

## The Curriculum for Mother Tongue and Literature Teaching in Montenegro

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### Abstract

*The paper presents the concept of mother tongue in primary schools in Montenegro. The author has presented the structure of the Curriculum as well as its basic components: operational objectives, activities, events, concepts, and correlations. The author has explained the organization of the curriculum consisting of two areas: language and literature, and analyzed the fundamental distinction between the modern to the traditional curriculum. The analysis indicates some of the important assumptions that have significantly influenced the innovation of the overall program concept: a system of the key competences for lifelong learning, PISA definition of reading literacy, theory of literary reception. The program contains numerous elements that can strongly influence the promotion of mother tongue teaching, proposes a variety of teaching methods and forms of work suggesting the usage of modern strategies and teaching techniques, as well as numerous and diverse sources of knowledge which are directed towards learning outcomes that are aligned with Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive area.*

**Keywords:** curriculum, teaching of the mother tongue, teaching literature, reading literacy, reception of the literary text.

### 1. Introduction

The reform process of the Montenegrin educational system has begun in 2001 and the basic elements of the necessary changes can be found in the Book of Changes (2001) which has pointed out numerous elements of the educational system which, as a whole or partially, must be implemented in order to improve the learning outcomes. Curricula for all educational levels and cycles were written with respect to the contents of the Book of Changes.

Subject Montenegrin - Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian language and literature has been studied as a compulsory course in primary and secondary schools. It is a subject that has the largest number of classes - in the first and second cycle of the primary school five hours per week, and in the third cycle of four hours on a weekly basis. The complexity of the subject is exceptional for several reasons. The principal ones are:

- Montenegrin - Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian language and literature is not only the subject, but also the language of instruction. That language is a medium of instruction of other subjects.
- Teaching almost all other subjects is often directly dependent on mastering the content of the mother tongue. For instance, until the peers master the skills of reading and writing, they cannot do a text (problem) assignments in mathematics or read the contents of other subjects. Basically, very often the students' failure in other subjects is directly related to the lack of reading skills.
- The internal structure of the subject is complex which is evident from its name. In fact, it is the subject in which offers the parallel studies of science of the language (the language) as well as art facilities with the necessary literary and theoretical knowledge (literature). When it comes to the teaching process, science and art usually work separately and that is the main reason why the overall methodical organization varies. However, there are two practical methodical system in this subject - one that is guided with respect to the linguistic field of knowledge and the other related to the reception of literature.

### 2. Elements of the Curriculum

The essential elements of the program, in addition to the general objectives, teaching guidelines, the minimum and maximum requirements of the knowledge standards are: operational objectives, proposed activities, concepts and facilities, and the intercourses correlation.

*Operational objectives* are basic and mandatory program element. Formulated in the spiral concept, which means that in future grades previously mentioned concentric circles are being widened, always adding some new requirements

and tasks. Thus, we often find that the program for the second class, for example, repeats a part of the operational goals of the first with some extended requirements and introduces a few new ones. The program for the third grade is very similar to the previous one – already achieved goals are further expanded with addition of some new elements.

*Operational objectives* are formulated quite precisely. They highlight what students of a certain age can learn in language and literature. These objectives are derived from the functional domain, so that in their formulations dominate verbs which express the ability of students to: distinguish, compare, identify, recognize, summarize, link, analyze, synthesize, say ... Verbs of *action* are directly related to the levels of Bloom's taxonomy (1981) for the cognitive area. Categories: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis and evaluation are obviously in relation to the formulation of objectives and learning outcomes within the minimum, optimum and maximum standards of knowledge (Program, 2011).

Other elements of the curriculum (activities, concepts, facilities, activities and correlation) have been derived in relation to the operational objectives. Since the activities have been proposed the teachers have been given full freedom to replace them if they have ideas that are acceptable for their class. Various textbooks and manuals made for teachers offer a number of different additional activities. And the correlation is also possible, and in different ways from those found in the curriculum. Activities are diverse and the authors of the program realistically assumed that students, inspired by the teachers' overall motivation and textbook or any other source of knowledge, would be interested in an active participation in the process of learning.

In addition to the activities that are to be carried during one class, a whole series of those that can last much longer has been proposed. Those activities can: writing a fairy tale of class, making alphabet or stories about individual characters, making common books etc. It is particularly important to select the activities in accordance with the operational objectives and contents (there is an internal cohesion) which will result in acquiring functional knowledge. Therefore, the focus of the operational objectives and activities is to ensure that students actually create knowledge as a practical and useful, clear and user-friendly system. Verbosity in the teaching process, which used to be a key feature of the previous period, the educational system, (as this program shows a large extent) has to be replaced by the problem-solving and learning through discovery, development projects and the like.

It is evident that there is a strong orientation towards laying the foundations for lifelong learning through the introduction of the eight key competences (European Commission, 2007) in the various program components, particularly those related to reading and analyzing a non-fictional text. Many European countries are currently searching for finding the most effective ways for the implementation of all the key competences for the lifelong learning (Halász & Michel, 2011).

Educational systems rationally choose those solutions that will as less as possible change the traditional curricula, but also facilitate the development of competencies. Mother tongue is a subject that existed in the traditional system, but the internal elements of the curriculum have been revised and harmonized (not entirely, it would be unrealistic to expect) with the development of competencies. Naturally, the largest space has been left to communicating in their native language, but also to the competence of learning to learn (to learn how to teach reading), to the cultural awareness, ICT, as well as many others. Learning to learn was initially included in the teaching of the mother tongue, which is thought to be reasonable, especially if we bear in mind that its objective is the development of effective learning strategies of a verbal content.

### 3. Language and Literature Program Organization

The current curriculum for the subject of Montenegrin - Serbian, Croatian, Bosnian language and literature has the character of an open curriculum. Elementary school is organized in three cycles and program was designed to clearly monitor not only individual classes but also the whole cycles. Thus, the authors have allocated key objectives as well as the basic didactic and methodological principles of organization of the teaching process. The operational objectives are defined as the basic elements of the program with educational outcomes, formulated in accordance with the constructivist learning theories, especially that offered by Bruner (Vilotijević, 2000). The spiral software organization is reflected by repeating the most important goals in the next grade with the necessary methodological advice on the necessity of establishing and expanding the knowledge, skills, habits, competencies etc.

There are two main areas found in the basic concept of the program: language and literature. The former program was carried out by a slightly different division within the subject, and contained five areas: the initial reading and writing, reading and textual analysis, speaking and writing skills, language and spelling in the language of theater, film and broadcasting culture. There has been no removal of the contents of some areas in the new program conception, but the authors have carried out a reorganization and found that the most convenient central facilities can be grouped within two

main areas: language and literature. Facilities of other functional areas fit either one or the other area, and sometimes are associated with both of them. Thus, for example, the initial teaching reading and writing implements within the linguistic field, while some types of reading (one specific for the reception of literature, such as expressive, interpretation, art, illustration, role playing, quiet, focused, etc.) will be learned and practiced on various literary texts. Culture of oral and written expression, among other things, included the various forms of retelling, the storytelling, describing, reporting, linguistic, stylistic, typographical and other exercises (Nikolic, 2005). Some elements have been implemented in the field of literature, and some of them have been more oriented towards language. Thus, for example, as a part of the interpretation of a literary text, a teacher organizes retelling (using the answers to these questions, using the plan text, concise, expanded, with the completion of the amendment, the place or time of action, with the change of grammatical person ...).

Often during the stages of individual and creative work students practice storytelling and talking. There are also different types of these exercises such as those created by a picture or an image, or those whose objective is to complete an event, as well as those based on the given start and given words, or those whose aim is to practice the skill of continuing dialogues ...). There are also the tasks that are related to describing a literary character, a setting of a story etc. However, all the aforementioned forms often purposeful fit in the framework of the objectives of language teaching and can be efficiently applied to a large number of classes dedicated to grammar and spelling comprehension.

Theater, film and broadcasting culture haven't been omitted or neglected in the new curriculum. As in the case of the previously mentioned two areas, the objectives of which are associated with it, are partially realized through language teaching or teaching literature. The pupils are often offered to watch different types of films: feature films, documentaries, cartoons, animated ... If the film in relation to a literary text, ie. it will be associated with literary. If a documentary film was planned for watching (about an area, natural phenomenon, discoveries, historical events, and the like), its analysis will be associated with the unpoetic code, ie. with non-artistic text and language.

There are numerous reasons for these changes. One of the most important resulted from the modern definition of functional literacy and the research in this area. The PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) is the current largest survey of literacy in the world. The study results point to the need recognize the difference between reading poetic encoded texts (Jakobson, 1991) from those which are not, and to develop reading skills which vary and are dependent on the type of text (with respect to the purpose, intention, etc.). Separation of literature as a distinct field of language teaching should warn teachers that there are different reading situations (Sample Tasks, 2000, p. 25) and help them to develop the students' reading competency that will be useful in certain situations (Literacy Skills, 2003; Reading for Change, 2002).

It has, also, been proved that the former school approach to learning grammar and spelling in selected literary texts or lingual and methodological texts is inefficient. The work on the first-mentioned type of texts cannot be considered sufficiently successful because of the fact that the objectives of language teaching aim at mastering the language of everyday communication of the standard language, while literary texts are coded as a poetic message, which means that they come in numerous variations of the everyday language. On the other hand, lingual and methodological texts have been specially prepared for the purpose of studying linguistic phenomena, so they often seem prude, and do not resemble the actual texts or in respect of a possible representation of linguistic phenomena which is being studied, while the topics have usually been chosen more according to the opportunities to use the grammar and spelling than according to the interests of children. The children usually don't find these texts particularly hard and it is usually easy for them to perceive, learn and rehearse some grammatical or spelling category. However, they have to sort out difficulties encountered when meeting with real texts - those in which the linguistic phenomenon is not "pushy" and obvious.

Thus, while teaching linguistics teachers are trying to meet the objectives by reading selected, non-artistic texts, while the artistic ones are interpreted in the special classes. All the main elements of the curriculum have been formulated through those two areas..

### 3.1 *The Field of Literature*

The choice of works to be read in class, at home and in the sequels, can be found at the end of the curriculum for each class and presented in the form of a proposal. This means that teachers are not required to read with the students the suggested texts. However, practice has shown that most teachers adhere to the proposed draft probably due to the fact that the readers are based on them and because it is not an easy task to find some other texts and to be more or less sure that the operational objectives will be achieved. Only in the third cycle, there is a number of texts that belong to the canon, which means that there is no obligation to be read and interpreted. Theories of literary reception represents the methodological framework of interpretation of literature in the classroom.

The proposed literary texts are grouped in prose, poetry and drama. In addition, the curriculum for each class suggests reading at home or in installments. When it comes to reading the sequels, all of the proposed works are narrative ones which is to be expected, since the break after reading are realized by the end of the narrative sequels. Although the objective of the curriculum is to achieve a balanced representation of literary genres, it has to be admitted that there is the need to adapt the affinities of the pupils which is an important factor for selection of works that should be read during the course.

The previously made textbooks usually contain prose texts, while the lyrical ones were represented optimally and there was only a small number of the dramatic ones. This trend continues to maintain to a certain extent, with a number of dramatic texts which constantly rises. The appearance is partially derived from the production and reception of literature for children as well as from the nature of some literary genres and types. Thus, for example, works written in prose have proved to be very popular among young readers, and their production in the world and is the most fertile. These works have the opportunity to achieve an international popularity thanks to the quality of translation, as, for example, is not the case with lyrical poetry (which is more often interpreted than translated, so the chances to cross the narrow linguistic framework is quite insignificant).

The children have a strong ability to understand the dramatic texts, since they easily comprehend the forms of dialogue (without narration and descriptions), and especially stage performance and role play inspired by such texts. However, there is considerably less number of dramatic plays written for children than those written in prose. Therefore, the authors used to adapt dramatic texts into suitable prose texts, and today it is a common method of obtaining the text in the dialog form. The new program contains a larger number of proposed dramatic texts. There are usually shorter called *theatrical pieces*, the volume of which does not allow the full development of dramatic action through a five-member composition.

The proposed prose texts (both those that are read in class, as well as those intended to reading at home or in installments) are generally well chosen. It is always possible to find the comments and complaints, but the fact is that the literary productions aimed at children actually experienced a boom in recent decades and it is an extremely complex task to make the right selection of works to read. It is evident from the curriculum that the authors have made very serious attempts to make a suitable list of background literature whose objective would be to make children really like literature, and that with proper methodological procedures gain a solid fund of necessary vocabulary. The titles of the books from the list for the first and second cycle prove the previous argument. These are the works such as: *Pinocchio* by Carlo Collodion, *Pippi Longstocking* by Astrid Lindgren, *Heidi* by Johanna Spiro, *Dr. Jekyll* by Corneille Chukowski, *Peter Pan in Kensington Park* by James M. Berry, *Alice in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, etc.. It is evident that these are the works of an international character, and to those who have popularity and, mainly, screened. The basic objective: the development of interest and love for books and reading can certainly be achieved only if take into account the quality of the selected texts, their good reception among the children, and, of course, in the classroom, the quality methodological approach. The program is in many ways took into account the interests of young readers, and in the higher grades suggests novels of recent date, such as, for example, Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* and *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer's Stone*, written by JK Rowling. There are significantly more articles written by local authors or writers for children that are from the countries of the region as part of the school background literature (texts containing workbooks), so it can be said that part of the curriculum is in many ways balanced.

Regarding certain types of fiction, it can be said that fable and fantasy dominate, as well as a large number of the proposed novels, and there are also fables, folk tales, short stories, and stories about animals. The mentioned priority which occurred literature of fantasies (and even that almost could argue for both the initial cycle, and some fantastic character texts are read in the third three-year period) has, probably, more sources. Numerous researches have shown that young readers prefer fiction because it helps them imagine and because it shows some of the worlds in which there are different physical laws than those that determine the structure of the real world.

There are fewer restrictions (a person can, for example, fly) in the fiction, and the improbability of the potential surprise (Vuckovic, 2013). Acts of the fantastic content are always dynamically narrated (in some embodiments even the characters in the photographs have the ability to move), the descriptions are minimized, complications are numerous, the events constantly surprise the reader, the plot often takes the characters in the direction that it was impossible to even guess. Some of the fantastic motives kids that the young readers extremely love and know more of the mythology (Greek mythology is almost fully experienced by means of film adaptation, which is one of their favorite cartoons), and some of them are interesting in relation to modern scientific (non) findings which the pupils have had the opportunity to learn through films (time machines and time travel, teleportation, mind reading other mind control, invisibility, the stone of wisdom as the product of the alchemists and the elixir of eternal life etc..).

Interests of children in fiction are clearly marked, long-lasting and strong. However, in addition to the fact that the

teaching process seeks to maintain and enhance natural or already established interest of students, it is important to help children and to acquire and develop new and different interests for other literary types and forms of narration. The curriculum has achieved the best results by means of the texts including a large number of those realistic ones.

Lyrical songs proposed by the curriculum are mostly written by local authors or poets or by those from countries in the region. When choosing them, the authors have also quite paid account of children's readers' interests, so that they read poems - fairy tales, such as *Little Red Riding Hood In a Taxi* by Radulovic, or *Moon's Robbery* by Spasoje Labudović, songs in which the game is dominant - *Chestnuts* by Luka Paljetak, *Taram* by Dusan Radovic, *The Great Captain* by Dusan Djurisc, *Spider's Swing* by Desanka Maksimovic, *A Walnut* by Jova Knezevic, as well as the descriptive lyrical poems, such as, for example, *What Is The Colour of the Spring* by Grigor Vitez or the one entitled *September* by Dusan Kostic, the poems with a specific narrative course: *A Grandma's Letter to Sanja* by Dusan Djurisc, *My Grandpa's Glasses* by Dragana Radulovic ... (Program, 2011). There is, of course, a number of the poems taken from the folk literature.

There are, still, less dramatic texts among those proposed in relation to poetry and prose, but this lack can easily be compensated by means of dramatization of the prose texts. The pupils find the texts in the form of dialogue also interesting and popular. There is no description (whose role in the literary structure the students may not understand to the necessary extent), while the complete action happens between the characters on stage, very often with elements of humor, a great number of plays and is actually written for younger audience, and the themes and motives stemmed from the ideas interesting to the children.

### 3.2 The Field of Language

The grammar and spelling of the mother tongue, in addition to the mandatory systematic literacy program (Cyrillic and Latin writing skills) are the central content of the area of teaching language. Due to the fact that a great number of, sometimes very complex, terms will be acquired, naturally, requires a delicate methodical treatment. Due to the fact that those terms have clear definitions, it often happens that the work in the classroom is exactly what the teacher insists since the verbose approach to teaching process of this area proved not to be helpful for acquiring functional knowledge. It is, however, important to note that literacy today "means mastering a set of social and contextual-based knowledge, abilities and skills necessary to successfully and purposefully using numerous and diverse resources, encode and decode the meaning and message transmission, which offers modern civilization, as well as to effectively and efficiently communicate and function in an appropriate cultural context" (Moskovljević and Krstic, 2007, p. 96).

Initial reading and writing skills are always acquired in the first three-year period. The objective of the teaching process at the first class is to prepare pupils for reading and writing. By achieving the operational objectives, the teachers prepare pupils for a number of activities that will be necessary for a systematic literacy. In this way the auditory and visual skills are acquired, as well as the grapho-motoric exercises, observation exercises, talking, storytelling, describing, lexical, phonological, syntactic exercises, analytical and synthetic exercises etc. During this period teachers work on the adoption of terms: sentences, words, voice, letter, which also represent the main contents of the first cycle in which the pupils are taught their mother language.

In second grade students become familiar with the Cyrillic, and the third with the Latin alphabet. Systematic literacy, ie. learning and practicing reading and writing Cyrillic alphabet continues through the entire second grade and it is the main objective of all the classes related to this subject. Learning Latin is proved to be much easier, takes less time and is easier due to the fact that the students, while by learning the Cyrillic alphabet, the principles and rules of reading and writing are introduced (developed sensitivity voice, voice-established correspondence letter, endorsed the concept of writing and reading printed and cursive letters. ...) which makes the process much harder.

With initial literacy the curriculum introduces gradually initial grammatical and spelling concepts. Also, during the exercises of reading and writing, students are introduced to the various non-artistic texts that have been assigned a higher share of the curriculum in relation to the literary ones (60%: 40%).

PISA publications mention various types of texts (Reading for Change, 2002, pp 27-29). The main division consists on the continuous (descriptive, narrative, expository, argumentation and instruction) and incontinuous (forms, invitations and advertisements, graphs, charts, tables, matrices, maps ...) texts (Sample tasks, 2000, pp 24-25) . Reading and analysis of a non-artistic text are directed towards the development of reading literacy of students, and by means of the application of different methodological strategies students should learn how to learn by reading and how to develop competence of learning to learn. Nonartistic texts are not (as is the case with literary) the proposed by the curriculum. Textbook authors choose them in relation to the operational objectives. Teachers are, of course, able to plan and organize reading of the appropriate texts that cannot be found in the textbooks, all in accordance with the overall

didactic-methodical basis of the classes in a particular grade. The texts are taken from the children's newspapers, encyclopedias, the Internet, and the like. The themes are rather diverse, and it is essential that children find them interesting. They talk about the natural and social environment, various sports, important historical figures, famous scientists and artists, inventions, etc.

When it comes to the nature of these types of texts (nonpoetic code), textbook authors and teachers are allowed to update and adapt of the original texts. There are the following types of the analysis of the nonartistic texts: an intentional analysis (where the intention of the speaking person comes to the first place), content analysis (which deals with identifying topics and subtopics, key words and concepts, identifying relevant data and relationships among them, as well as the attitude towards the less important data, ie. Recognizing the conceptual structure of the text); pragmatic analysis (which deals with analyzing of place, time and situation in which the text was written), the analysis of words and sentences (dealing with connections between words in sentences and longer text units, the meaning of certain words, variation statements etc.), material analysis (dealing with recognition of the usefulness of the text and its value in everyday life), valuation analysis (dealing with the assessment of a text - stating opinions on the subject, content, form, facts, truth, functionality, linguistic level, etc.), metalinguistic analysis (connecting the previous elements into a whole that gives a total view of the text) (Popovic, 2009).

The acquisition of grammar and punctuation should be implemented without grammaticalization, ie. without starting from the finalized definitions. The methodological approach, basically, goes through three main stages: identifying linguistic phenomena, its acquisition and practicing. At each stage the pupils should be active and be able to (which is planned and managed by the teacher) come to conclusions about various aspects of their language by means of independent work. Logical thinking operations are particularly important and must be carefully planned by the teacher in order to make the students correctly acquire self-concepts, making judgments and conclusions. The curriculum also provides functional graduality in naming the grammatical concepts. Thus, for example, adjectives, being the part of speech have been introduced into the educational process since the third grade, but their grammatical naming and defining is not provided for this age group. They are named the words that describe the noun and its quality and belonging to somebody or something and when pupils acquire the three basic meanings, the teacher will announce that this type of words are called *adjectives*. This procedure is analogous when acquiring numerous grammatical concepts.

#### 4. Conclusion

The program of the mother language and literature of primary school education in Montenegro, after many years of using of the traditional program was changed in 2001. In the last decade, several times minor amendments to the research results have been made, especially when it comes to the recommendations and suggestions of teachers. However, the core concept, set in 2001 stayed the same. It is a process-targeted curriculum that distinguishes two basic areas: language and literature. Teaching literature dealing with literary and language teaching is based on the non-artistic texts.

The basic program elements include: operational objectives, activities, events, concepts, and correlations. Consistent with the overall organization of primary school in three cycles, the program indicates the goals that the cycles have to achieve. The operational objectives and learning outcomes are formulated in accordance with Bloom's taxonomy for the cognitive area. Dominant words in their formulation are the verbs of action (pupil listens, reads, writes, speaks, analyzes, summarizes, compares, tests, implements ...) suggesting the necessity of acquiring functional knowledge in the learning process.

The interpretation of literature in teaching is methodically based on the theory of literary reception (Jauss and Iser's conception). By means of the proposed selection of texts the authors are trying to meet the interests of pupils. In this regard, efforts were made to offer three literary genres equally. The proposed texts (particularly extensive) generally are screened as well, so that teachers can use the movies in some stages of the teaching process.

Teaching the language (grammar, spelling, cultural expression) is implemented in nonartistic text. PISA definition of reading literacy had much influence on such decision. The former concept of *learning to read* strives to innovate and change in teaching reading. Grammar and spelling of the mother tongue should be functionally adopted, without excessive verbalism, by means of reading and analysing the relevant texts that were written in standard language of everyday use, and such a determination best suits the two different kinds of nonartistic texts.

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