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Language Education of Children at the Early Schooling Age in the Aspect of Handbooks Used

Edukacja językowa dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym w aspekcie stosowanych podręczników

Introduction

For the majority of people, speaking and listening are central activities in life: much more important than reading and writing. That is why the ability to effectively articulate one's thoughts is fundamental for children, ensuring their success both in social and school life. Speech opens up the doors of our reality to the world of the other person, allowing one to inform others about our needs, feelings and any knowledge we wish to convey. The ability to put together coherent utterances greatly facilitates initiating contacts – both with adults and with one's peers. It enables active participation in various – often complicated – communicative situations, giving one the chance to experience autonomy and independence, and creating opportunities for mutual dependence with others and for conveying one's attitude to the surrounding world. In schools today, the use of language plays a key role. In the context of early-school education, the capacity of the young student for self-expression provides the basis for building contacts with one's social surroundings, for one's ability to explore the world, and for forming one's own outlook. The ability to express thoughts is quite rightly taken to constitute a space of potentially intensive formative education, with the latter aiming to both shape and improve it.

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During this period of the life of a child, teaching and assessment are carried out by means of spoken language. When participating in a school class in various situations that require language practice, children of early-school age have the chance to discover its attributes: they learn about and construct concepts, discover the meanings of basic parts of speech, uncover for themselves the sense of specific utterances, but also come to experience its sheer power. This power lies in the skilful choice of words, some of which may be benign and pleasing to hear, while others are harmful and unpleasant. Acquiring such knowledge, together with the capacity to frame one's own utterances through speech, furnishes the basis for the subsequent teaching and acquisition of reading and writing skills.

The above deliberations lead us to conclude that knowledge of one' own mother-tongue, and the ability to put together utterances correctly, are the very foundation of adult life. Linguistic education should therefore be a priority in Polish schools, and teachers of Classes I–III, who are responsible for organising education at this level, should possess a variety of didactic means, making the education they offer attractive to pupils. One of these means, obligatory and ever-present in Polish schools today, is the textbook. However, it is worth considering the question of whether the textbooks used by teachers in Classes I–III include suggestions relating to Polish language that would be appropriate for a creative education. To what extent are children at school able to participate in various communicative situations on then basis of having creatively constructed their own utterances? The aim of the present paper is to draw attention to the problems involved in the linguistic education of children from Classes I–III, using the findings of selected authors. In this context, textbooks used in the course of early-school education are analysed with respect to the questions, instructions and exercises they direct at children. It turns out that some erroneous ways for teachers to approach working with children in the context of Polish classes were put forward. However, on the basis of the available literature, the paper also points to ideas that could potentially be used. It aims to highlight the need for further reflection on the future of linguistic education for small children, pointing to the necessity of changes in the outlook of teachers and emphasizing the extent to which they should further modify how they work with pupils from Classes I–III.

Language and speech: some terminological clarifications

Language, as a universal phenomenon present in the culture of every nation, has became a subject of research for many scholars. These draw attention to the constant modifications language has been subject to since

ancient times, right up to the present. Ways of communicating have changed throughout the ages, as language tracks the society itself, evolving with it. Together with the development of particular social groups, language is perfected, enriched, and sometimes – unfortunately – impoverished. According to Ziembiński, language is a system that, through certain rules, includes a set of verbal signs, by means of which certain rules link thoughts of a certain type while others specify acceptable ways of linking these signs to form compound utterances.[1] From a semiotic point of view language is described by three groups of rules: rules that specify the vocabulary of a given language, semiotic rules, and syntactic rules. Similar notions are present in the definition of Demel, who claims that language is a set of signs (a code) used by a given community, that should be mastered by each of its members if they are to understand others and be understood.[2] Language is a closed set of prosodic (melodic, rhythmic, accentual), phonic (phonic, inscriptional), morphological (inflexional), lexical (word-based) and sequential (phrasal) symbols, as well as a structure of grammatical rules according to which we construct and read (i.e. understand) texts. And, of course, language is an inseparable element of our everyday reality: it is "a system of symbols organised according to specific rules that allows us to receive information and sensations in the form of words and to interpret their meaning."[3]

Language belongs to human speech as a part of the latter. It is a practical realisation of speech, the sound-based understanding that occurs between two persons in which one informs the other about something. At the same time, differences that can be traced between language and speech are observable on three levels:[4]

1) Language is a social process. It is used by multiple persons who belong to the same cultural circle. Linguistic community concerns, amongst other things, the fact that there is a given system of words and grammatical rules organizing the speech process and making communication possible between people. Speech, on the other hand, is an individual process, almost as distinctive for each person as their fingerprints.

2) Language is a structure, so it has an enduring existence in time. It is to be found in a very similar form in the psyche of many people, and can survive for ages with no significant changes. Speaking and understanding, on the other hand, are of a temporary character.

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[1] Z. Ziembiński, *Logika praktyczna*, Warszawa 2013, p. 15.
[2] G. Demel, *Elementy logopedii*, Warszawa 1987, p. 7.
[3] S.P. Morreale, B.H. Spitzberg, J.K. Barge, *Komunikacja między ludźmi. Motywacja, wiedza i umiejętności*, Warszawa 2008, p. 141.
[4] T. Milewski, *Językoznawstwo*, Warszawa 2009, pp. 5–8.

3) Language is abstract, as it is built up out of words and grammatical rules that do not refer to particular and specific phenomenon, but rather to their theoretical representations (e.g. horse in general) or to general relations between them. Contrary to the above assumptions, speaking and understanding assume the character of specific processes, reflecting specific concerns (e.g. current affairs).

Speech fulfils many functions, but the authors we shall be concerned with here enumerate three basic ones, which in their opinion are the most important:[5]

● Communicative function – transmitting information between people, communication;

● Expressive function – characteristic for the sender; judging from voice alteration, intonation, and their way of speaking, we are able to determine the age, sex, emotional state, affiliation and education of the speaker;

● Semantic function – drawing attention to certain phenomena of the world immediately around us that are perceptually accessible to the persons engaged in the conversation, and presenting more distant or unseen phenomena too.

According to Więckowski, what is vital to the education of pupils of Classes I–III, especially when it comes to Polish, is the development of the basic functions of language: i.e. both semantic and non-semantic functions.[6] The semantic functions of language pertain to the reality with which a child is becoming acquainted: they are quite basic in character and make possible their perceiving of a world, or a social-and-natural milieu. We can distinguish two types of function here: the representational and communicative functions of language. The representational functions of language determine a specific representation in language of the specific elements of something that obtains in reality. On the other hand, communication is dependent on an understanding of the significance of relations holding between linguistic signs and some portion of reality one is being informed about, which is represented by these signs. The non-semantic functions of language describe the emotive attitude towards reality of the speaking subject, and are present in both expressive and impressive functions of language. A proper process of linguistic education cannot focus solely on providing essential knowledge about the mother-tongue, as it should also develop skills for transmitting and describing the emotions and relations that arise in the situations of our everyday life.

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[5] Cf. ibidem; also E. Grodziński, *Wypowiedzi performatywne o doniosłości prawnej lub quasi-prawnej*, [in:] *Zagadnienia socjo- i psycholingwistyki*, edited by A. Schaff, Warszawa 1980, pp. 158–60; I. Kurcz, *Psychologia języka i komunikacji*, Warszawa 2005.
[6] R. Więckowski, *Pedagogika wczesnoszkolna*, Warszawa 2004, p. 155n.

Indicators of communication in the mother-tongue
of children of early-school age

Within the pedagogical literature, the notion of competences appears a great deal, and under a variety of interpretations.[7] The term is more often applied to knowledge, but also to skills, in the sense of abilities to do things (and related attitudes) which allow for efficient operations with respect to the implementation of planned courses of action and life tasks. Meanwhile, in the 1970s the term "linguistic competence" was introduced by Noam Chomsky to refer to the tacit linguistic knowledge given to every individual. It encompassed not only the rules that allow one to formulate and grasp sentences, and to assign meanings to them, but also the capacity for understanding and producing grammatically correct sentences. According to Chomsky, moreover, the notion of a competence is inseparably tied to its attributes: namely, creativity, grammaticality, acceptability and interiorization.[8]

Over the course of their time spent in early-school education, the development of the linguistic and communicative competences of children takes place in many areas. Analysing the Basic Curriculum, along with associated curricula relating to an integrated education, we may observe that a typical pupil finishing the first stage of education will exhibit a high level of communicative competence in his/her mother-tongue:

● He/she clearly communicates his/her observations, needs and emotions;

● He/she reads texts and analyses and interprets them;

● He/she is able to express his/her wishes, invitations etc. orally and in written form;

● He/she is able create, both orally and in written form, utterances lasting several sentences, subject to editorial requirements (narration, description);

● He/she copies texts, is able to write from memory and can follow a dictation;

● He/she recites poems, taking into account punctuation and intonation;

● He/she chooses adequate forms of communication in various social situations;

● He/she uses information conveyed orally or in writing;

● He/she engages in dialogues in a culturally appropriate way (listening to the utterances of others and trying to understand them, using the information conveyed)[9].

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[7] B. Dudel, *Istota i rodzaje kompetencji kluczowych,* [in:] *Rozwijanie kompetencji kluczowych uczniów w procesie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, edited by J. Uszyńska-Jarmoc, B. Dudel, M. Głoskowska--Sołdatow, Kraków 2013, pp. 14–17.

[8] M. Głoskowska-Sołdatow, *Porozumiewanie się w języku ojczystym*, [in:] *Rozwijanie kompetencji kluczowych uczniów w procesie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej*, op.cit, p. 59.

[9] Ibidem, p. 65.

The development of such a diverse, and materially wide-ranging, set of linguistic competences demands that the teacher break with the traditional, transmission-oriented approach to knowledge sharing. Naturally, in the course of education, there are things that can only be presented in the form of items of vocabulary that simply have to be mastered. One should remember, however, that it is important to organise situations in which pupils will have the opportunity to express themselves and use the vocabulary they have mastered. During Polish classes, for example, natural circumstances must be fostered, that are conducive to oral self-expression (e.g. when a pupil reports interesting events or personal observations, conveys individual impressions and assessments of books they have read, or of films, stage productions or even football matches thay hacve seen, reports on personal or team work or creative activities, on the gathering of information from various sources, assessing its value).[10] What ewe have in mind here, then, is a process of education in which the child may be a receiver, but most of all a creator – of education based on play, and on one's own attempts at language use and word-formation. Only such circumstances will prove conducive to the development of all of the linguistic functions of children in their early-school phase. Moreover, it is not just teachers of Classes I-III who should care about such an education, but also authors of educational packages addressed to children at this stage, where such packages should offer interesting tasks, exercises and instructions.

The use of textbooks in early-school education

Over the course of history, the way in which knowledge is transferred by teachers to the younger generation has passed through radical changes. Already, in the 16th century, J.A. Komeński – the author of the principle of demonstrativeness – argued, in his work entitled „Wielka dydaktyka" ("Great Didactics"), that we should aim to "teach people, as widely as it is possible, to derive wisdom not from books, but from heaven, earth, oaks and beeches, to know and research things themselves, not solely somebody's observations and testimonials about things,"[11] and in the case of a lack of possibilities for using real and authentic illustrations, that we should use paintings and other sorts of picture, aimed at imparting an adequate notion of the thing in question. New concepts and systems were created, whose assumptions are still present in some educational centres. One might include here, inter alia, the views of Montessori, who drew attention to the role of a prepared environment in developing the potential of the

[10] Compare A. Dyduchowa, B. Dyduch, M. Jędrychowska, *Zadanie języka polskiego w szkole podstawowej* [in:] *Kompetencje szkolnego polonisty*, edited by B. Chrząstkowska, Warszawa 1999.
[11] J.A. Komeński, *Wielka dydaktyka*, Wrocław 1956, pp. 161–162.

child,[12] the suppositions of the Rudolf Steiner school, in which textbooks were relinquished entirely, or the system of education of C. Freinet, in which the role of textbook is taken over by informal texts written by the pupils themselves and printed out on the school printer. Advocates appeared for the idea of a school that would reject all kinds of institutional formality: a school open to the abilities of the individual child, focused on the development of pupils' independence in respect of their research and their explorations of their surroundings.

The views of Herbart, that sought to question received didactic ideas, have reached Poland as well. Hence, the value of the transition from an education based on verbalism, dry and ready-made facts and their passive reproduction by pupils, to one marked by the active and creative engagement of the children themselves, now seems beyond doubt. On the other hand, numerous studies show that in Polish schools the teacher continues to play a pivotal role, and that the basic didactic tool employed in classes remains the textbook.[13] The findings of current research falsify the predictions of futurologists, who had anticipated a swift end to the era of print, and the creation of new forms of information transmission involving computer-based technology. Furthermore, government slogans and promises of a free computer (netbook) for each pupil in Class I turned out to be no more than an electoral fantasy. It now seems that for many years to come, the printed word will continue to serve as the basic source of knowledge, and school textbooks will remain a staple item in every pupil's backpack. Educational packages, especially those for children of early-school age, should be well thought through – i.e. carefully prepared with respect to adequate choice of content (texts) and appropriate graphic representations. After all, according to C. Kupisiewicz the textbook has at least three vital functions:[14]

● Motivational function – the development of the emotional-motivational aspect of the pupil, shaping his/her interests and encouraging the formation of a positive attitude towards learning and work;

● Informative function – reflecting the need to widen and enrich the child's knowledge not only by means of text, but also through photography, pictures, and instructions referring to other sources and methods of acquiring information, such as observation or experience, etc.;

● Exercise function – facilitating (above all by supervision) the assessment and correction of a course, and so of the results of one's own work,

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[12] B. Surma, *Edukacja językowa w koncepcji pedagogicznej Marii Montessori*, „Edukacja Elementarna w Teorii i Praktyce" 23(2012)1, pp. 62–76.
[13] Compare: I. Bieńkowska, *Językowe komunikowanie się nauczyciela z uczniami w aspekcie stosowanych środków dydaktycznych na lekcjach (na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej)*, Gliwice-Kraków 2012; D. Klus-Stańska (edition), *(Anty)edukacja wczesnoszkolna*, Kraków 2015.
[14] C. Kupisiewicz, *Podstawy dydaktyki ogólnej*, Warszawa 1996, pp. 91–92.

while also fostering pupils' memorization skills and general understanding, and their putting to use of information acquired.

Neverthless, in the context of early-school education, and especially where linguistic education is concerned, the above-mentioned three functions seem insufficient. It has long been emphasised that the substantive content of Polish classes should be inspired by real-life situations, observed by and purposefully organised by pupils themselves. In view of the above, children should be given a chance to express themselves freely on a specific subject, with the stimulus to this being their own experience (e.g. experience gained during drawing classes, DIY classes, stage productions, excursions). An illustration, image or a film can often inspire them to engage in conversation, while a text from a textbook can prompt an exchange of views.[15] We may add that one of the basic tasks of Polish language education is showing the beauty, diversity and richness of language. That is why the authors of "Metodyki nauczania początkowego"[16] state that a textbook can have a self-educative role (working with a well-prepared book, children can choose texts to read by themselves), as well as a research role (in the future, a child will be a receiver of literary texts) and a coordinative role (correlating the content of a textbook with other school books, papers, various kinds of art and music class, etc.). On the other hand, as soon as we examine the educational packages typically on offer for children of Classes I–III, we notice that there is only a paltry number of tasks encouraging them to get involved in linguistically creative activities. In the majority of cases, they very largely comprise tasks and exercises aimed, inter alia, at the following:

● analysis and synthesis of words, putting words in order, copying words, commenting, explaining, looking for meaning;

● reading sentences, reproduction, analysing, explaining, commenting on their content, putting words in a correct order;

● reading texts, reconstructing or narrating stories read, reproduction of facts, forming titles or subtitles, paying attention to grammatical forms, characterising persons according to their roles, constructing sentences to me memorised, explaining and commenting upon texts;

● reading of singular words, putting words in order, copying words and using them in sentences;

● reading, explaining and completing tables, lists and charts;

● learning rules and principles, copying, explaining and using them.

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[15] I. Bieńkowska, *Językowe komunikowanie się nauczyciela z uczniami w aspekcie stosowanych środków dydaktycznych na lekcjach (na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej)*, p. 58.
[16] M. Radwiłowicz, Z. Morawska, *Metodyka nauczania początkowego*, Warszawa 1990, p. 98.

The research carried out by I. Bieńkowska is by no means encouraging in this regard, either.[17] The author emphasises the fact that in the textbooks and exercises currently used for Classes I-III, 40 types of question can be distinguished. Among them, the dominant ones are those with the operators "what" or "how", yes/no questions, and questions starting with the adjectival pronoun "which". When it comes to Polish language content, the prevalent sorts of question concern the following:

● content of a text read – "What did Kasia do during the winter break?";
● meanings of terms and concepts, e.g. "Who is a patriot?";
● subject and object of actions, e.g. "Who might the yeti be in Ania's account?";
● conditions, e.g. "How does water change in winter?";
● circumstances, e.g. "What work did the boy do, and what advice could we give him?";
● place – e.g. "What was theatre for Emma";
● time – e.g. "How are you going to spend the first day of Spring?";
● direction – e.g. "What places are mentioned in the poem?".

There is a significant quantity of questions pertaining to course of action, development, changeability, similarities and differences. According to the author quoted, in Class III, questions concerning justification and explanation are considered vital. However, questions concerning construction and rules of operation are rare. The fact is, though, that the majority of questions included in textbooks for children from Classes I–III are reproductive in character: their main purpose is to test the level of mastery and understanding of some given material. In general, there is an absence of such questions as would lead to reflection, stimulate one to creative thinking, or encourage one to explore the surrounding world. There are no questions suchb as would stimulate young minds to independently pursue knowledge: questions, for example, about the causes of a particular phenomenon, or about connections and dependencies obtaining between objects. A significant drawback of the textbooks used by pupils of early-school age is the absence of questions and notions relating to children's assessment of, e.g., the conduct of the principle protagonists in the texts to be analysed. Textbooks prepared in this way are mainly focused on the development of just the basic functions of language as these relate to learning and perception of the surrounding world (i.e. its semantic functions). They in no way help to develop the ability to individually think about and respond emotionally to whatever information is presented (i.e. the non-semantic functions of language).

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[17] M. Bieńkowska, *Językowe komunikowanie się nauczyciela z uczniem w aspekcie stosowanych środków dydaktycznych na lekcjach (na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej)*, p. 169n.

The textbooks offered to children in Classes I–III are full of instructions, tasks and contents that involve putting things in order, and/or copying, inserting, or completing them. Many exercises concern reading, but this is mainly just with a view to understanding the text read, where pupils are asked "to indicate", "read" (e.g. according to roles), "underline", "adjust" or "relate". They arenot allowed to tell their stories freely, or be authors of their own stories: instead, they must passively recreate the texts presented in the textbook. Textbooks that would facilitate giving a personal assessment of an illustration, creating a comic story, drawing a picture to accompany a text being read, are rare indeed. This way of constructing books for children of early-school age may have the effect of blocking teachers when it comes to building their own creative ideas in the field of linguistic education. As the research already presented here shows,[18] lessons with children of Classes I–III tend to be dominated by a passive mode of acquiring new knowledge, especially when it comes to Polish language education. The most common form of working with a book is reading (especially reading aloud), combined with writing, searching for fragments or new words, and summarising the contents. Pupils rarely formulate questions, and if they do do so, and seek to answer them, this only happens after prompting from the teacher, or in ways constrained by what is required in order to make use of the textbook itself. In the case of questions asked by the teacher, these are prevalently of an imitative nature, testing the extent of one's knowledge: e.g., questions about the meaning and content of terms and notions. In Polish language classes, teachers only make minimal use of the sort of problem-solving instructions that can lead to the acquisition of new knowledge, to the drawing of new conclusions, and that inspire children to become actively involved. The teacher's role in Classes I–III barely fosters the development of creative thought, focusing instead on the development of cognitive operations and those kinds of thinking valued for their convergence with received norms.

A similarly depressing picture of classes with children of early-school age emerges in a paper by M. Żytko, who draws attention to the fact that children learn verbal communication through imitation of a model of adult language use that is, essentially, meaningful for the latter.[19] For children starting school, the adults in question are, of course, their teachers. However, the situations in which the teacher uses language to reflect, deliberate upon

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[18] Compare: I. Bieńkowska, *Językowe komunikowanie się nauczyciela z uczniami w aspekcie stosowanych środków dydaktycznych na lekcjach (na etapie edukacji wczesnoszkolnej)*, op.cit., p. 186 and the following.

[19] M. Żytko, *Edukacja językowa w szkole – między dążeniem do formalizacji schematu a refleksją nad uczestnictwem w zdarzeniach komunikacyjnych*, [in:] *(Anty)edukacja wczesnoszkolna*, edited by D. Klus-Stańska, Kraków 2015.

a problem, look for information, or show children that speech can be used in exploratory ways are rare. Usually, the teacher does not converse with pupils, but speaks to them using questions (these being mostly closed ones, or just testing knowledge of a text that has been read), instructions or assessments. According to Żytko, one can observe at least three method-related stereotypes in the opinions teachers hold about the aims and tasks of linguistic education. These can be summarised as follows:[20]

● children will learn how to speak correctly when they listen carefully to the teacher's words;

● discipline and silence in a classroom during language classes guarantee better work on the part of pupils;

● children should reply to the teacher's questions using full sentences.

In line with such clichés, we can still witness, in Polish schools, numerous educational situations organised by the teacher, where it is in fact he or she who is cast in the active role and located at the centre of what is going on. The pupil is expected to listen carefully to what the teacher says, and then reproduce the data with perfect accuracy. All conversations, even those accompanying group work, are suppressed and consigned to the margins of educational activity. Working in such an atmosphere, the pupil gets the impression that any dialogue and discussion occurring when viewpoints meet are something wrong, and even forbidden. Any exchange of ideas, even if approved by a teacher, is supposed happen quietly and without unnecessary noise, as it counts also as something that could interefere with the work of other children. Young pursuers of knowledge are almost entirely deprived of situations in which the exchange of thoughts, arguments, drawing conclusions, count as something important: where in attending to the opinions of others one modifies one's own point of view, and where a single problem may come to be considered in many different ways. Instead, the best response to the question asked is just the one expected from the pupil by the teacher, and the way in which it must be presented (i.e. as a complete sentence) is quite different from the communicative situations in which the child participates when outside school, in the context of their relations with peers and adults.

It is worth reminding ourselves here of the rules formulated by I. Adamek concerning use of language in the classroom:

● activities of teachers and pupils should be clearly expressed verbally;

● problem solving should be connected with the verbal description of the activities undertaken;

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[20] M. Żytko, *Pozwólmy dzieciom mówić i pisać: w kontekście badań umiejętności językowych trzecioklasistów*, Warszawa 2010.

● when introducing new concepts, they should be linked to activities;

● children should be encouraged to get used to talking about what they are going to do and what they are thinking about;

● we should test the understanding of an idea or strategy in various contexts and through the completion of diverse tasks;

● the use of "private speech" is to be encouraged;

● children should be inspired to write about what they are doing, intend to do, and so on;

● writing should take place during all classes (and not only during linguistic education);

● conversations with children should be pursued, about what else they could add to what they have already written;

● writing is to be combined with fun and play.[21]

Possibilities for a creative approach
to the linguistic education of children at school

A teacher working with children of early-school age can, and even should, play a decisive role in shaping their language. First of all, for children of 6-8 years, a pedagogue is an important person, who they are inclined to treat with respect. His or her position in that period of a child's life is a very lofty one, often even more elevated than that of the parents. These are the parents who, while being told all the time by their children that "My teacher said so", are also aware that no form of persuasion or solid argumentation is capable of changing how the little pupil will act. Secondly, the teacher is a significant person for the child, and as such is imitated all the more enthusiastically. His or her way of approaching the information presented in the classroom will thus also be copied (e.g. a creative approach focused on exploration of the surrounding reality). However, in order to achieve this the teacher should pursue the following pedagogical imperatives, both during lessons and in their private encounters with the children:

● accompany and support children, listening carefully to their utterances and helping them to develop them;

● create communicative situations that will encourage and motivate pupils to engage in dialogue;

● create reasonable, and socially meaningful, functional communicative situations, in which listening and speaking appear in various contexts;

● facilitate and arrange for pupils to get numerous and diverse experiences with respect to verbal communication;

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[21] I. Adamek, *Wspieranie rozwoju dziecka – implikacje teorii L.S. Wygotskiego w praktyce edukacyjnej*, [in:] *Rozwijanie zdolności uczenia się. Wybrane konteksty*, edited by E. Filipiak, Bydgoszcz 2008.

● ask open-ended questions, and analyse problems that are interesting for the participants in a conversation;

● enrich children's vocabulary, showing interest in children's language and their ways of using it, while also entering into word-play with pupils;

● accept that children have a lot of interesting things to say, that they may become valuable partners in a discussion, and that they are persons from whom one can learn a lot;

treat listening and speaking as mutually dependent and of jointly primordial significance, expecting active participation from pupils in this sphere;

foster an atmosphere of safety and trust in relation to communication, so that children are not afraid to ask questions and express their own opinions.[22]

The above recommendations may be considered signposts, showing the direction one should go in when working with children in the area of speech development. A teacher who mainly relies on a textbook as their basic didactic tool in such work, should really aim to use it skilfully and sensitively. Nowadays a school textbook is not the only reliable source of information in play: it cannot be treated as an oracle that determines how we should work during classes. If one wants to develop a creative attitude to speech and language on the part of pupils, then the teacher has a duty to formulate sentences in an inspiring way – one which will develop thinking and provoke exchanges of opinion. Therefore the proportion of questions and instructions included in school textbooks should be subject to the teacher's modifications, and where too obvious and clichéd, they should undergo radical transformation. It is the teacher, as the major organizer of the educational process, who is nowadays entrusted with the task of creating classes that will attract children, arousing their interest and curiosity. If asking questions of pupils becomes a habit for the teacher, as a kind of second nature that then functions as a routine throughout all of the communicative situations arising at the school, then the only reasonable solution would seem to be a change in their type – from closed questions to open (i.e. open-ended) ones. This is a classic, dichotomous division pertaining to all questions, where in the former sort of case one usually starts with a particle and specifies precisely the scope and nature of the expected answer. A child's reaction to a question asked in this way is repetitive, predictable, and often limited to just two words: "yes" and "no". A person who is in charge of a conversation, and who uses closed questions, knows

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what he or she would like to hear. Such a person, in asking questions, is really just checking his or her assumptions, and usually seeks to reinforce his or her existing point of view. In the latter kind of case, though, we find that the questions, precisely because they are open-ended, allow for a multiplicity of answers, and thus stimulate thinking, which at the same time informs the teacher about how pupils themselves think, giving children a chance to experience what it is like when one relies upon one's own perceptions of certain relations and dependencies. The use of open questions also creates circumstances conducive to an atmosphere of kindness and co-operation, in which it is natural to take note of the viewpoints of others and get to know the pupils themselves better. Hence it is fair to say that such questions should be at the very heart of teaching in Classes I–III. Inter alia, we may say of open questions that they are:
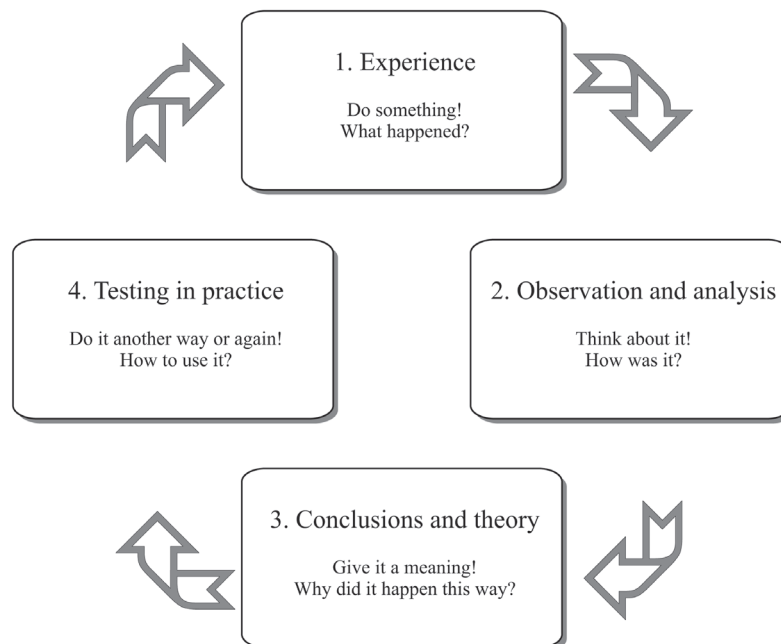
● clarifying questions, e.g. "What do you mean by...?" "What example illustrates...?"

● questions verifying assumptions, e.g. "It seems to me that your assumption is ..." "Why do you think it is obvious?"

● questions checking reasons and evidence, e.g. "How would you answer someone who says, that ...?"

● questions concerning viewpoints or outlooks, e.g. "What effect would it have?"

● questions checking implications and consequences, e.g. "How can we check it?"[23]

Open questions usually start with one or other of the interrogative pronouns "who", "what", "how", "where", "when", "which", etc. As the very name suggests, their purpose is to "open" our interlocutor (in this case, the pupil). Thanks to such a sentence construction, his/her utterances become longer and include more information. They are often called "activating questions", since they stimulate the exchanging of opinions. Such questions are used by authors when proposing and outlining methods that are creative or thought problematic. Moreover, education based on methods aimed at activating pupils is not a new idea: over the years, many publications have encouraged its use. Also, in our own times we can witness the fact of books being written specifically to encourage the propagation of creativity in education. These present systematic instructions for the implementation of methods specifically tailored to the capacities of children of early-school age.

One idea that could well prove attractive for teachers working at early-school level is to construct a teaching system based on the cycle suggested

[23] The questions were prepared on the basis of materials received by the author during a training session entitled "Teaching (oneself) by questions – the use of questions in the educational process."

by David Kolb. This cycle of effective learning is usually taken to refer to how adults learn: it often appears as a topic in training sessions for adults. Nevertheless, closer analysis shows that it is a universal method for designing not just an effective way to learn, but also an effective way to teach. It can easily be put to use in primary education, and is usually presented in graphic form (Figure 1). It refers to four different ways of acquiring information.

Figure 1. The effective learning cycle according to David Kolb

1. Experience

Do something!
What happened?

4. Testing in practice

Do it another way or again!
How to use it?

2. Observation and analysis

Think about it!
How was it?

3. Conclusions and theory

Give it a meaning!
Why did it happen this way?

Source: Own elaboration.

A process of learning based on this model usually starts with a particular experience. For a teacher working in early-school education, this might be arranging for children to watch a film or a multimedia presentation, go on an excursion, conduct an experiment, participate in a theatre production, choose a literary text to read, make a visit to a museum, etc. At this stage of the Kolb cycle, the teacher is interested in providing children with "material" to be experienced, where the emotions experienced at any given moment are bound to be important for the children. Such an experience may be in harmony with pupils' views, but can also run contrary to them, and the children's experiences will furnish the basis for further phases of the cycle. The point here is that if we really want to learn

something, a single experience (e.g., a one-off episode of emotion) will not suffice: it must be analysed and thought over. That is why the second phase of the cycle concerns assessment, reflection on the situation we participated in, and an apprehension of its less immediate consequences. In the course of working with children from Classes I–III, this phase can take the form of appropriately supervised conversations, discussions and dialogues, and a free exchange of ideas. It is important that any questions asked of children by the teacher be open-ended and help create a certain distance from experience, so that they facilitate the discovery of regularities in that experience. A vital feature at this stage of the process is the absence of any assessment of participants (i.e. of their utterances), and that no opinions concerning the children's work be expressed by the teacher. The transition to the next phase here may pass almost unnoticed for some children, as one continues to be involved in analysing new information acquired during one's experiences. What is added, however, is another element, that presupposes the drawing of conclusions both from the experience itself (phase I) and from reflection (phase II): this is the phase at which the teacher speaks with the aim of elucidating matters theoretically, adding additional information, enriching, and informing pupils about that which they have not yet themselves paid proper attention to. The role of the teacher during this stage is crucial, since he or she offers help in formulating conclusions, all the while trying to relate this to the experience of the pupils themselves, and at the same time linking it to his or her own knowledge and experience with respect to the material being presented. The last phase of the Kolb cycle assumes that there will be effective experiments to test the newly acquired knowledge in practice. Pupils, together with their teacher, can consider, and give examples of, how the knowledge or skills acquired are used in everyday life. The easiest way to pursue this phase is to give pupils homework. This, however, should be of an open-ended sort: it should be creative, a stimulus to thought, and distinct from any instructions given to all of the children in the classroom as a collective.

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Abstract

In the course of early-school education, young pupils' capacity to express themselves provides a basis for building contacts with their social surroundings, exploring the world, and forming their own outlook. The ability to express one's own thoughts is quite rightly thought to merit intensive educational input, aimed at nurturing it wherever possible. Par-

ticipating in school lessons in various situations that involve practical language use, children of early-school age have a chance to discover the attributes of language itself: they learn and build concepts, discover the meanings of basic parts of speech, and uncover the sense of specific utterances.

Language education should therefore be a priority in Polish schools, and a teacher of Classes I–III, engaged in organizing their education, should possess a variety didactic tools that will help to make it more appealing. One of these, obligatory and ever-present in Polish schools today, is the textbook. However, it is worth considering whether the textbooks used by teachers of Classes I–III include suggestions that would be relevant to a creatively oriented approach to Polish language education. To what extent are schoolchildren able to participate in various communicative situations while relying on their own creatively constructed utterances? The aim of this paper is to draw attention to the problems of language education of children in Classes I–III, using the findings of selected authors as its basis. In this context, the textbooks used in early-school education are analysed with respect to questions, instructions and exercises for children. Some educationally misguided approaches to working with children, on the part of teachers of Polish language classes, are indicated. However, using the current literature as a basis, the paper also points to some ideas that could be of value in this respect.

Keywords: linguistic education, textbook, children of early-school age, language, speech.

Edukacja językowa dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym w aspekcie stosowanych podręczników

Abstrakt

W toku edukacji wczesnoszkolnej zdolność wypowiadania się jest dla ucznia bazą do budowania kontaktów z otoczeniem społecznym, możliwością poznawania świata czy konstruowania własnego światopoglądu. Umiejętność poprawnego wyrażania myśli stanowi też obszar intensywnych oddziaływań nauczycielskich, w celu jej kształtowania i doskonalenia. Uczestnicząc w klasie szkolnej w różnych sytuacjach, które wymagają praktykowania języka, dzieci w młodszym wieku szkolnym dostają szanse na odkrycie jego atrybutów: poznają i budują pojęcia, odkrywają znaczenie podstawowych części mowy, ujawniają sens poszczególnych wypowiedzi.

Edukacja językowa powinna być zatem priorytetem polskich szkół, a nauczyciel klas I–III, który ją organizuje musi dysponować szeregiem

środków dydaktycznych, dzięki którym stanie się ona atrakcyjna. Jednym z nich, jakże obowiązkowym i na stałe obecnym w polskiej rzeczywistości szkolnej, jest podręcznik. Warto się jednak zastanowić nad pytaniami, czy podręczniki wykorzystywane przez nauczycieli w klasach I–III zawierają propozycje twórczej edukacji polonistycznej? W jakim stopniu dzieci w szkole mają możliwość uczestniczenia w różnorodnych sytuacjach komunikacyjnych, opartych na kreatywnym konstruowaniu własnej wypowiedzi? Celem artykułu jest zwrócenie uwagi na problemy edukacji językowej dzieci w klasach I–III w oparciu o wyniki badań wybranych autorów. W tym kontekście poddano analizie podręczniki wykorzystywane w toku edukacji wczesnoszkolnej pod kątem pytań, poleceń i ćwiczeń kierowanych do dzieci. Nakreślono błędne sposoby pracy nauczycieli z dziećmi w toku zajęć z zakresu edukacji polonistycznej, ale podjęto również próbę wskazania pomysłów jej realizacji w oparciu o dostępną literaturę.

Słowa kluczowe: edukacja językowa, podręcznik, dziecko w młodszym wieku szkolnym, język, mowa.

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