

The initial teaching of literacy across Europe

Early Literacy Curriculum in Slovakia

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Facts to know

„Preschool“ education is a non-compulsory part of Slovak education system, that provide care for children aged 3 to 6, and that existed outside the national education system until being incorporated into it in 2008.

The first preschool curriculum was published in 1965 and, notwithstanding minor changes, remained in use for over 40 years until 2008.

The centralized education policies and curriculum also shaped teachers' beliefs, and under the communist system there was little room for schools and teachers to be creative and reflective in their teaching practices.

Reading education relies mostly on phonics. As Slovak is transparent language this approach should enable to master the „technique“ of reading in a short period of time to focus of reading comprehension and literacy skills. Although, the proportion of young people who lack the basic reading skills required for further learning is growing, with the most recent data indicating it is 32.1% (OECD, 2016).

Theoretical and empirical background of the „NEW“ LITERACY CURRICULUM

Literacy education emphasizing “literacy practices” and “literacy events” instead of “reading and writing instruction” (Street, 1997).

Piagetian (cognitive-constructivist) perspective, and Ferreiro’s (2003) psychogenetic theory of literacy development.

Emerging literacy with the idea that a literacy-rich environment provides children with opportunities and reasons to explore print and writing through spontaneous cognitive activity, leading to the gradual acquisition of literacy (Black & Ammon, 1992)

Vygotskian perspective, a learning approach based on the socially mediated construction of knowledge through interaction with adults in dialogue and discussion that goes beyond the child’s existing capabilities.

Anne van Kleeck’s model used as an conceptual framework for the LaC section.

Language and Communication SECTION in the new national curriculum

The primary aim is to develop the child's communicative competences at all language levels, making use of the development potential of the written word, that are an important foundation for learning at subsequent education levels.

Use of a wide range of texts from different genres of children's literature with various important functions is suggested:

- They are a source of rich language experiences that enable children to **develop the spoken language and communication skills**, and stimulate all areas of language development – vocabulary and syntax, the appropriate use of grammar, standard language and socially appropriate forms of expression.
- It is a rich **source of linguistic knowledge**, helps develop all the key developmental foundations of literacy (develops listening and reading comprehension, understanding of the meaning and function of the written word, awareness of the relationship between spoken and written forms of language) in terms of both content and form.
- It is an important source of **positive experiences**, motivates and promotes interest in and a relationship with the written culture, education and learning.

Language and Communication SECTION in the new national curriculum_ overview of the conception

I. Spoken Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication conventions• Articulation and pronunciation• Grammar and standard language	
II. Written Language	1. Understanding the Meaning and Use of Written Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exploring the functions of the written language• Understanding the explicit meaning of the text - vocabulary• Understanding the implicit meaning of the text• Exploring literature genres, figurative language and narrative conventions
	2. Exploring and Understanding the Formal Features of Written Language	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Concepts about print and exploring print conventions• Phonological processes and phonemic awareness• Graphomotor skills required for writing

Language and Communication SECTION in the new national curriculum_ example of the structure

2.1 UNDERSTANDING THE CONTENT, MEANING AND FUNCTION OF THE WRITTEN WORD (WRITING)

2.1.1 Exploring the function of the written word (writing)

Performance standards	Content standards	Evaluation questions
<p>Can explain in simple terms why the written word (writing) is important and give basic examples.</p>	<p>Through the use of a variety of genres and by incorporating them into educational activities the teacher will demonstrate the function of the written word so the child is aware the written word:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - facilitates communication (over and above spoken language) in the absence of the addressee, - is a source of knowledge and information - is a source of enjoyment (emotions, experiences, fantasy) and a means of expression, - has many practical uses (e.g. is an additional and easier way of remembering information, provides a means of managing one's own activities and those of others, provides information about practical activities. 	<p>Is the child interested in using and making an effort to use the written word?</p> <p>In which situations and for what purposes?</p> <p>Is s/he interested in 'writing' to others?</p> <p>Does s/he want to 'write' to someone?</p> <p>Does the child attempt to formulate simple messages?</p> <p>Does the child try to find the answers to questions in books that interest him or her?</p>

RECEPTION OF THE „NEW“ NATIONAL CURRICULUM

Work on national curriculum started in 2012, coordinated by State Pedagogical Institute, document came into force in September 2016

During the process 3 ministers of education left their office, what in each time resulting into a new cycle of reviewing process.

Institutions involved in education policy: State School Inspection (SSI) and Centre of Teaching Methods (MPC) and both two teachers' associations, the Society for Preschool Education (SPV) and Slovak branch of the World Organization for Early Childhood Education and Care (OMEP), and also teachers were invited to take part in the review.

Statements of all of them collected during the process of reviewing the curriculum were analysed and used in revising the document and preparing the conception for in-service teachers training.

RECEPTION OF THE „NEW“ NATIONAL CURRICULUM

The most discussed aspects of the new conception:

The focus on experiences of children with **written language** (including text comprehension) was viewed as overly challenging for children:

The idea that writing should be encourage was rejected, even pre-conventional writing among preschools. “Why should a teacher encourage pre-conventional writing? Discover how you write a short message, word, or story?”

Even the expectation that a child should be able to write her / his name was commented: “Some children can write their name but only because they want to. It is not right to encourage that in preschool!”

Recommendation to create **literacy-rich environment** in the classroom was rejected as pointless.

It was recommended that **concepts about print** (including development of print-related vocabulary) and **literate behaviour** generally, should be excluded from the suggested list of knowledge and experiences preschool-age children should gain.

On the other hand, most reviewers thought the curriculum lacked detailed descriptions on the teaching of graphomotor skills and required more detailed specifications of of graphomotor pre-writing stage, and requirements for “sitting correctly, body posture, the angle of the paper, holding the pencil correctly...”