Записники учнів як інструмент довготривалого дослідження та освіти

Крістіна Студена

Кафедра чеської мови, Факультет освіти, Університет Палацького в Оломоуці, ЧЕСЬКА РЕСПУБЛІКА, Оломоуць, площа Зізково, 8, E-mail: kristina.studena@gmail.com

Навчання мови у Чехії (по відношенню до чеської початкової освіти) можна розділити на декілька частин; в цьому тексті, ми зосередимо увагу високо на літературній освіті. Здебільшого, її функція полягає у наданні учням доступу до літератури мистецтва за допомогою літературних уроків та їхніх інтерпретацій.

Інтерпретацію літературного тексту можна розглядати по-різному; дидактичну точку зору ми розглянемо як найважливішу. У даній статті ми розглянемо лексічний метод постановки проблеми в контексті літературної освіти і представимо декілька відмінностей, що на ньому базуються, у тому числі використання учнями записних книжок.

Ми також покажемо як записи книжки учнів можуть використовуватися в літературній освіті (і не тільки), як вони можуть виконувати роль; які форми вони можуть приймати; а також в чому має пере надатися вчитель, щоб зробити «метод записника» прийнятним для учнів.

Згодом, ми зосередимо увагу на використанні записників у довготривалому науково-дослідницькому проекті, що реалізується в межах літературної освіти в двох початкових класах шкіл Чеської Республіки. Ми використовуємо цілі даного дослідження, визначаємо межі чотирьох основних явищ, які ми помітили в ході нашого аналізу учнівських записників. Ми також представимо фактичні результати аналізу записників учнів, які є частиною довготривалого дослідження. Ми детальніше розповімо про результати спостережень та повну інформацію щодо гендерних питань.

Ми також представимо у тексті помічені нами успіхи учнів у сприйнятті та інтерпретації прочитаного. На закінчення, ми підсумуємо переваги використання записниками учнів в освітній практиці записників з точки зору як вчителя, так і учня, як в освіті та і протягом виконання науково-дослідних проектів.

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The pupils’ notebooks as a tool in long-term research and in education

Kristina Studená

Department of Czech language, Faculty of Education, Palacky University Olomouc, CZECH REPUBLIC, Olomouc, Zizkovo nam.8, E-mail: kristina.studena@gmail.com

Czech language education contains the Literary education, its function lies mainly in making the literature of art accessible to pupils via literary excerpts and their interpretations. The literary text interpretation can be thought of in several ways, including the use of pupils’ notebooks. The paper will also show us how the notebooks can be used in literary education, what roles can they fulfill, what forms can they take and what the teacher has to make sure of to make the notebook method accepted by his or her pupils. Then, we will focus on the use of the notebooks in the long-term research project, which is being realized within the boundaries of literary education in two elementary school classes in the Czech Republic. We will outline the objectives of this research, we will delimit four basic phenomena, which we have observed during our analysis of the pupils’ notebooks. We will also be presenting actual results of the analysis of pupils’ notebooks. Our text also covers presentation of noted advancements in pupils’ reading reception and interpretation. At the conclusion, we will sum up the benefits of the use of the pupils’ notebook in educational practice.

Keywords – literary education, interpretation of a literary text, long-term research, second part of elementary school education, reflecting, reader’s reception, experiential education, pupils’ notebooks.

I. Introduction

Literary education constitutes one of the parts of Czech language secondary education; its aim is to help pupils get acquainted with distinguished authors of both Czech and world fiction through excerpts from their famous texts. Pupils read the texts with the teacher, working with them and interpreting them. In the first part of our contribution, we will explain the term “interpretation”, because we use the pupils’ notebooks during interpretation activities. We will cover their functions, possibilities and forms in the next part. Then, we will focus on the usage of the notebook as a tool of a long-term research in the context of secondary education and we will outline actual results of the analysis of the notebooks.

II. Interpretation of a literary text

The interpretation of the text is is crucial for experiencing the text artistically, as well as for its understanding. When we use the term “artistic interpretation”, we mean “reader’s search for significance of sign systems of the text with regard to their mutual relationships”. [1] According to Lederbuch, we can distinguish between artistic and didactic interpretation – while the artistic interpretation covers the analysis of an artistic value of the text, the didactic one aims to support pupil’s reading and communicative skills. [2] Depending
on the chosen level of the text, we can also differentiate between textual analysis (poetics, stylistics, lexical level and so on) and theme analysis (authorial position, characters, themes, and plot). [3]

From the didactic point of view, interpretation methods can be viewed through the extent of participation of pupils – information reception method places them in the role of a listener, while the teacher provides ready information (this approach is typically used for poem analyses, which have set interpretations, for writers’ biographical information and so on). [4] Reproductive method partially brings pupils into the process of interpretation; it is based on set models and grants the teacher an ultimate verdict (for instance, retrospective re-telling of an excerpt, asking questions regarding the text, textual and theme analysis). Due to their undemanding character, the aforementioned methods are used quite frequently by teachers; however, the pupil’s participation during text interpretation is minimal, which creates a barrier between a pupil and a literary work.

Hnilč [5] analyzes the problem of insufficient interpretation participation, because of which pupils don’t have an opportunity “to open themselves to the text, to comment on it freely, to openly say if they like it or not (fundamental esthetic judgment), if it speaks to them and, if so, in what way (educational capacity of the text – does the text have this capacity, what exactly is the nature of this capacity?), if, for instance, the events and the characters in the text somehow relate to their personality or previous reading experience; they don’t even have an opportunity to understand the meaning of their learning within literary education”.

The problem lecture method relies on an equal participation of both the teacher and pupils, while the teacher specifies the problem and pupils (helped by the teacher) are trying to find the solution. The experience of pupils’ self-activity is the basis of experiential teaching and learning. J. Quay describes the educational process through experience and reflection, “at the centre of experiential educations adaptive experience, mowing towards future improved experiences via a process which combines experience and reflection.” [6] The reader’s experience starts by reading, the reflection helps to awakening feelings and perception connected to the text.

III. The pupils’ notebook – functions and possibilities

The pupil’s notebook is not directly connected to any specific method, because it is so versatile as to cover both the reproductive (writing down the teacher-given information) and productive (pupils’ response) activities. The notebook can help pupils to reflect, to evaluate and to express themselves; it can also perform introspective and self-fulfilling roles. In educational practice, the notebook can also serve as a means of communication and understanding the pupil’s personality, as a medium of feedback and as an instrument of research (for instance, for monitoring given phenomenon’s psychological, educational or didactic development).

However, the function of the notebook differs in relation to desired objectives which we are trying to achieve through the notes. The teacher directs real usage of the notebook via explaining its function to pupils – we will achieve one set of results when there are no rules as to the structure and the content of the notes, while limiting the writing to school hours only will generate different results.

For successful use of the notebook (meaning frequent and long entries of value), help and guidance provided by the teacher is a must. During ordinary education, pupils are seldom given opportunity to reflect on the subject, let alone in a written form. It has been proven important to explain (at least briefly) the purpose of the notebook, to say how it can help both pupils and the teachers, what can be written in it – pondering about subjects and reflecting on them (regarding reading, methods used by the teacher, other experiences connected with literature and art in general), pupils’ own writings (poems, short stories, texts resembling newspaper articles), reproductions (copies of favorite texts, quotes, poems, song lyrics and so on), when is the writing obligatory (during school hours), how will the obligatory entries be revised and how will the privacy of other entries be observed (for instance, we can present certain text only if its author agrees).

This “manual” concerning the usage of the notebook can help pupils to make use of it in such a way that it will be truly beneficial for them, as well as for us. It is useful, at least at the beginning, to observe the quantity and frequency of pupils’ entries (and to repeatedly encourage writing in the notebook if necessary, perhaps even promote it through leading questions or explanation of alternative approaches).

If pupils are able to endorse the usefulness of the notebook and to create their own writing motivation, we can regard the teacher’s introductory facilitation as successful. Negative reception of the notebook can be caused, for instance, by excessive stress regarding the entries, feeling of obligatory nature of the notebook or its uselessness, too liberal confines of the entries and so on. It remains to be seen if we can rectify possible negative stance of pupils or if the first impression of this method is irreversible.

As well as its function, the teacher can define the form of the notebook – it can be an ordinary notebook with
lines, pupils can also hand in their notes in electronic version. We have decided on the more traditional form of the notebook, which pupils could choose freely and decorate it to their liking. An alternative option is to let pupils create their own notebooks (during their literary education, for instance). Both the form and the purpose of the notebook should lead to forming a relationship between pupils and their notebooks, which will subsequently increase their note-taking motivation.

IV. The pupils’ notebook as a research tool

The role of the pupils' notebooks in our project is as important as interpretation activities. The notebook can be used primarily for reflecting upon reading experience, teaching methods and interpretation activities, as a means of communication between a pupil and the teacher. Pupils (with the help of their notebooks) are learning to become more aware of the experience provided by literature, as well as to think about the text critically.

In our research project, we use Pike’s concept of long-term research (Pike monitored the adolescent readers’ development of reader’s reception of poetry for three years; his study took place in England). Students reflected on their experience, viewpoints and understanding of poetry in notes and discussions, which Pike later used to prove the changes in readers’ attitudes. [7]

Long-term research, which has been started in two elementary school classes at the beginning of 2010, is supposed to monitor the development and changes in pupils’ reader’s reception and relationship to literature, as well as to literary writings in general. During education, we focus on two main areas – application of various methods and activities of text interpretation and usage of pupils’ notebooks for the purposes of reflecting pupils’ reading experience.

Pupils (encouraged by teacher or of their own volition) write down their observations in their notebooks; their activity is carefully observed and increased by motivational activities, if necessary. They can hand in their notebook at any moment, not for inspection, but as a medium for more intensive communication. Pupils are asked to submit their notebooks at the end of an educational period (half a year) for research purposes; the act of handing one’s notebook in is optional and is not bound by any obligations (teacher’s evaluation, grades and so on).

Two classes are participating in this research project; all in all, there are fifty-four participants. The research has begun in seventh grade (twelve to thirteen years) and will be finished with the end of an obligatory school attendance (ninth grade, fourteen to fifteen years). Therefore, we have an opportunity to monitor the change of pupils’ understanding and perception of various literary texts during three years. The results we have gathered so far are incomplete; we assume that they will develop further. We also strive for demanded fulfillment of research phenomena. Thus far, almost thirty pupils have submitted their notebooks for analysis.

V. Analysis of the notebooks

The research aim of pupils’ notebooks analysis is to gain a complex view of the pupil’s development in relation to literature and literary writings. During our notebooks analysis, we outlined the phenomena which we wanted to study. We were interested mainly in the monitoring of the development of pupils’ ability to interpret a literary text. We evaluated this ability according to following criteria:

1. measure of expression of one’s own opinions about the text and views on it,
2. comprehensiveness of the entry in regard to a number of separate statements,
3. stylistic and lexical coherence of the entry,
4. comprehensiveness of the entry in regard to its extent.

Furthermore, we observed pupils’ measure of frankness and gender differences.

Although pupils should always comment primarily on the text or its theme, they usually start by describing the story, characters and motives; they conclude their entries with their own evaluation. Dependence on the teacher’s comments is evident, because they start their own commentary with repeating the question or part of the teacher’s discourse.

Pupils are expressing themselves quite openly, they are not ashamed of their opinions or of their negative or positive stances (negative opinions are often related to dullness of the given text, to fatigue or boredom). Expressing one’s opinion about works of art is gender-specific. Girls responded to the text emotionally, they were trying to empathize with characters and situations; they noticed primarily the social aspects. Boys were evaluating the text with regard to their experience and abilities; they were more interested in the assessment of setting and abilities of characters. Girls tend to be more diverse in their opinions, boys often limit their entries to simplified comments, such as liked it – didn’t like it, good – bad, would read it again – wouldn’t read it again. This last criterion (if they would or would not read the text or the book again) can be, in context of their notes, understood as the essence of their view of the text. If this characteristic appears in some reflections, we can be certain that the book reached out to pupils.

The entries that pupils write at home (magazine article review, book review and so on) tend to be more creative in terms of lexical and stylistic quality. Their writing abilities, their ability to approach the text creatively and their opinions are far more pronounced here. In general, girls’ texts tend to be longer and stylistically better than the texts of their male counterparts. Girls often contemplate the theme in more detail, they make use of rhetorical questions, they answer their own existential questions and so on; boys often show surprising insights and controversial opinions, they choose humorous word phrases and demonstrate better sense of humor overall.

Differences in frequency and length of entries are also gender-specific – girls are more meticulous and initiative than boys. The same thing occurs with the graphic layout and decoration of notebooks – girls are more particular about it.
Our analysis also shows that submitted notebooks come almost exclusively from pupils who used them regularly and actively to write down their observations. We interpret this as an effort to avoid possible repercussions on part of those students who did not use their notebooks much, or as an effort to promote their hard work on part of the others.

Development of pupils (on the basis of analysis of their notebooks submitted in this project) can be seen in areas of expressing oneself, in openness in presentation of one’s own opinions, in critical thinking about a literary text (which manifests itself, for instance, in bright remarks), in understanding of literary writings and also in view on the literature as a whole.

In comparison with the beginning of the project, pupils are able to meaningfully talk about a literary text, to analyze it, to express and defend their viewpoint, to readily answer questions and to ask them. They also understand the value of literature for themselves, as well as for our society in general, much more than at the beginning.

**Fig.2 Grafic by girl’s notebook**

Conclusion

We can see the benefits of use of pupils’ notebooks mainly in the domain of viewpoints and opinions, in the development of abilities to express oneself and to think critically and in granting pupils safe space for self-fulfillment. For teachers, pupils’ notebooks can be a valuable tool of feedback via its uncensored pupils’ opinions about texts covered in lectures, a means for more intensive communication with pupils, an instrument for pupil’s personality development; last, but not least, they can be used for the monitoring of chosen phenomena. Because of its versatility, pupils’ notebooks method can be used to achieve various educational goals and to develop pupils’ competences not only in literature education lectures.

**References**