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Language Diversity in the Classroom and Different Subject Teacher's Professional Competence: Some Problems and Solutions

Summary: *The relevance of research findings is connected to the problem that over the past decade Latvian schools and schools for national minorities have grown considerably with respect to their linguistic and ethnic diversity. Students who are beginning to learn the national language can be grouped into two categories, one for whom Latvian is the mother tongue and one for whom Latvian is a second or foreign language. Subject-area teachers must engage in further professional development on how to deal with the linguistic and ethnic diversity of their students; they need to help them to become familiar with the content of the different subjects. This study aims to highlight the work needed in the different subject areas and to suggest some potential doable solutions in teachers' professional development. Helpful in this respect are materials and methods of language theory and linguodidactics, cultural theory as well as some empirical observations in different subject-area teaching. The professional competence of teachers with respect to linguistic and ethnic matters is connected with the necessity to recognize the individuality of students and to find out about similarities and developments in different ethnicities and cultures. Equally important is to keep in mind the balance between language and content in each subject, the organization of students' extra-curricular time and their meaningful use of information materials and media (TV, computer, mobile phones, games with special computer programs, interactive whiteboards, etc.).*

Key words: *Language as a teachable subject and means of integrating other subjects, intercultural dialogue, resources for teaching and learning*

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Резюме (Зента Анспока: (Языковое разнообразие в классе и различные профессиональные компетентности учителей: некоторые проблемы и решения): Актуальность исследований связано с той проблемой, что за последние десять лет латышские школы и школы национальных меньшинств все больше и больше становятся лингвистически и этнически разнообразными. Учеников, которые начинают изучать государственный язык, можно подразделить на две группы: одна часть используют латышский язык как свой родной язык, другая часть - в качестве второго языка или иностранного языка. Учителя должны развивать свой профессионализм в том направлении, как работать с лингвистически и этнически разнообразным классом и как помочь ученикам познакомиться с содержанием различных предметов. Цель исследования - обратить внимание на проблемы в различных предметах при работе в этнически и лингвистически разнообразных классах и предложить некоторые разумные решения в области профессионализма учителя. Материалами и методами являются теории языка и лингводидактики, теории культуры и некоторые эмпирические наблюдения на уроках разных предметов. Профессиональная компетентность учителей в этнической и лингвистической среде связана с тем, что необходимо учитывать индивидуальность ученика, надо искать сходства и различия в различных этносах и культурах. Также важен баланс между содержанием языка и содержанием каждого учебного предмета. Важная проблема - организация внеучебного времени учеников, помощь в использовании информационных средств (телевидение, компьютеры, мобильные телефоны и игрушки со специальными компьютерными программами, интерактивные доски и т.д.).

Ключевые слова: *язык как предмет и как средство для усвоения других предметов, межкультурный диалог, ресурсы для учебы и преподавания*

Zusammenfassung (Sprachenvielfalt im Unterricht und unterschiedliche Kompetenz der Fachlehrer: einige Probleme und Lösungen): Die Relevanz der Forschungen ist verbunden mit dem Problem, dass in den letzten zehn Jahren lettische Schulen und Schulen für nationale Minderheiten immer vielfältiger geworden sind hinsichtlich ihrer sprachlichen und ethnischen Vielfalt. Schüler, die die Landessprache zu lernen beginnen, kann man in zwei Gruppen unterteilen, in eine, für die das Lettische die Muttersprache ist und in eine, für die Lettisch Zweitsprache oder Fremdsprache ist. Die Fachlehrer müssen ihre Professionalität weiter entwickeln hinsichtlich des Umgangs mit sprachlicher und ethnischer Vielfalt ihrer Schüler; sie müssen ihnen helfen, sich mit dem Inhalt der verschiedenen Fächer vertraut zu machen. Es ist das Ziel dieser Studie, die Aufmerksamkeit auf diese Probleme der Arbeit in den diversen Schulfächern zu lenken und einige nachvollziehbare Lösungsansätze auf dem Gebiet der Lehrerprofessionalität vorzuschlagen. Dazu dienen Materialien und Methoden der Sprachtheorie und Liguodidaktik, der Kulturtheorie sowie einige empirische Beobachtungen in Unterrichten verschiedener Fächer. Die professionelle Kompetenz der Lehrer in ethnischer und linguistischer Hinsicht ist mit der Notwendigkeit verbunden, die Individualität der Schülerinnen und Schüler zu berücksichtigen und Ähnlichkeiten und Entwicklungen in den verschiedenen Ethnien und Kulturen herauszufinden. Ebenso wichtig ist die Beachtung der Balance zwischen sprachlichen und fachlichen Inhalten jedes Unterrichtsfaches, die Organisation der außerunterrichtlichen Zeit der Schüler und ihre sinnvolle Nutzung der Informationsmittel und -medien (Fernseher, Computer, Handys, Spielzeug mit speziellen Computerprogrammen, interaktive Whiteboards, etc.).

Schlüsselwörter: Sprache als Unterrichtsfach und Mittel der Aneignung anderer Fächer, interkultureller Dialog, Ressourcen für das Lehren und Lernen

Introduction

Year by year the composition of the general education school students becomes more heterogenous linguistically and ethnically. This is determined by several social and economic conditions as well as national education policy provisions. In the same class there are bilingual and even multilingual students and among them there are students who have been born and brought up in a similar culture environment and the ones who have previously had a different family or instruction language, but also a different cultural environment, and their number tends to increase year on year (Pičukāne, 2014; Divplūsmu skolas kā bilinvālās izglītības ieviešanas piemēra novērtējums, 2003).

Since 2001 approximately 19.3% of minority children have started their education in the Latvian language education establishments. The most important parents' arguments for sending their children to a Latvian language education establishment are as follows: an easier integration in the society of Latvia based on the usage of the Latvian language, it is easier to continue the education process in the universities, to find education establishment near from home or from work place etc. The students who begin to learn the official language in these education establishments can be divided into the following groups: a part of the children learn Latvian as their native language, the other part – as the second language or as a foreign language (Austers, Golubeva, Kovaļenko, Strode, 2006).

To strengthen the positions of the Latvian language as the state language and social integration bilingual education programmes are implemented in the native minority general schools where the acquisition of the study content simultaneously takes place in the pupils' native language and in Latvian (Mazākumtautību etniskās identitātes veicināšana vispārizglītojošās izglītības iestādēs, kas īsteno mazākumtautību izglītības programmas, 2007).

Teachers need to acquire a new professional competence – working with ethnically and linguistically heterogenous groups. This can be explained not only by the fact that in the education process a pupil uses both oral and written text, but also the fact that language represents a means for acquiring thinking and culture and serves as a means for proving oneself. While working with an teach-

ing/learning text, a pupil learns to acquire new knowledge, find specific information and answer questions, select information for preparing a speech, narrative or report, structure the information presented in the text etc. A topical problem regarding integration in terms of the language and content is the professional competence of each subject teacher for not only helping the pupils acquire the subject content, but also ensure successful communication among the people representing different ethnicities and cultures and the possibility to learn more about the surrounding world and provide for the quality of life. It is as important to be aware that in the modern world the ways of obtaining information and processing it have diversified and require special knowledge and skills. The teacher must not ignore the fact that each pupil's language and speech develop at a different speed and it is not necessarily connected with their intellectual development but rather with his individual language ability (Мадден, 2011; Garcia, 2009). It is also important to understand that insufficient language skills can create psychological, emotional and social problems and it can cause low self-confidence, bad study performance and even untimely leaving of school (Divplūsmu skolas kā bilinvālās izglītības ieviešanas piemēra novērtējums, 2003).

Methodology

The aim of the study is to analyse the professional competence of the teachers of various subjects for working in ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous classroom in the pedagogical process of a general education school.

The content of the article is based on the theories about the mutual relation between the language and culture, communicative approach as the basic approach that provides for the integration of the language development and content acquisition in a pupil-centred educational process, and the results of empirical research conducted during the pedagogical observation and teacher survey. Chosen as respondents were 102 pupils from forms 3–9 and 18 teachers of various subjects from the general schools in Latvian municipalities.

The Description of Data

In the pedagogical process language is a subject and mean of acquiring other subjects. Language skill is a complicated skill. It includes the skill to perform speech activities depending on the communication situation and one's own intentions, a level of language knowledge and techniques that allows using the acquired language purposefully in speech, listening, reading and writing. The exploration of language is not possible without the study of culture, which includes social behaviour and situations characteristic for the particular language users (Hall, 2002; Anspoka, 2015).

During the observation of 25 different subject lessons in forms 3 to 9 with the Latvian language of instruction where in average for 4% of the pupils the language of instruction did not coincide with the family language, it was discovered that both the pupils and teachers face several significant problems that have to be solved to provide for purposeful learning and teaching. The results of the study suggest that the linguistic heterogeneity takes various forms among pupils. In one class there are pupils whose family language coincides with the language of instruction and in this case it is Latvian and pupils who due to various conditions are bilingual. At the same time among the pupils there are ones with a highly developed language disregarding their family language as well as pupils with language and speech disorders. Among the pupils whose native language does not coincide with the language of instruction, their bilingualism takes various forms – from the balanced bilingualism characterized by the skill to use two languages equally well depending on the communication situation, up to asymmetric bilingualism – use of two languages for communication where

one of the languages prevails. Similarly, there are also differences in the cultural environment where pupils live outside school. In the observation of the pedagogical process differences could be seen in the behaviour and application of etiquette among pupils, who have lived in Latvia since their birth and pupils who have resided in some other country at certain periods of their life and even have studied abroad. Observations of the pedagogical process let us conclude that the quality of how well pupils acquire education content and mutual relations in the pedagogical process are also influenced by the psychological microclimate. Poorly managed work with teaching/ learning texts during a lesson always arises confusion in pupils as well as fear to make mistakes, ask questions, get involved in communication. Pupils' emotional discomfort if not noticed by the teacher in the due time either turns into a pupil's isolation in the class or social behaviour issues. These, in their turn, significantly influence the collaboration quality between the teacher and pupils: a lack of system appears in the acquisition process of the education content, the pupil loses the direction of his cognitive activities and, consequently, loses his motivation for learning.

The data of the teacher survey also suggest that any unprofessional mistake made by the teacher in an ethnically and linguistically heterogeneous classroom has an obvious effect on the quality of teaching and learning. This can be explained by the fact that in the study process the teacher not only must be able to provide for the acquisition of the study content, but also plan the use of the means of the language during the acquisition of the content. This, in its turn, as it was noted by 72% of the surveyed teachers, is an issue they have been forced to think about just in recent years as previously regarding the Latvian language as a language of instruction it was not that important. Only 5% of the respondents indicated that they have knowledge on the ways of planning the language and other issues related to it in the education process, others do it intuitively and are not sure about the correctness of their work.

Other problems connected with the professional activities of teachers, mentioned in the survey can be listed as follows:

- ability to formulate the task instructions and divide them in successive stages so that pupils would find it easier to get involved and take responsibility for the achieved result,
- to customize and differentiate pupils' work according to the need,
- ability to notice culture-related information included in the educational text, and to use it not only for better acquisition of the content, but also for developing mutual relations among pupils in the intercultural dialogue,
- to overcome the stereotype that, if needed, in a school with Latvian as the language of instruction, it is possible to use two or more languages and take over the methodology developed in the bilingual education process in order to help a pupil get involved in the study process as well as achieve agreement with the family of each pupil, but first of all with Latvian pupils' families and to be able to persuade that the pupils will not lose anything due to finding himself/herself in a multicultural environment,
- to help pupils distinguish the colloquial lexis a pupil has acquired in an informal environment from the academic or instruction language lexis,
- to prevent situations when the minority pupil starts assimilating in a strange to him cultural environment and lose his ethnic identity thus even creating conflicts in his family with the life in the out-of-school environment,
- not to give in to the opinions existing in the social environment stating that a minority pupil in a school with the Latvian language of instruction cannot acquire education as well as the pupil whose native language is Latvian.

The results of the pedagogical observation and teacher survey suggest that a bilingual pupil benefits in terms of personality development disregarding his level of knowledge of each of the languages.

As a child is already born with a unique language system, then during the application of two languages he transfers the system of one language to the system of the other. As a result, a more intensive thinking process takes place implicitly as dual information is processed in brain. Not only a person faster acquires balanced bilingualism, but also faster integrates in the society, gets involved in the intercultural dialogue and feels more comfortable in different social environments. A bilingual person with a more intensive speed of thinking loses intellectual ability slower and less significantly as well as has a lower risk to suffer from the Alzheimer disease and experience depression in the old age. In an early age simultaneously with the language skills a child acquires behaviour etiquette, develops a more positive attitude towards the language and has more interest in the language (Mazākumtautību skolēnu un vecāku nostādnes par latviešu valodu, 2003).

During the empirical study about the proceeding of a bilingual pupil's cognitive activity in form 3 of the primary school (the average pupils' age is 10) a regularity is revealed that if we compare the bilingual and monolingual children's performance (with the exception of the children with language or speech disorders or other issues) in five lessons in mathematics and three in sciences, bilinguals demonstrate better results. If the average study achievement of the rest of the pupils accounts for 6.5 points according to the pupils achievement assessment system adopted in Latvia, then the average assessment of bilingual pupils is 7.02 points. According to the teacher interviews it can be explained by the bilingual pupils' need to concentrate more in the process of receiving and processing information and to use the so-called meta-linguistic ability or he will not perceive the message and will not understand the conditions of the task or other information (Anspoka & Stangaine, 2016).

If the pupil regularly listens with a focus, he will develop a better selective listening skill, perception, attention and ability to control the internal processing of the language. The child learns to transfer the experience he has acquired in one language to the other language quicker. Moreover, it is not always the way that the native language experience is used in the second language, it can be vice versa as well. The bilingual pupil often has a more sensitive phonematic hearing and higher self-confidence (Beikers, 2002; Cummins & Swain 1986; Мадден, 2011; Bialystok, 2008).

This also facilitates the child's awareness about his self-esteem, widens his mental outlook and develops a more tolerant understanding about the common and different features in the mindsets and values of various cultures. (Hamers, Blanc, 2000).

Another bilingual pupil's gain is the opportunity to find himself in different cultural environments and not only get acquainted with the festive traditions of different peoples, but also experience them by himself. This, in its turn, allows better understanding and accepting the different and be tolerant against culture differences. It is worth mentioning that 89% of the interviewed teachers had observed that the families of minority children more often go abroad. Although they mainly visit grandparents or relatives residing in different cultural environments, their life experience becomes wider and more versatile. The bilingual child not only acquires two languages and two different cultures, but also different styles of thinking. Moreover, by allowing pupils with a different culture, religion, language and ethnic origin to integrate in the education process at school and share their experience with their peers mutual enrichment takes place as well as targeted implementation of the modern educational aim to provide for the intercultural education that lets a person become aware of his cultural values and respect the culture of others (Anspoka & Stangaine, 2016).

Some significant aspects for working in a linguistically heterogeneous environment

A particularly suitable model for promoting the collaboration of pupils in a linguistically heterogeneous class is problem-based learning because the reference point for the acquisition of new knowledge is each pupil's individual previous knowledge about the specific topic, repetition of this knowledge and using it in new situations (Nemeth, 2009; Bennett, 1998).

For the mutual cooperation based model to exist and for the pupil's language and speech development to serve for the development of both the study content and his personality development, one of the ways how to help pupils more successfully acquire the study content and feel needed in the pedagogical process is a purposefully selected and planned work with texts. As the text depending on each study subject comprises the definitions of concepts, terms, specific instructions of the tasks to be performed and the texts feature parts, chapters, headlines, subheadings, various highlighted sections, various forms of letters, letter sizes, verbal and numerical information, graphs, tables, pictures etc., it is very important to prepare for reading the text: a clearly identified objective for reading the text and its further processing, application of the experience from previous actions related to the educational content under discussion, work with lexis, special expressions, the meaning of which it is important to understand in order to perceive the text as a whole. It is often that pupils must not only acquire the knowledge about the meaning of the words, but simultaneously must learn to pronounce and write them correctly. It is as important to plan the tasks to be performed both individually and in groups after reading or listening to the text.

In a linguistically heterogeneous environment the work in heterogeneous and homogeneous groups is equally important. When working with heterogeneous groups the pupils with a better developed language and speech can implicitly help the pupils with a less developed language. The bilinguals who are particularly asymmetric can learn new lexis, sentence formation as well as acquire non-verbal means of communication. During joint work the pupils acquire the skill of providing/gaining mutual support, pick up the peers' learning habits, acquire not only the education content, but also the way of communication – how to speak with others, discuss, persuade them about one's personal opinion etc. The work in homogeneous groups, however, allows differentiating the work and customizing it to for specific needs, finding ways for achieving the same study objective in different ways in a heterogeneous class.

The collaboration among pupils both facilitates cognition processes as well as promotes sociocultural learning. Through mutual collaboration the social relations among pupils with different social and cultural origin improve if the collaboration takes place in a positive micro environment.

As the language also serves as a means of pedagogical influence, the text of the teacher's speech and use of the language means must also be planned. The speech must not be chaotic, spontaneous, verbose and constructed in a too complicated way. When assessing the level of pupil's language and speech, the teacher must also think about the choice of sentence constructions and particular words so that pupils could easily perceive them and understand them from the context, gestures, mimicry, respond to them appropriately and engage in the study process. At the same time the usage of the colloquial style should not be exaggerated in the pedagogical communication as it does not promote the perception of the educational process as a business-like, trust-based and targeted process from the pupil's perspective. A particular attention must be paid to terminology and its application both in the oral and written speech. Sometimes it is important to consider the speed of the speech. For the pupils to be able to successfully deal with the previously described tasks, a par-

ticular attention must be paid to the application of different forms and methods of work. Here we can also speak about a certain connection and succession of the methods and forms of work organization used in the lessons of the language and other subjects (Anspoka, 2015).

Nowadays a pupil can acquire information on various topics from the most different sources: books, magazines, newspapers, electronic media etc. At the same time we must keep in mind that searching for information is a long and complicated process and not always the materials found are of sufficient quality. In the pedagogical process we must intentionally plan how to facilitate learning the skill of using the Internet, library services and other resources for widening their experience. If needed the teacher must be ready to change the pace without changing the direction towards the pupil's development as a harmonious personality disregarding his physical, mental and social experience. Each task must be meaningful and correspond to the pupil's capabilities and simultaneously the pupil must find it attractive in various ways: the pupil finds its form or content attractive, he knows how to deal with the task and sees how it relates to his further learning and results of work.

The teacher, however, is definitely entitled to receive professional knowledge and acquire the necessary skills and has the right and duty to acquire them in the teacher education programmes of higher education and in the courses and seminars of further education. Over the recent ten years in teacher education a particular attention has been paid to issues like integrated acquisition of the education content and language or use in the study process, provision for inclusive education acquisition of bilingual education methodology, education of teacher mentors as well as teachers' stress management skills that would prevent professional burn-out and solve other psychologically important issues.

To mention just one aspect, the teacher must be aware in a linguistically heterogenous class it is often that we cannot expect a fast result from a pupil and the speed of learning might differ. However, if the pupil finds himself in the environment of emotional comfort, there is a security and confidence to receive the necessary assistance, he can successfully engage not only in the cognition process, but also qualitatively acquire the education content and develop his language and speech as well as, disregarding his ethnical identity, develop such character traits as patience, empathy and behaviour and communication etiquette.

Conclusion

1. For the mutual collaboration based pedagogical process to exist and the pupil's level of language and speech serve as a means for thinking, communication and proving oneself, an important issue is integrated planning of differentiated content of the study subjects and language application.
2. An intentionally planned and managed work with the teaching/learning text in terms of the content and form can provide not only for the development of the study content, but also for the development of the pupil's language, speech, thinking and attitude to the outside world.
3. To the traditional study aids the digital study aids and possibilities offered by information and communication technologies should also be purposefully used as it facilitates the development of each pupil's study experience.
4. In teacher education programmes of higher education institutions and programmes of further education the contents of the study courses must be developed that helps the teacher acquire the knowledge and skills for integrated language acquisition or use in the study pro-

cess for the provision of the inclusive education, acquisition of bilingual study methodology and psychological preparedness to work in a heterogenic pedagogical process.

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