses and become an inspiration to students" (Zeleňáková in Blokeschová, 2014, p. 39). The innovative conception of literary education, in connotation with experience as the primary intermediary between recipient, textual interpretation and its meaning, is concerned with the reader and interpretation, in the sense of finding narrative meanings relatable to the reader. Within this innovative conception of literary education, the act of reading should predominate (in other words an active – reading – encounter between pupils or students and a work) as well as creative activities: creative expression (compare Hník, 2007; Hník, 2012 or Hník, 2014). Literary education consists of three components: reading, learning and creativity (Hník, 2014). According to the innovative conception, these component aspects of teaching literature should work together. The result of the mutual cooperation of reading, learning and creativity for pupils and students is the aesthetic and artistic product of the reception of artistic narratives (Hník, 2014). Through constructive activities, the pupils are introduced to literature in aesthetic and scientific terms. Through creative activities they acquire values, attitudes and form their own axiological systems (see Hník, 2012 or Jurčo & Obert, 1984).

One of the three basic components of the innovative (reader-based, interpretative) conception of literary education is creativity, or rather creative literary expression, which Hník (2014, p. 122) defines as "creativity in the sense of creative (literary) pupil activities accompanied by appropriate reflection" and categorizes it into one of two areas: 1. "reflection on reading and reflection on creation", which relates to the perception of reading as an independent type of creative expression and 2. "reflection on one's own reading", connoting the perception of reading as a permanent value.

Creative literary expression may impact the forming of the recipient for example by laying out positive and negative models, which may help the reader position themselves relative to various aspects of life. Creativity itself – the cornerstone of creative literary expression – may take on various forms, which can be summarized as creative approaches that "make use of creative literary expression and lead to deliberate and systemic fulfilment of literary and educational goals as well as the associated personal educational goals" (Hník, 2014, p. 59).

Creative interpretation, the core of literary creative expression, "is one of the paths to a meaningful literary education, also fulfilling a reader-based and communicative conception of the subject" (Hník, 2014, p. 71).

The goal of the project is not to discuss the application of individual creative interpretational concepts in teaching and educational practice, but to research the factors influencing their level of integration into the educational process of literary education at lower-secondary schools. Here we consider it sufficient to mention certain approaches to interpretation, in order to make it clear in the context of Hník (2014) or other scholars (for example Vala, 2017 or Vala et al., 2015) which methods we view as innovative (creative): text completion, inspired creativity, story retelling, summarizing the primary setting of a lyrical text, paraphrasing a narrative, imitation of a storytelling style, reconstruction of a record, outline creation, assuming a foreign viewpoint (another's role), evaluating text variants, condensing and cutting content, comparison of texts or working book titles. Among the mentioned methods, Gejgušová (2009) also includes utilization of the audio qualities of a text, repeated reading, quiet reading, using a work's title, working with the first page of a publication, working with the narrator's role, the internal construction and coherence of a text, working with rhymes, textual comparison, intertextuality, creating illustrations, dramatizations, using a text's keywords or the creation of literary texts. The above-mentioned methods of course include creative writing (see Fišer et al., 2012).

Some of the methods corresponding with the innovative conception of literary education were integrated into an anthology of texts about the Shoah (Mašát, Sladová, Šmakalová, 2020). The results of the research, which had the goal of assessing several texts that the authors considered including in the abovementioned monothematic collection, showed that during literary education classes, pupils are not currently fully prepared to work within the intentions of the methods of creative expression. We believe that one of the causes of this situation is the fact that teachers from the pedagogical field of Czech language and literature either don't know about these methods, or know about them, but are unable to work with them, or abandon their application within classes due to lack of time. We are of the opinion however, that the most significant issue is the fact that, despite their subject-didactic readiness, for various reasons teachers fail to introduce them into actual teaching. One of the goals of the presented project is uncovering precisely the factors leading to such teacher decisions.

3 Summary of the current state of the problem

The presented research survey is building on the results of research that dealt with the constitution of a separate subject-didactics of literature in a conceptual sense, including those which centered findings concerning the integration of innovative teaching methods into the actual teaching and educational practice of the various stages of education. Of these, one may mention for example the research of Ondřej Hník, who studied the experiences of first- and third-year university students with the teaching of literature. A crucial question was "How did the teaching of literature at lower-secondary schools and secondary schools take place?" The results of the research survey may be summarized by stating there was "an absence of the reading experience" (Hník, 2014, pp. 23–25). The sample of 203 respondents in the first phase of the research (2009–2010) came to similar conclusions, which we summarized with the phrase "absence of the reading experience". Hník continued with student questioning in the years 2011 and 2012, collecting a total of 191 testimonies.

Similar research was carried out as part of the doctoral thesis *Integration of Texts at Grammar School of Věra Radváková* (2012). A total of 1,478 students of four- or eight-year grammar schools participated in the research. The findings of this extensive research were summarized by the author as follows: "Our research showed that very little attention is paid to working with texts during school classes. Text has still not become the basis for teaching literature at a grammar school level. It is as if teachers were afraid to designate entire lessons of literary education to textual interpretation, not even artistic texts are regularly used in literature classes" (Radváková, 2012, p. 152).

We take the position that the findings of these two selected research surveys can be seen as evidence of a certain level of non-integration of innovative teaching methods into literary education at various educational levels in the Czech Republic. The researchers did not however track the factors influencing teacher decisions not to include the given teaching methods into the teaching and educational process at the corresponding levels of education. When studying the results of further research in some way related to the application of innovative teaching methods to literary education in practice (see Gejgušová, Hrdličková, Kubeczková, Novák, Zychová, 2017; Hábl, 2013; Lederbuchová, 2010; Poláček, 2016/2017), we failed to uncover any findings that would show the level of integration of innovative teaching methods of literary education into the actual teaching of literature at lower-secondary schools from the teachers' viewpoint, with a focus on the factors influencing their decision to include or not include this area of methods into the implemented curriculum. Hník (2010/2011) tracked what form the teaching of literary education took based on student testimonies, Sulovská and Nyčová (2017) just like Vala and Sladová (2013/2014), concerned themselves with the implementation of poetry into literary education lessons. Sztokowski and Dobešová (2012) tracked the opinions of teachers of the subject Czech language and literature, on the optimum use of multimedia when teaching literary education at lower-secondary schools.

Hník (2012, p. 63) pointed to two vital points that must be fulfilled to integrate and develop innovative conceptions of literature into school practice: 1) ensure "corresponding literary and didactic research with an ontodidactic and psychodidactic focus" ("Psychodidactic aspects take into account that teachers are intermediaries for pupils' knowledge, where the issue is more than the transfer of the curriculum, but also a growing emphasis on a pupil's personality, on the development of their cognitive, educational and personal characteristics" (Kosíková, 2011, p. 11); 2) create corresponding teaching materials, "which would take into account the findings of the latest literary and didactic research and the outputs of research-oriented projects (...) and support conceptions of literary education that meet the actual needs of pupils in the 21st century." Hník's recommendations are however proposed at a general level. We believe that unless we can uncover those factors that form the opinions of teachers who fail to include innovative teaching methods in literary education, it will be impossible to functionally react to teachers' needs.

The innovative conception of literary education narrowly corresponds with its communicative conception. Šed'ová, Švaříček and Šalamounová (2012) carried out research concerned with the communicative aspects of teaching. The primary goal of the research was to provide a comprehensive report on methods of teaching communication in the classroom. The research team observed teaching in 7th, 8th and 9th grades of lower-secondary school classrooms. Data collection took place as a combination of several methods: (1) "in-depth teacher interviews; (2) direct observation; (3) video studies; (4) a pupil questionnaire" (Šed'ová, Švaříček, Šalamounová, 2012, p. 28).

From the research findings it is clear that while there is currently a call for a communicative conception of (not only) literary education, corresponding with the integration of innovative teaching methods therein, Czech teachers are not prepared to apply this approach to actual education. Teachers are often unwilling to "step down" to the authority level of the pupils or, taking into account the saturation of the curriculum, they consider any pupil exchanges as a waste of time or are worried about their own potential failure. To an extent, we disagree with the study authors' conclusions. We believe that graduates of pedagogical faculties are sufficiently equipped with the subject-didactics to carry out their profession, having been systematically trained for such. In our opinion, the problem lies precisely in the fact that the application of the acquired abilities and competencies into pedagogical practice is influenced by various factors that weaken the inclusion of innovative (creative) methods into actual teaching situations or may even lead to their

elimination. Unfortunately, there exist no sufficiently evidenced claims about which internal or external factors these are.

4 Research methodology

The research tool used in this qualitative research will be interviews with randomly chosen respondents (see the *Research survey respondents* section). The interviews will be recorded and subsequently transcribed. Their evaluation will be done using grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin, in four phases: open coding (segmentation of interview records), categorization (explication of phenomena discovered in phase one), axial coding (discovery of relationships between categories) and selective coding (identification of key categories and explication of the central category). The approach to evaluating qualitative research was chosen primarily because it "enables in-depth insights into the topic" (Gulová, 2013, p. 46). We believe that the methodology in question will contribute to a useful assessment of the interviews. The anonymization of all testimonies is a matter of course.

4.1 Research survey respondents

The qualitative research will take place with two groups of respondents. The first of these will be teachers of Czech language and literature with various lengths of previous teaching experience, professionally active at lower-secondary schools in the Olomouc Region. The second group of respondents will be students of teaching programs at the Department of Czech Language and Literature of the Faculty of Education at Palacký University in Olomouc. Based on data provided in the document *Pedagogical Workers in Regional Education* (2021) available at the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic, as well as data from the Czech School Inspectorate and Czech Statistical Office, a quota of respondents from the ranks of teachers was established.

Based on the data provided in the documents above, the number of men and women working as teachers at the lower secondary level of education in Olomouc Region was established, as well as their corresponding lengths of previous teaching experience. At lower-secondary schools in the Olomouc Region in the school year of 2019/2020 there were a total of 4,066 teachers, of which 19.6 % were men. Establishing the respondent sample size for the first phase of the research survey was based on the statistical formula for the minimum number of respondents in a qualitative research survey, $N_{min} = \frac{1}{\epsilon^2} \ln(2)$ (Chráska, 2007, p. 26). Interviews should therefore be carried out with at least 15 teachers divided into three groups, based on the length of their previous teaching experience. Dividing teachers into three categories according to the length of their previous teaching experience corresponds with the stratification of teachers provided in the above-mentioned documents. To increase the informative value of the interviews as well as ensure their greater variability, the interviews will be carried out with twice the number of teachers.

The choice of specific teachers fulfilling the given criteria will be carried out by simple random choice (dice roll). Using the list of full primary schools in the Olomouc Region, 30 of these will be randomly chosen and out of these, in the next phase, based on teacher lists from each given institution, specific respondents will once again be randomly selected (drawing lots with names). If it fails to fulfil the established criteria, the selection will be repeated. In exceptional cases (where a given school does not have a teacher fulfilling the necessary criteria, e.g., length of previous teaching experience), the random selection will be carried out once more at the level of choosing institutions from those remaining.

Random selection will also be carried out for the second group of respondents, the university students. Using the system of tertiary education, we will filter out students of the study programmes who will be attending the required year of study at the time of the research survey and subsequently by simple random choice (drawing lots with names) those designated for

interviews will be selected. In case any of the chosen respondents refuses to take part in the interview, the respondent selection process described above will be repeated.

The number of students designated for interviews was established using the same formula for establishing the minimum number of respondents for a qualitative research survey. Our basis was the number of students who enrolled in the 1st year of a bachelor's degree in Czech language and literature with a focus on education and the 2nd year of a follow-up master's degree in Teaching of Czech language and literature for the lower-secondary stage, full-time, in the 2021/2022 academic year. We intentionally eliminated students of combined forms of study in the relevant study programmes because many of these are already active in teaching practice and that fact might subsequently skew the research results. The necessary minimum numbers of respondents were established as 1 man and 1 woman from each study programme. Once more we decided to carry out interviews with twice the number of respondents. The interviews will therefore take place with a total of 8 respondents (i.e., 2 male students and 2 female students of the aforementioned study programmes). The choice of year for the students was intentional. We believe that students in the 1st year of a bachelor's degree in Czech language and literature with a focus on education are not yet equipped with a sufficient knowledge of subject-didactics in literature and therefore the preconceptions with which they are coming to their chosen field of study will be significantly influenced by the literary education they received at their secondary school. This offers a comparison of our findings with the relevant results of the research by Hník (2014) or Radváková (2012). Students from the second group mentioned have already completed two semesters of the subject Didactics of literature and have also gained some practical teaching experience required by the course. To a certain degree, it may be said they will be entering into teaching practice (where they can try out various methods and forms of teaching) with slightly biased preconceptions concerning the ideal form of literary education classes.

5 Discussion

Without a doubt, the presented research survey has several limitations. The most significant of these are the testimonies of the participating respondents themselves. Researchers cannot influence the truthfulness of their answers, since verification of their answers would require listening in on their classes, something that depends on the willingness of both the teachers and administrators of the individual schools. Of course, throughout the interviews we will try to use control questions to determine how believable a respondent's answers are and to what degree they are a presentation of their theoretical knowledge, which is not actually being applied in real teaching situations. Another limitation is the choice of respondents. Despite being carried out using the above-mentioned random selection, we are aware that merely fulfilling the requirements for the number of respondents in a qualitative research survey regarding its representativeness, will not make the results of the planned research survey fully generalizable. This will always depend on the teaching and educational conditions that the given school has at its disposal or the degree to which teachers are able to pursue further education or even on the conditions set by the school administration. In the group of student respondents, their testimonies will be primarily influenced by their own activity during lessons, the level to which they have completed their tasks during Didactics of literature classes or their motivation to pursue the teaching profession after graduating from university.

Despite the aforementioned research limitations, we are convinced that the results of the research being carried out can provide insights into the current situation in the given area. Based on the results of the research it will be possible to carry out targeted interventions, both in further teacher education, as well as possible transformations in the education of the given subjects as part of undergraduate teacher training.

6 Conclusion

In this article we have presented the planned research survey, whose goal is to discover the degree to which teachers of literary education integrate innovative teaching methods into their teaching and educational practice, according to the findings of the current subject-didactics of literature and the factors that influence their decisions. The planned research survey builds on research surveys being carried out in the given area and we will be comparing our findings with their results. Despite certain limitations of the planned research, we are convinced that its results may contribute to an improvement in the transfer of acquired experience and knowledge in the academic sphere or the area of further teacher education into teaching practice.

The research will be carried out through interviews with 30 teachers of Czech language and literature divided into three groups based on their previous teaching experience. Students of the first year of the Czech language and literature course and students of the last, that is fifth year of the same study course, will also take part. From each of the student groups, interviews will take place with eight individuals.

The interviews will be evaluated based on grounded theory according to Strauss and Corbin, in four phases: open coding, categorization, axial coding and selective coding. We are of the opinion that the chosen approach to interview evaluation provides a certain assurance that it will be possible to clearly postulate the findings of the research survey in accordance with its primary goal.

We believe that the results of the planned research survey may contribute to an improvement in current teaching in literary education, as was theoretically supposed to happen when the teaching paradigm of the subject in question changed. The results of the research survey may also be viewed as a starting point to carry out certain targeted interventions in the education of future teachers as well as in teaching practice. Of course, this opens up possibilities to expand the survey to other universities, not just in the Czech Republic, but to possibly carry out interviews with teachers from other regions of Europe and the world. The results of research with this focus may contribute to the comparative study of undergraduate training for future teachers, as well as those teachers already involved in teaching and educational practice. The respondent testimonies could facilitate an exchange of views between the participating individuals, enriching education in the given area.

Finally, we believe that presenting the completed research may serve as an inspiration for similar research surveys, centering on the discovery of factors influencing the (non-)integration of innovative methods into the teaching of (first language) literary education at lower-secondary schools or at other levels of education.

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