

The Importance of Narrative Texts in Teaching and Learning Activities in Primary School

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Abstract

Narrative texts play a very important role in the instructional activities of primary school classrooms as they significantly contribute to the development of communication skills, thinking, and creativity of young students. These texts must be carefully selected, taking into account both aesthetic and ethical elements, as well as those related to stimulating and developing students' language and communication abilities. The criterion of accessibility must be fulfilled by choosing appropriate works based on the students' age categories. In the first and second grades, epic works should not be too lengthy, with a cohesive plot, and often featuring fictional characters to engage children. By the third and fourth grades, works become longer, with more characters and more developed plots, and students begin to study dense, concentrated epic creations such as novellas and novels. Thus, through the use of epic texts, students learn to analyze deeply what they read, identify subtle details from the content, form various opinions about events, and express their opinions about characters in a correct and coherent manner.

Keywords: narrative, primary school, education, teaching

By reading literary texts, students develop the ability to discover different contents and forms of reality, expressed through a multitude of expression modalities, to associate them with others in order to thus expand their knowledge range, from concrete to abstract, from intuition to fantasy, reaching the acquisition of useful tools to satisfy their desire to discover the surrounding reality. The ways in which students are guided to understand the message and meanings of a literary text depend both on the thematic content of the respective text and on the genre and literary species in which it fits. The intermingling of literary genres is what enhances and amplifies students' receptivity.

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Although, at the beginning of their encounter with literary texts, they are attracted to epic works (by discovering the moments of action: exposition, plot, action development, climax, and resolution – which the teacher will approach in detail and with attention), as they develop their capacity to receive literary texts, students become sensitive to the expressiveness of poetic language, identifying „beautiful expressions” (figures of speech) in a lyrical creation and begin to understand their role in highlighting poetic ideas or expressed feelings in the text. The characters of literary works become symbols of good and evil which students compare and identify with, they get to know living beings endowed with human characteristics, with models of social behavior, which they adopt if they are positive or reject if they are negative. In primary education, numerous texts with narrative content are introduced in school textbooks, most of them belonging to the epic genre, accessible to young school-age children, both from Romanian and universal literature, and which include various literary species such as fairy tales, stories, legends, ballads, sketches, anecdotes, fables, short stories, novels. Through these texts, moments from the lives of children and adults, of small creatures, events from historical past, aspects of the lives of personalities etc., are presented.

Narrative texts, which are intended for reading and study by students in primary school, have a coherent plot and a logical development of events, which gives the teacher the opportunity to guide students, intuitively, towards understanding the artistic message. The attractiveness and receptivity of narrative texts will be achieved if students are skillfully and masterfully led by the teacher to gradually intuit the action up to the climax and resolution. „Before constituting and being recognized as a literary genre, the epic represents an essence, a way of being, an ontological given and at the same time an angle of perception of existence and the universe, a form and a spiritual category. In its first form, the epic belongs to becoming, the succession of history, and in the second, the epic reflects this situation under the guise of the narrative, the succession of actions, events, facts.” (Marino, 1973: 576)

The epic genre encompasses all works that present events in which the author's feelings and thoughts are expressed indirectly. The primary mode of exposition is narration, but this is often intertwined with description and dialogue. The narrator is objective, and events are narrated in the third person. The action is generally extensive, unfolding according to the moments of the plot (exposition, conflict, rising action, climax, resolution). „Narration is the literary composition in which a true or imagined event is told. The subject of the narrative can be taken from



history or current events, from the realm of the soul or social life, from the real world or imagination.” (Crețu, Fierăscu, Cardaș, 1942: 68)

Works specific to this literary genre can be written both in prose (autobiography, biography, folktale, journal, novella, sketch, short story, novel) and in verse (ballad, epic poem, fable, legend).

Characters in the epic genre can be fictional, real, or inspired by certain human stereotypes specific to certain periods of time/social backgrounds etc. Characters can be positive or negative. The narrator tells how the characters feel, how they approach different situations, how they change, and how they behave in various social contexts. Often, young students choose a favorite character from the works they study, appreciate them, and wish to acquire certain positive moral traits.

External conflicts as well as internal ones often appear in epic works, and they influence the behaviour of the characters. In epic works intended for young students, the external conflict is often represented by the struggle between good and evil. Triumph belongs to the good, after it goes through several trials. These works have a strong moralizing character. All these aspects are very attractive to students, developing various feelings, emotions, or experiences.

Within the school, the institutionalized education of the child is formed, even from a young age: „By realizing institutionalized and obligatory education, school equalizes social access to culture. Undoubtedly, school provides the child with knowledge that he could not acquire on his own, because his interests, needs, and curiosities do not demand such interest to counteract the effort involved in this endowment.” (Șchiopu, U., Verza, E., 1997, p. 162) From a very young age, children are read numerous texts, especially narrative ones. These texts belong to the epic genre and have an educational-formative character. The struggle between good and evil is one of the most common characteristics of narrative texts. Young students are attracted to positive characters who fight for a noble goal.

Most often, in narrative texts, the following moments of the plot are followed:

1. The exposition presents the time, place, characters, and initial situation.
2. The intrigue is the motive that leads to the triggering of the action.
3. The development of the action represents the succession of events.
4. The climax is the most tense moment of the work.
5. The denouement highlights the evolution of the characters and the conclusion of the action, concluding the struggle between good and evil.



In primary school, narrative texts are very common in the school manuals for „Communication in Romanian Language” and „Romanian Language and Literature” because students love and understand them more quickly and easily compared to poetry. These texts include both Romanian and foreign authors: Ion Creangă, Mihail Sadoveanu, Ion Luca Caragiale, Ionel Teodoreanu, Constantin Chiriță, Mark Twain, Jack London, Rudyard Kipling etc. With a little help from the teacher, students go through the texts and after a while they manage to extract the main ideas on their own, identify the moments of the plot, the theme, and the physical and moral characteristics of the characters. Narrative texts play a very important role in teaching and learning activities in primary classes, especially in the third and fourth grades when reading is already consolidated, because they have a significant contribution to the development of the young student's personality, to the development of oral and written communication skills, creativity, and thinking. With the help of these texts, students learn new words, discover characters with various physical and moral characteristics, explore a multitude of themes, develop their aesthetic sense, and critical thinking.

After reading several epic works, young students begin to interpret certain situations and moments from the text. Later on, they will make connections between characters and detect the relationships between them. Their spirit of observation becomes increasingly active, helping them to see even the smallest details in texts.

According to Norbert Groeben, literary works can also be interpreted from a psychological point of view, based on characters, events, and internal or external conflicts: „The psychological interpretation of the work represents a psychological semantics of the content of the work” (Groeben, 1978: 118).

Teaching-learning activities have a very significant importance even from the primary classes. Teaching is carried out by the teacher and aims to transmit information in an appropriate manner: „Teaching is the process of organized presentation of knowledge to students by trained personnel. The content of teaching is carefully dimensioned so that the transmission of information can take place. The teacher plays a guiding role in teaching” (Cucoș, 2014: 56). Learning is carried out by students, through the acquisition of information transmitted by teachers: „Learning mainly targets the agents who undergo educational intervention; it consists in the methodical acquisition by students of knowledge or skills required by teachers” (Ibidem: 56). These are necessary for students to develop and form themselves in the most harmonious way.

In the teaching-learning activities of narrative texts, primary school students acquire both new information and skills. Attention is one of the



most important factors for the easiest understanding of these texts: „It is important to note that attention, through all its specific characteristics, ensures a better understanding of reality, increasing the efficiency of activity” (Mielu, 2009: 32). If the text is read attentively by the student, then they will easily understand the storyline, the typology of characters, and the messages conveyed. Without attention, reading would be pointless, a fact that must be very well understood by primary school students. In the school curriculum for kindergarten, first and second grades, in the Romanian Language Communication subject, the study of epic works is provided starting from kindergarten. The teacher reads various excerpts from stories and then asks the young students several questions, thus ensuring that the message of the text has been understood. Another method widely used in kindergarten and first grade is the audio playback of stories. In the third and fourth grades, epic works are more complex. Students already have the skill to analyze a text on their own. Many Romanian authors have created literary works for both adults and children, some of them being: Mihai Eminescu, Ion Creangă, Ion Luca Caragiale, Mihail Sadoveanu, Constantin Chiriță, Tudor Arghezi, Ionel Teodoreanu, Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea, Radu Tudoran etc. Additionally, there are authors from universal literature such as Charles Dickens, Hans Christian Andersen, the Grimm brothers, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Jules Verne.

In Romanian education, there are numerous epic works loved by both young and old: „Amintiri din copilărie” by Ion Creangă, „Vizită,” „Bubico,” „D-l Goe” by Ion Luca Caragiale, „Dumbrava Minunată” by Mihail Sadoveanu, „La Medeleni” by Ionel Teodoreanu, „Toate pânzele sus” by Radu Tudoran, „Cireșarii” by Constantin Chiriță, „Făt-Frumos din lacrimă” by Mihai Eminescu, „Bunicul,” „Bunica” by Barbu Ștefănescu Delavrancea etc. These are just a few of the representative epic texts of Romanian literature, representing great treasures of this country. In these epic texts, children can observe people's occupations, how they thought, social relationships, landscapes from nature, society and its evolution, as well as worthy role models.

In conclusion, narrative texts play an important role in teaching-learning activities in primary schools because they develop students' oral and written communication skills, enrich their imagination, contribute to focusing attention, and influence how students perceive the surrounding world, helping them to create their own vision of the socio-cultural environment they belong to.



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