

Helena Balcerek

Text - Educational material for students with special educational needs in primary schools with integrated classes

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to present the conclusions from research conducted while working with students that have the certificate of special educational needs issued by psychological and pedagogical counselling centre¹, and who attend state primary school with integrated classes². The analysis of the documents and several years of pedagogical observation of the students³ allow to draw conclusions regarding the implementation of educational goals described in core curriculum, such as utterance reception and use of information it contains, and as a result, the analysis and interpretation of literary texts⁴.

As Bożena Olszewska notices, "The texts gathered in textbooks constitute a close unity which is conditioned by the education concept followed by their authors⁵. It is the result of their own thoughts, search for their own sets of works which are the most beneficial for the education and upbringing process, and is in compliance with the guidelines of core curriculum"⁶. Unfortunately, the changes proposed by the syllabuses and school textbooks are designed for students who develop properly. According to the regulations by Ministry of

¹ Hereinafter referred as PPCC.

² Particular schools implement specific educational and therapeutic goals for their pupils. In accordance with the justification to Regulation by the Ministry of Education of 20th Feb 2015 on the change of education system act and other acts (Journal of Laws, item 357), the teaching goal in integrated classes is to ensure integration of the children attending special education institutions with their peer environment, including able-bodied children (art. 5 par. 1 subpar. 5 of the regulation).

³ The conclusions from the analysis of documents, performance tests and pedagogical observation of the pupils possessing PPCC certificate from 2012 until 2016 were drawn as part of research for PhD thesis.

⁴ In accordance with the applicable Regulation by the Ministry of National Education of 27th Aug 2012 on core curriculum of pre-school education and general education in particular types of schools (Journal of Laws of 2012, item 977).

⁵ Pupils with PPCC diagnoses (with autism spectrum, Asperger Syndrome, light intellectual disability, social maladjustment and psychomotor hyperactivity) attending general-profile and integrated forms of state primary schools, in accordance with the Act of 30th May 2014 *regarding the change of education system act and other acts* on textbooks and educational goals described in footnote 2, use the same textbook as students developing properly. Special educational needs of the students require implementing changes by the teacher, as well as adjusting literary texts presented in textbooks in terms of implementation of a generally chosen teaching programme.

⁶ B. Olszewska, *O wierszach w wybranych podręcznikach szkolnych. Zaduma nad ich statusem i funkcjami*, in *Język a edukacja. Tekst edukacyjny*, ed. J. Nocoń., A. Tabisz, Opole 2013, pp.154.

National Education on the education of pupils possessing PPCC certificates⁷, the same didactic materials should be used in the education of children with developmental disorders. However, they are not well chosen in terms of both their perceptual-cognitive, as well as emotional and social areas. The content is too hard, difficult to grasp, and badly understood in terms of goals set by the authors of syllabuses and textbooks. School practice shows that some types of literary texts included are too complicated to constitute an educational material for a student with developmental disorders or with a light intellectual disability⁸. Thus, it is essential to think about the proper choice of texts. Otherwise, such education process will be a failure at the beginning.

Literary text – educational material vs. developmental disorders of a primary school student

The attempt to educate which is based on a badly chosen educational material brings catastrophic results. A child is not able to read the text, does not understand the message, is not motivated, has no pleasure in reading, does not analyse, select and use the information included in the text. Reading comprehension will be associated with an unpleasant duty which is difficult to do. Consequently, the student will not develop a habit of reading for pleasure. As Anna Janus-Sitarz writes: “It is necessary to think about the possibility to use old and new theories of interpretation of a literary work at school, adapting them in order to regain the lost ability to feel pleasure in reading a book that has not been read within recent years due to many reasons. Among those reasons, some are related to sociocultural changes /.../ and others to a poor reading technique and problems understanding reading text”⁹.

Sociocultural changes include modern education problems emerging from a growing number of children with various developmental disorders (also called diseases of affluence). The result of this is poor reading technique and problems developing reading comprehension skills for such students. The most common, repeatable PPCC diagnoses are:

- autism spectrum,
- Asperger syndrome,
- light intellectual disability,
- social maladjustment,
- psychomotor hyperactivity

Perception, logical thinking, reception and understanding of the messages in all of these cases manifest themselves in a slightly different way, as different disorders are characterised by different symptoms. The diagnosis in the PPCC certificate describes a particular group of

⁷ Preamble to education system act of 7th Sep 1991 (Journal of Laws of 2004 no. 256, item 2572 with later amendments); the act of ratification of Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities of 13th Dec 2006 in New York (Journal of Laws, item 8829); Regulation by the Ministry of National Education of 17th Nov 2010 on the conditions of organising education, upbringing and care for disabled and socially maladjusted children and youths in special kindergartens, schools, classes as well as in centres (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 392), and regulation by Ministry of Education of 17th Nov 2010 on the conditions of organising education, upbringing and care for disabled and socially maladjusted children and youths in kindergartens, schools and public or integrated classes (Journal of Laws of 2014, item 414). Regulation by Minister of National Education of 20th Feb 2015 on the change of education system act and other acts (Journal of Laws, item 357).

⁸ Thesis supported by the certificated issued by PPCC and empirical research conducted since 2012 during constant didactic work with pupils possessing diagnoses of disorders and disabilities listed in the article, attending integrated classes in Primary School no. 98 in Warsaw.

⁹ A. Janus-Sitarz, *Szkolne strategie lektury wobec “stanu nieczytania”* [in:] *Kompetencje nauczyciela polonisty we współczesnej szkole*, ed. E. Bańkowska, A. Mikołajczuk, Warszawa 2006, pp. 216.

Text - Educational material for students with special educational needs in primary schools with integrated classes

symptoms and may point out the actions to take in order to support the education of a particular student, taking into account his level of development¹⁰. The text that would constitute an educational material has to be individually adjusted to the student in terms of: volume, graphic layout, content, lexicon, stylistics.

Children with autism spectrum are very often diagnosed with a higher than average level of intellectual and cognitive development. However, they suffer from emotional and social disorders. They have difficulties understanding metaphors, irony, non-direct messages, they do not understand the concept of literary fiction entirely, although fantasy genres are very interesting to them. Perfect memory, focusing their attention on details and extensive knowledge resulting from their interests are often related to a wide range of vocabulary and allow to notice recurring motifs¹¹. Taking those symptoms into account, we can point out the features of a well-chosen text. Such text often belongs to prose genres with a limited number of stylistic devices, but with substantial content (not in the context of social relationships or psychological descriptions of characters), more difficult vocabulary and more complicated grammatical constructions. An additional advantage is the division into parts (paragraphs, short chapters) as children with autism spectrum are positive about division of particular areas of action. If the text is too long, it facilitates tiredness and boredom. Perfect memory might sometimes be an obstacle because negative situations and experiences get ingrained in a child's mind thus the tiniest references could destroy the reading process totally, enable blockades of cognitive functions which are replaced by sad memories.

After the analysis of PPCC certificates in the diagnoses of students with light intellectual disability one can notice a repeating pattern: cognitive functions deficit, lowered level of perception, observation and correct logical thinking, low attention focus, weak short and long-term memory, poor vocabulary and general knowledge, lowered reading pace and partial understanding of the reading text. Children with such certificates show low level of the ability to confront the text they read with reality. Taking into account special educational needs of such a student, a properly chosen literary work should belong to the genre of a narrative, short story, fairy tale, or a fable of a limited volume (about 1-2 pages). It should also convey the message in a simple way, use third-person narration which is easy to understand, and direct information in the form of simple sentences.

"Whether a particular book is the right level can be checked by asking the child to read the text on one of the pages. If it the child is not able to read at least five words, it means that the book is too difficult"¹². I was looking into similar criteria while choosing the texts for children with social maladjustment certificates, at the same time taking under consideration their disorders in terms of interpersonal relationships, marking particular names of social roles or specific vocabulary which is used by a child.

While observing children with psychomotor disorder, it turns out that despite average level of intellectual development, extensive interests and openness to the content analysed, those students have problems focusing their attention, are very prone to stimuli and often get distracted. They also show lowered level of visual perception or short-term memory. A properly selected educational material is a short narrative divided into small parts. An interesting narration from the point of view of the character, limited to direct and simple style, dynamic

¹⁰ See M. Mountstephen, *Jak wykryć zaburzenia rozwojowe u dzieci i co dalej?*, Warszawa 2011, p. 44.

¹¹ See M. Winter, *Zespół Aspergera. Co nauczyciel wiedzieć powinien*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 10, 17.

¹² M. Mountstephen, *Jak wykryć zaburzenia rozwojowe u dzieci...*, p. 82.

plot, realistic events that give the opportunity to confront them with own reality and student's interest, prolong the periods of attention focus and active reading.

Methods of effective reading of literary works (in the context of core curriculum for general education on the second level of education)

Work with students possessing certificates of special educational needs has proven that effective education in utterance reception and using the information included in it focuses on three short steps: proper text adjustment, proper reading and clear analysis.

Proper text adjustment, at the very first moment, when the child deals with the reading matter causes positive emotions. The division into short parts (paragraphs) allows to make breaks in order to rest. Larger font and spacing makes the text clearer and easier for visual perception. Frames, gentle, colourful background highlight the space for reading starting from indents and makes the text more attractive. Clear style, content adjusted to the level and interests causes positive associations and enables the willingness to read. What is supported is making the child interested in the plot, reading curiosity and not the obligation to work with the text. As Anna Janus-Sitarz writes "unfortunately, it is not possible to clearly define factors that guarantee the pleasure of reading"¹³. It is particularly difficult to obtain such a guarantee in case of children with special educational needs because their condition at a given moment depends on many variables (such as what happened during a break, the weather and the place where the classes take place).

The second step is the proper reading – being focused, calm, reading that stimulates the reader's involvement. The students with developmental disorders have better results if the text is read aloud (both by student and teacher), as the polysensory reception (visual and auditory) stimulates visual-auditory perception. Listening to the content facilitates the amount of the information processed. Also, all the bookmarks used to highlight particular parts of texts prove to be effective. Due to that pupil's eyes are concentrated on particular verses and words. Reading aloud is beneficial in terms of noticing relevant content and bookmarks help to underline useful information at the same time.

The last step in developing the ability of literary texts reception and using the information included there is the analysis that is clear for the child. Conclusions drawn from my research¹⁴ point out that using an established system is a very efficient method. The notions deriving from literature studies proved helpful here. These include pointing out the narrator, defining narration type, setting, time and discussing the events by the students (in the form of a general plot outline, verbal summary or the answers for questions about the text). In case of more difficult works, it is worth supporting the child with additional questions in order to allow him/her to draw conclusions himself/herself so that he/she could strengthen the habit of searching for meanings, information and interpretation¹⁵. Depending on the level of the child's development, "assuming that the necessity of simplifications, standardisations, categorisations, etc. – as they do not discourage from reading and provide the reader with certain reception tools – show him /.../ the possibility of moving away from the standards /.../. This means opening some gates that allow to have many interpretations, possibilities of making

¹³ A. Janus-Sitarz, *Szkolne strategie lektury wobec "stanu nieczytania"...*, p. 221.

¹⁴ Conclusions drawn from the analysis of the documents, performance tests and pedagogical observations of students possessing PPCC certificates from 2012 until 2016, conducted as part of PhD thesis research.

¹⁵ See M. Winter, *Zespół Aspergera. Co nauczyciel wiedzieć powinien*, Warszawa 2011, pp. 8,14-15.

Text - Educational material for students with special educational needs in primary schools with integrated classes

the meaning more complicated, totally subjective reception which is undetermined by any factors”¹⁶. Drawing illustrations related to the text read that would summary the reading process in a positive way will solidify the content of the text that has been read. By stimulating imagination, the children process the text and transform it into a subjective image. Such intersemiotic interpretation makes it possible to assess whether the images created by the student are relevant to the content of the text, conducted analysis, interpretation and conclusions drawn while working. They allow to correct some ambiguities and mistakes through changes of particular elements of the drawing justified by proper comments and quotes.

Conclusions

Patrycja Huget writes: “The child that learns to read letters and words sees them at the beginning as meaningless signs which gradually become more familiar and gain meaning”¹⁷. Following such thesis, in order to reach educational goals included in core curriculum (literary text reception and use of information included there) by students of primary school with certificates of special educational needs, it is necessary to adjust forms and methods of work with the text individually. Proper reading matter, adjusted to specific features and difficulties of a particular child proves to be an efficient educational material. In order to develop the skill of reading literary texts by children with certificates of special educational needs, it is necessary repeat certain actions. Repetition and consolidation of information regarding how to read, will in time change by itself into independent, active reception of the texts and into subjective interpretation related to particular standards.

Bibliography

- Huget P., *Specyficzne trudności w uczeniu się – dysleksja, dysgrafia i dysortografia*, in *Doskonalenie warsztatu nauczyciela polonisty*, ed. A. Janus-Sitarz, Kraków 2012.
- Janus-Sitarz A., *Szkolne strategie lektury wobec „stanu nieczytania”* in *Kompetencje nauczyciela polonisty we współczesnej szkole*, eds. E. Bańkowska, A. Mikołajczuk, Warszawa 2006.
- Mountstephen M., *Jak wykryć zaburzenia rozwojowe u dzieci i co dalej?*, Warszawa 2011.
- Olszewska B., *O wierszach w wybranych podręcznikach szkolnych. Zaduma nad ich statusem i funkcjami*, [in:] *Język a edukacja. Tekst edukacyjny*, ed. J. Nocoń., A. Tabisz, Opole 2013.
- Winter M., *Zespół Aspergera. Co nauczyciel wiedzieć powinien*, Warszawa 2011.
- <https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/.../ksztalcenie-specjalne.rozporzadzenie.docx>, Retrieved 10.10.2016.
- <https://men.gov.pl/wp-content/uploads/.../ksztalcenie-specjalne.uzasadnienie-2.docx>, Retrieved 07.05.2017.
- http://orka.sejm.gov.pl/proc7.nsf/ustawy/2315_u.htm, Retrieved 07.05.2017.

przekład Michał Musielak

¹⁶ A. Janus-Sitarz, *Szkolne strategie lektury wobec „stanu nieczytania”*, p.221.

¹⁷ P. Huget, *Specyficzne trudności w uczeniu się – dysleksja, dysgrafia i dysortografia*, in *Doskonalenie warsztatu nauczyciela polonisty*, ed. A. Janus-Sitarz, Kraków 2012, p. 32.