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METHODICAL ASPECTS OF TEACHING LITERATURE FOR PEDAGOGY OF PRESCHOOL /PRIMARY EDUCATION STUDENTS

Ileana Silvia Ciornei (a)*, Marius Valeriu Grecu (b)

* Corresponding author:

(a) University of Pitesti, 1 Târgu din Vale, Pitesti, 110040, Romania, silviaciornei@yahoo.com
(b) University of Pitesti, 1 Targu din Vale, Pitesti, 110040, Romania, mariusgrecu33@yahoo.com

Abstract

The teaching of literature has always been a challenging process, starting from the preparation of the course syllabus to the reality of the class. Any teaching process supposedly starts from a clear structure and a statement of objectives. In the Romanian curricula for Preschool and Primary Pedagogy program of studies, the objectives divide into cognitive, procedural and attitudinal objectives. However, the general objective of the course is not only to cover a certain set of literary topics, but also to train our students to think, read, analyze, and approach literary texts as specialists. Thus, we aim at giving them a set of critical skills they can apply in the domain of language, literature and culture as well. The theories that apply to the practice of teaching literature for Pedagogy of *Preschool /*Primary Education Students are divided into subject-centered theories, teacher-centered theories and student-centered theories (Showalter, 2006, p.27), teaching approaches appeal to several techniques and methods.

1. Introduction

The teaching of literature has always been a challenging process, starting from the preparation of the course syllabus to the reality of the class. The teaching process has always been connected to the goals of teaching literary texts.

At the beginning, literature bridged the gap between normative expectations, about what society should be and the forms of experience in everyday life. Literature was seen as a repository of moral and

spiritual values, responsible of making people better human beings, a matter of morals, civilization and humanity, a mark of national culture and identity.

Literature also helps the acquisition of effective rhetorical and communication skills. It describes the world in a given situation and allows its perception and understanding. There is a complex relationship between grammar and a humanistic interactive field that changes constantly, since it follows the needs of its speakers and changes according to their context. Literature can be considered a valuable source of 'authentic material' because it has two main characteristics in its written form: one is "language in use," that is, the use of linguistics by those who refined it into a form for its native speakers; the second is an aesthetic representation of the spoken language which is can represent language in a certain cultural context. Language refinement, either through its aesthetic reading or its "efferent reading" of a literary work, offers a "rich context in which individual or lexical items are made more memorable" (Collie&Slater, 1988, p.5).

A literary text provides students with a much clearer idea about the syntactic structure of a written text and to what extent written language differs from spoken language. By getting used to the formation and function of sentences, to the structure of a paragraph, a section or a chapter, their writing skills improve and their speech skill can improve. Of course, students considerably expand their vocabulary by being exposed to a literary text.

To F.R. Leavis, the study of literature was a chief weapon against the corruption and vulgarity of mass urban industrial society, a space which studied "the most fundamental questions of human existence-what is meant to be a person, to engage in significant relationship with others, to live from the vital center of most essential values" (Eagleton, 1996, p.9)

Although literature is closely connected to social contexts, New Criticism isolated the study of the text from historical contexts, transforming it in a language laboratory of irony, tone, paradox and symbolism. At the other end of the range of diverse literary theories, literature was an explicit political act, expressing different views of race, gender, radical or political groups which was important in the formation of personal identity and in political struggle, a form of protest and conscience awakening.

Literature was also regarded as a type of philosophical study on signification, representation and ideology, a frame which gave rise to transdisciplinary enterprises in its study.

However, between the normative and imaginative, between pleasure, philosophy and politics, the teaching of literature is important in education and life for every individual. That is why, this shared goal which functions for everybody must associate with attention to pedagogy and to learning theories. Consequently, we should define our objectives in teaching literature as actions and competencies of our students, the skills we want our students to acquire.

Certainly, any teaching process starts from a clear structure of the material and a statement of objectives. The taxonomy of educational objectives includes a hierarchy of cognitive skills, knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation. In the Romanian literature curricula for Preschool and Primary Pedagogy program of studies, the objectives divide into cognitive (acquisition of theories on the global approach of language and general information on literature, methods of forming creative and correct language, acquisition of modern teaching strategies, of the concepts of projection, operationalizing and evaluation as well as familiarity of literary genres and representative texts and techniques of analyzing and interpreting the literary text), procedural objectives (which refer to the

acquisition of skills in order to operationalize the objectives of different activities in the classroom with a view to encourage creative thinking) and attitudinal objectives (which mainly refer to the personal side of the training for the future profession-responsibility in assimilating fundamental concepts in the domain, continuous professional training through permanent research and documentation, implication in extracurricular activities.) However, we must not forget that the general objective of the course is not only to cover a certain set of literary topics,   but also to train our students to think, read, analyze, and understand and to approach literary texts as specialists. In other words, we aim at giving them a set of critical skills they can apply in the domain of language, literature and culture as well.

Consequently, courses must be defined by the texts of the syllabi and also by the acts that students will be expected to perform. In other words, we should train our students to think, read and analyze literary texts from a scientific point of view but also to approach the literary text from their point of view. Some critics like Robert Scholes has proposed a reorientation of literary pedagogy towards rhetoric and reading, in order to help students" recognize the power texts have over them and assist the same students in obtaining a measure of control over textual processes" (Scholes, 1985, p.39).

Taking into account any approach we adopt in teaching literature, we must transform it in measurable and realistic units and engage our students in activities meant to form specific competencies and skills. Mainly, our students should recognize differences in language use, distinguish between literal and metaphorical meaning, understand figurative language in its units, develop knowledge about an author and his work, and decode the stream of language. The student should also detect cultural references of a different period or society, use literature as a means of broadening life experiences through creative thinking, learn with others and defend one's opinion through debates and analysis.

2. Teaching Literature for Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary Education Program of Studies

To this end, theories that apply to the teaching of literature are divided into subject-centered theories which focus on the content and information, teacher-centered theories which are centered on what a teacher should do or be in order to facilitate education and student-centered theories (Showalter, 2006, p.27) which are centered on the way people learn and the structure and organization of the classroom process for an active learning. Certainly, very few teachers apply a single theory and we can affirm from our teaching experience that teachers often use a combination of them, according to the structure and level of the class.

Subject centered-theories consider education as a depository act, an act of transferring knowledge from the teacher to the student. All teachers are expected to know their fields and follow a certain curricula which include texts considered to be of interest for most students. The Romanian literature curricula contain texts and authors such as Alecsandri, Creangă and Eminescu, representative for the literary canon and the development of the individual. Such theory was well illustrated by the teaching of the leftist poets and prose-writers during the communist era where such texts were taught in order to shape a future ideology, an aesthetic and moral frame and was considered coercive and undemocratic. Nevertheless, the teaching of representative works allows students to have objective remarks or to interpret the texts in point of their actuality, power or interest for the present-day readers.

Teachers may have intellectual convictions about one subject. A teacher may prefer a certain way of interpreting texts since his ideas and beliefs are at the center of his teaching. That is why it is very important to assess the class level of understanding and to provide a decoding scheme of literary texts in order to let them discover the hidden meanings. When teaching the fairy-tale it is generally accepted that it is a story about good and evil, fantastic and mysterious, with different types of characters, with specific dimensions of the space and time concepts. Sometimes, predetermined clues and meanings can be guided by the teacher but students can be led to discover the patterns and debate on time, space or other associated topics. A complex story like Harap-Alb must give raise to different levels of analysis and understanding (from the story itself, to the symbolical level and to the language).

On the other hand, subject-centered teaching must take into consideration that if a student is given a lot of information, he will consider reading an optional task. A student can have his own opinion on the text only if he knows it. Classroom practice shows that it is always useful to present the text and the associated literary theories and then let the students have their own presentations and give their own opinion in order to meet the curricular functions, all based on their readings.

Teacher-centered theories focus on what teachers must do or be in order to facilitate the educational act. They focus on the performative aspect of the process, since many studies show that a teacher with good speaking skills and charisma has good results. Performance must be integral to the process of learning, the classroom becomes a "dynamic and dramatic space" (Showalter, 2006, p. 34).

Literature teachers need good speaking abilities which are very important in the communication process. In teaching poetry, the act of reading a poem in the classroom has many benefits, from the concrete to the emotional material of the text.

Furthermore, Parker J. Palmer, a specialist in pedagogy advocates a "community of learning" which includes the teacher and the students. This refers to physical arrangement of the room, by depth rather than length of assignments, by the toleration of silence and teaching by questioning and encouragement to express one's feelings and beliefs. This approach is far from the impersonal and objective teaching of literature, familiar to the traditional style.

The research of teaching-learning styles has led to a shift towards student-centered theories which rely less on the traditional presentation of the literary work but on an active collaborative learning where the students confronts the text directly. Active learning implies what the student does while teacher performance becomes less important and is measured in terms of students' acquisitions. Thus, it is not about teacher omniscience and personality but about large group teaching or small group teaching.

Most teachers need to be pragmatic and use whatever seems to work with the students or the subject. This is often called an eclectic view and takes into account the content, the possible meanings, the examination of the structure, the historical context assessment and comprehension of the text.

After selecting an author or a text, the teacher may consider some pre-teaching activities (Kramsch, 2010, p.139) such as textual clues, focus, pedagogic format (whole class discussion, individual report, group work). Also, the teacher must be ready to switch the lesson plan (reconstruct the story if the class has not read the text). Pre-reading activities may refer to types of reading (for information and for experience), to pedagogic expectations (students are explained what is expected on them).

The act of reading is represented by Judith Langer (Pamfil, 2003, p.64) through four types of relations which are established between the reader and the text: 1) a shift from the outward to the inward;

entering the world of the text 2) to be inward and explore the text 3) to shift back and rethink the data we have 4) to get out of the text and objectivate the experience. Generally, the didactic approach of the literary text has three stages: a. pre-reading activities, b. understanding and interpretation, c. reflection.

The pre-reading stage develops students' interests for the new text. They are given information about the author, period, trend; the fragment is integrated in the whole. Certainly, the classical formula can be altered with other modalities, anticipations, discussions, presentations, according to the topic selected. For instance, if we are ready to teach Eminescu, students may prepare an assignment about Romanticism that can serve as an introductory part for the course.

The understanding and interpretation of the text is made by means of the direct contact with the literary text first through reading and includes all the other activities which lead to decoding and interpretation. The approach of any literary text cannot be done without its reading. With some texts such as recipes, directions, reports, readers focus on the referential and such kind of reading is called "efferent" reading, where the primary purpose behind the act is gathering information of some kind. The other kind of reading, "aesthetic" reading is focused on experiential, namely, reading done for the experience it provides. (Rosenblatt, 1978, p.35). This kind of reading is necessary with poems, stories, novels and drama or as Scholes argues even with other aesthetic arts such as visual arts and music. The amount of time allocated to the reading of the text depend on several factors; literary genre, the structure of the course, the pedagogic format. The teacher must take into consideration independent reading, shared reading and group instruction (in seminars).

For decoding and interpretation, the teacher offers the basic comprehension strategies for both efferent and aesthetic reading. As an experienced strategic reader, the teacher not only gives information about the authorial techniques of the respective text but he also facilitates reading and understanding through questions. These can be open-ended questions that ask for new ideas or closed questions which refer to already known information. Thus, students must understand the dynamics of the plot, its development, identify, classify and define characters, understand the concepts of time and space. In case of poetry, the teacher might ask students to identify literary devices within a particular section. The teacher must also encourage students to engage in a dialogue, making intertextual connections and individual responses. Learning to read and understand what is read enhances students' appreciation of the book or of the author.

Reflection as final stage in the study of the literary text refer to the analysis of the new acquisitions for self-experience, to the connections that can be made with other types of text and other types of communication. Students are encouraged to find their own meanings by exploring possibilities, considering understandings from multiple perspectives, sharpening their own interpretations, and learning about literary issues through their own responses. Intertextual references not only point to another literary text, but also to an entire cultural experience specific to a certain socio-historical context. These interconnections guide students to develop a considerable understanding of the way of life and of the connections to other cultural disciplines, establishing a complex relationship.

In addition, between the theories of Robert Scholes who proposed a reorientation of literary pedagogy towards rhetoric and reading rather than teaching any particular great books or literary canons to the careful analysis of particular pieces of literary genres, each teaching approach appeals to several techniques, such as lecturing, listening, memorization, discussions, exercises, group work, and recitation.

Some teachers use new technologies, from slide projectors to websites while others develop technologies which enable open discussions.

Teaching prose fiction has a flexible methodology. Novels may be taught in a wide variety of choices. There may be one novel or the novels of an author, the novels of a particular period. It may begin with the author, the historical context, the storyline, characters, and narrative conventions of temporality. Obviously a major obstacle in teaching a novel is its length. Students must be assigned certain number of pages, reading check-terms, also considering intertextuality issues. Another challenge of teaching long books is the background and especially literary tradition, influence and intertextuality. The curricula changed over years and advocates teaching thematic courses in spite of individual authors. Certainly, individual authors are the reference point but it is more frequent to teach a certain period or subspecies and then to illustrate with particular authors, in order to permit comparisons and further investigations. For instance the Romanian literature curricula for Primary and Preschool Pedagogy future teachers uses themes like traditional short story, traditional novel, the Buildungsroman, the realist novel, the psychological novel, the modern novel, the war novel. By the end of the course, students should be able to identify and analyze the techniques writers use, to locate the works in their historical context, to identify themes and motifs, to compare novels with their adaptations for other media in terms of their narrative conventions, to form and to apply critical skills to other fields.

When teaching the narrative, the text must be made relevant to the students through cognitive operations: exploring the storyline, formulate questions, establish logical relationships, select information, organize fact and events, generalize, explore consequences, evaluate. For instance *Amintiri din copilărie* can be taught using such operations and can also be used as a starting point for writing assignments about one's childhood(pleasant, unpleasant, humorous) experiences.

Teaching poetry detaches the reader from the usual frame of reference by "immersing him in a world of sounds, rhymes, stress and other formal figures of speech" (Kramsch, 2010, p.156). Poetry is usually considered most difficult to teach. In teaching poetry, the teacher must combine a range of techniques and methods.

First of all, poetry is written in a specialized technical language. Students must understand that "poetry is written in a line of syllables with sonic and auditory relationships. The sonic patterns encode a set of meanings that are already there."(Showalter, 2010, p.65). That is why, the student need a precise vocabulary to understand poetry. One can also try to organize the course in terms of genre, since such segments have a strong generic emphasis which can be effective in analyzing and discussing the poem in history. Moreover, for an understanding of a poem, students need extensive, historical, literary, mythological or theological information.

In teaching poetry, three stages must be taken; reading, lecturing (trope and technique) and interpretation or emotion. Whether the text is taught in one or over several lessons, the text, opening lines or part of it should be read in the classroom. Memorization and writing about poetry are also used. The oldest pedagogical method for teaching poetry is memorization. We all learnt poems by heart as school assignments or voluntarily because we liked it. Formerly, knowing a poem by heart was quite natural or a sign of good education and intelligence while nowadays the habit seems to be unusual in the modern classroom. However, memorization is a useful pedagogical tool since "once committed to memory, the poem has the capacity to induce a sense of transcendence in the reader who recites it" (Showalter, 2010,

p.69). Through memorizing, the student comes in an intimate connection with the author and the work, understands how the work is done and feels the sounds and the words and which runs underneath.

As a rule, there can be two approaches in teaching poetry. The classical approach takes into account reading, discussion of the title, theme, and structure, the analysis on different levels, interpretation, and poetic diction. The structuralist model proposes a first stage which includes the use of images, films, paintings with reference to the respective piece of poetry, the first exploration-reading, the intuition of the theme and dominant feeling, selection of relevant lines, the analysis on lyrical sequences or fragments and the final stage-open questions, interpretations, analogies. There is no rule in choosing one or another model when teaching Romanian poets but one can consider the classical model with Alecsandri and Eminescu and the structuralist one with poets such as Eminescu, Blaga or NichitaStanescu.

Teaching drama can be done through a combination of methods since teaching itself is considered to have a dramatic character. Moreover, taking into account the specific character of the genre, it can be considered that plays are not meant to be read, that is why it is very important to see them on stage and perceive the performative possibilities. A teacher may bring some elementsof the story, all the information in the way of drama techniques – role playing, dialogue, audience participation, dramatic tension, improvisation, the strategic use of interaction, space, movement, and gesture, the characters and the setting but the whole image can be grasped only at the theatre. Students can also appreciate the non-verbal elements in a play, such as gestures or sounds. Staged plays such as *O scrisoare pierdută*, *O noapte furtunoasă* can be entirely seen, giving students clues in matter of content and ideas. Teaching techniques can be student-centered and can lead to intellectual discovery of the text.

3. Conclusions

Judith A. Langer in *Focus on Research: A Response-Based Approach to Reading Literature* says that students are part of the process of understanding literature. Whenever possible, the teacher should ask questions that trigger students' knowledge and encourage students to develop their own well-formed interpretations and gain vision from others.

A teacher should remember that questioning, probing, and leaving room for future possible interpretations is at the heart of critical thinking in literature. Teachers as well as students need to be open to possible meanings; in literary experiences here are no preconceived ends or final interpretations. Teachers should also provide guidance and help students engage in more mature literary discussions by eliciting their own responses, asking for clarification, inviting participation, and guiding them in sustaining the discussion. Literature is closely connected to life; students come to think about their issues in more complex ways and acquire deeper knowledge of the self.

While political, social and cultural developments profoundly shape the production and reception of literature, literary works in turn also leave their traces in politics, culture and social life. Literature is able to influence society; it can, for instance, question meaning and values, shape our tastes and transmit knowledge or determine conflicts. Literature transforms our perception of reality and the "real world" far beyond the borders of literary discourse. Channeling the study of literature towards contents (a national horizon and humanistic values) but also towards the training of how to teach literature will be an

important part in the development of knowledge in our students, in the forming of critical skills which can be applied in the domain of literature and culture as well.

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