



Editors' note: L1 teaching in the Czech Republic, tendencies and challenges

Nota de l'editora: L'ensenyament de L1 a la República Txeca, tendències i reptes

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Abstract

This special issue presents the situation in L1 teaching in the Czech Republic, some of its tendencies and challenges. One invited senior researcher, two doctoral students and a fresh postdoctoral researcher from four universities across the Czech Republic present their interests and conclusions in three articles and one interview.

Keywords: Communication-functional approaches; Teachers' subjective theories; Special L1 didactics for pupils with vision impairments; Literary education

Resum

Aquest número especial presenta la situació de l'ensenyament de L1 a la República Txeca, tendències i reptes. Un investigador sènior convidat, dos estudiants de doctorat i un nou investigador postdoctoral de quatre universitats de la República Txeca presenten els seus interessos i conclusions en tres articles i una entrevista.

Paraules clau: Enfocaments comunicatius-funcionals; Teories subjectives dels professors; Didàctica especial de L1 per a alumnes amb discapacitat visual; Educació literària

The main topic of this special issue is a common concern of educational sciences around the world: the difference between what is theoretically affirmed by modern didactics and in teaching practice in schools. As it has been maintained by a number of authors devoted to grammar teaching (see for instance the previous issues of *Bellaterra Journal of Teaching & Learning Language & Literature* vol.13, no.2 and 3), modern language didactics postulates that one of the goals of teaching grammar is developing pupils' communication skills – and that grammar instruction has a fundamental supporting function in this. However, research into teaching processes, not only in the Czech Republic but also elsewhere, shows that, in school practice, grammatical-normative and formal-knowledge approaches to the language curriculum predominate, and that teaching grammar is often understood as an end in itself, rather than as a means for something more, something larger, something more important – and more useful in everyday life.

Invited senior researcher and experienced teacher Stanislav Štěpáník (Palacký University in Olomouc, Faculty of Education) promotes long-term communication-functional approaches in L1 teaching. Recently he has published a monograph in which he and his co-authors present a complex model of innovative didactics of Czech language (Štěpáník et al., 2020). In his paper in this special issue, Štěpáník warns that innovations so far have focused mostly on general parameters of communication and interaction in class, instead of focusing on the content and how content is didactically transformed. His study demonstrates the necessity of the content-focused approach to modelling L1 education, and the danger of slipping to didactic formalism of *shedding the content* if the content-focused approach is disregarded.

Due to the history of the subject and the close bond between Czech linguistics and didactics, the learning and teaching environment of Czech is mainly created through scientific methodology. Thus, the main aim of such teaching is the transfer of linguistic knowledge – linguistic concepts, definitions and terminology, in other words “small linguistics” (Štěpáník, 2020). That this is replicated in teachers' reflections about teaching Czech as well, is demonstrated in Ivana Hurytová's paper. In her work, Hurytová (Ph.D. student at Charles University, Faculty of Education) focuses on teachers' subjective theories. Not only she found that teachers often misunderstand the communicative aim and the general communicative approach to language teaching, but also that they reduce it mainly to oral expression and do not perceive it as a complex and completely different approach to teaching, which affects both the choice of content and its didactic transformation for instruction.

In her paper, Klára Eliášková, fresh postdoctoral researcher (Faculty of Education, Charles University) presents the issue of special L1 didactics for pupils with vision impairments. Individual didactic transformations often found theoretical backgrounds in special education approaches simultaneously designed across Europe and accentuated respect for the special teaching requirements of pupils with vision impairments. The embrace of specific European approaches usually depended on the general (especially political and social) context of the period, which also had an impact on the aims and tasks of special language teaching. The paper defines the historically shaped aims of L1 teaching for these pupils and contextualizes them in order to understand the current aims.

The Interview written by Michal Schuster (Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, Faculty of Education) deals with the issue of teaching literature. Schuster interviewed Ondřej Hník, Associate Professor of the Czech Language Department of the above university. In most schools across the Czech Republic, literary education forms a part of the educational subject Czech Language and Literature. The present concept of literary education continues to be primarily based on the doctrinal approach reduced to literary history and frontal organizational form of teaching. Less space during teaching is given to the use of innovatively conceived literary education: reading texts, aesthetic interpretation and creative activity involving the pupils' construction and re-construction of the texts and their reflection.

Also, here we can see the problem mentioned at the beginning. Although the communicative-functional approach is strongly recommended also for literature teaching, based on real literary texts and their interpretations and even interconnections between language and literature teaching, the reality in school is different. Such reality is dominated by the atomization of the curriculum and the concept of grammar teaching in which grammatical phenomena are practised on isolated sentences; likewise, teaching literature might sometimes be reduced to memorizing the names of authors and their works. We hope that this special issue about L1 teaching in the Czech Republic will provide clarity on the matter.

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