

The Reading Activity of Migrant Children within the System of Sociocultural Adaptation in Russia

La actividad de lectura de los niños migrantes dentro del sistema de adaptación sociocultural en Rusia

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ABSTRACT:

This paper describes a methodology for cultivating one's reading abilities and skills of analyzing literary texts which has been developed and tested as part of the operation of a school for migrant children set up at the Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute. As a result of their comprehensive examination of existing research into the issue and based on the findings from their own research, the authors identify a total of 3 stages in putting together a technology for assisting minor non-native learners in mastering reading. The paper shares the results of running an experimental class, describes the stages in the process of cultivating reading competence in migrant children, and cites the key components of the pedagogical model under implementation, including the provision by student philologists of tutoring support toward teaching children in the migrant school and the testing at the Advisory Educational Center of programs for enhancing the qualifications of instructors working in polycultural classes. The proposed learning technology is aimed at enabling migrant children to successfully master an adapted curriculum in Russian Literature and adapt socioculturally into the Russian educational space.

RESUMEN:

Este artículo describe una metodología para cultivar las habilidades de lectura y las habilidades de análisis de textos literarios que se han desarrollado y probado como parte de la operación de una escuela para niños migrantes establecida en el Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute. Como resultado de su examen exhaustivo de la investigación existente sobre el tema y sobre la base de los resultados de su propia investigación, los autores identifican un total de 3 etapas en la creación de una tecnología para ayudar a los alumnos no nativos menores a dominar la lectura. El documento comparte los resultados de la ejecución de una clase experimental, describe las etapas del proceso de desarrollo de la competencia lectora en niños migrantes y cita los componentes clave del modelo pedagógico en implementación, incluida la provisión por parte de filólogos estudiantes de apoyo de tutoría para enseñar a los niños en la escuela de migrantes y las pruebas en el Centro Educativo Asesor de programas para mejorar las calificaciones de los instructores que trabajan en clases policulturales. La tecnología de aprendizaje propuesta tiene como objetivo permitir a los niños migrantes dominar con éxito un currículo adaptado en la

1. Introduction

The need to promptly adapt to the conditions of a single integrated world amid the expansion of intercultural and interconfessional interaction across the various areas of human activity and other similar issues facing migrants require prompt dealing with, and that directly depends on how motivated a migrant is and what kind of conditions the receiving country can create. Resolving issues of the sociocultural adaptation of migrant children is currently a priority for Russia, which is attested to by a number of statutes and laws that are being effectuated today by the Russian government (e.g., the Migrant Kids (in effect since 1999) and Children of Russia (has a section devoted to migrants; launched in 2003) programs).

The Republic of Mordovia, as one of Russia's more migrant-intensive regions, has found itself in need of regional pedagogical model for the language and sociocultural adaptation of migrant children into the school setting, with a focus on the following objectives: developing an integrated program of activities aimed at the social, cultural, and language adaptation of migrant children; developing and implementing additional educational programs on the Russian language for non-native speaker learners; developing and implementing career enhancement programs for teachers.

The authors have proposed the following as the key components of the pedagogical model under implementation: the provision by student philologists of tutoring support for teaching children in the migrant school and the testing at the Advisory Educational Center, set up at the Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute, of programs for enhancing the qualifications of teachers providing instruction in classes composed of migrant children; adapted curricula in Russian, Russian literature, and the history of Russia. The authors view reading activity as a major adaptation tool for migrant children.

The focus is on making the learning of Russian literature by migrant children as versatile as possible. The top priority is introducing children-non-native speakers to samples of Russian culture that reflect the ethnical, ethical, and esthetic priorities of the Russian people, whose morals and customs it helps to assimilate in order to live and study comfortably going forward. Further, reading activity serves, first of all, as a tool for expanding one's communication potential, inasmuch as exploring the sign nature of any literary text requires a certain amount of effort; second of all, fostering reading competence facilitates a shift to an new adaptation level, which is possible owing to the accumulation and assimilation of knowledge about the language and culture of the receiving nation.

In exploring general issues related to the nature of the process of migration, the authors drew on works by scholars S.V. Badal'yants (2012), J.W. Berry (1980), M.M. Gordon (1964), T. B. Mikheeva (2008) and W. Kimlicka (1995), whose research is focused on the sociocultural adaptation of migrants into Russian society. Of special interest is research by E.L. Omel'chenko (Omel'chenko, Andreeva, Luk'yanova, Sabirova, & Krupets, 2010) and G.E. Zborovskii (2013), focused on searching for optimum ways to integrate migrant children into a foreign national environment and exploring the nature of the process of cultivating in them notions of the fundamental values of Russian culture and the Russian nation. The authors have yet to come across an all-round research study into the learning of literature by migrant children. There is relevance in research by scholars Yu.N. Karaulov (2012) and E.G. Kuznetsova (2016), focused on migration pedagogy and polycultural education and suggesting the need for making some changes to present-day school learning and, as a consequence, for retraining instructors, including those who teach literature.

The authors relied on the ideas expressed by scholars E.V. Kvyatkovskii (1984) and S.N. Kostromina (2006) to define the reading competence of migrant children as a set of specific skills required for the sociocultural adaptation of migrant children who intended to receive an education in Russia. To note, special attention is devoted to fostering the following set of

abilities and skills: cultivating a command of the word-stock and grammar of the Russian language through introducing migrant children to literary samples of Russian culture, the ability to properly perceive and generate texts, and the ability to familiarize oneself with and master, by way of analysis of literary works, the fundamental sociocultural values of Russian society.

2. Materials and methods

This study is focused on developing and implementing some of the basics of reading activity at the initial stage of a course of study prescribed for migrant children, followed by skill honing. The authors utilized the following methods: theoretical, employed to explore and analyze literary-studies, methodological, and psychological/pedagogical research; sociological/pedagogical, utilized to develop a methodological concept and predicated on the analysis of observations of how schools organize work related to migrant children's study of literary works and interviews with learners and instructors; experimental, implying the organization and conduct of ascertaining, teaching, and checking experiments as part of introducing migrant children to the basics of reading activity; statistical, involving the analysis and summarization of the study's findings.

3. Results

The study's central methodological idea is centered around fostering reading competence in migrant children with a view to not just developing in them the ability to perceive a literary text as a sample of different culture and a translator of the mentality of the people whom one is going to live alongside with but also help them develop as individuals capable of creative activity in the foreign national conditions and circumstances they are going to live in.

The current strategy for literary education is oriented toward the process of modeling, i.e. creating and substantiating a set of interdependent elements that, combined, form a single entity aimed at cultivating in one a set of competencies, including reading mastery. Considering the non-uniform and equivocal nature of the current development of the literary education paradigm, it may help to identify several stages in the development of a migrant reader:

- initial: 'Learning to Read';
- middle: 'Acquiring a Minimum Technical Reading Proficiency' (based on the study of literature at school);
- top: 'Becoming an Advanced Reader'.

The reading culture of modern people is a significant indicator of society's spiritual potential. When there come face to face two different cultures (native and non-native), the mutual interadaptation whereof is often of a pragmatic nature, the resolution of daily-life collisions through an educational minimum is a necessary condition for the primary adaptation of migrants, which guarantees the peaceful coexistence of the newly-arrived and the receiving nation. In essence, it is the initial level in learning to read that enables the primary integration of migrants (including the children who arrived with them) into the sociocultural continuum of the other nation's culture. In addition, "Russia's multinational and multiconfessional make-up facilitates that significant numbers of migrants find themselves in more comfortable conditions in Russia than in countries where the population is distinguished by being monoethnic and monocultural" (Badal'yants, 2012).

The complexity of integrating migrant children into a different cultural environment and difficulties associated with learning Russian as the core language required to speak to be able to receive an education in Russia signal the need to resolve the major issue of having to master a set of basic operations of sign/context learning. At that stage, reading activity implies acquiring a command of reading techniques, techniques for comprehending the work's content, and skills of primary analysis of a literary text. Thus, learning to read is equivalent to acquiring an elementary-level command of skills of interpersonal communication in the context of the dialogue of cultures, and is implemented at the level of

a reader's ability to use a book as a source of knowledge and information.

As part of the project 'A Regional Model for the Language and Sociocultural Adaptation of Migrant Children into a School's Academic Setting' (Activity 5.4 'Support for Innovation in the Area of Developing and Monitoring the Education System' of 'The 2016–2020 Federal Special-Purpose Program for the Development of Education'), instructors at the Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute have developed and tested in a school for migrant children, set up within the Minor School Academy, a prolonged program for mastery of reading techniques. The program has produced a number of significant results which will be used in helping adjust the way migrant children work with a literary text as an exemplar of a communicative act and acquire a command of relevant components of reading activity.

The developed program for beginning readers implies tutoring support for migrant children from student philologists, who can help introduce them to the national flair and ethnic identity of the receiving people through text realities. Proper assistance with assimilating the prescribed behavioral norms and values will enable students acting as tutors to practice communicating with representatives of other cultures and will facilitate fostering tolerant behavior from both sides.

The second stage in cultivating reading competence, 'Acquiring a Minimum Technical Reading Proficiency' (based on the study of literature at school), involves implementing in the educational process of the school for migrant children an adapted literature curriculum for migrant children (Biryukova, Mardaeva, & Serdobintseva, 2017).

Considering that the key objective for teachers providing instruction in Russian literature is to cultivate in learners an esthetic taste, skills of analytical examination of literary works, and willingness to do some reading on one's own, high proficiency in figurative concretization and figurative summarization, proper command of theoretical/literary concepts, communicative/verbal skills, etc., developers of the adapted literature curriculum for migrant children have based their judgement on specific methodological objectives that will need to be resolved in literature classes attended by migrant children.

The developed and tested 'Adapted Literature Curriculum for Migrant Children' is intended to assist learners with reading and exploring literary works under the guidance of an instructor, and is 72 hours long. Reading and exploring implies the textual reading of and commenting on a literary work or some of its fragments. The program consists of three modules (*Module 1 – 'This Unusual and Magic World', Module 2 – 'Discovering the World Around You', and Module 3 – 'The Year After Childhood'*), each of which includes the following sections: contents, theory of literature, relationship with the other arts, speech development, and recommendations for home reading.

In testing the program in the school for migrant children, two experimental groups were set up. The first group consisted solely of migrant children, while the second one, a mixed group, was made up of non-native speaker learners and schoolchildren from several general education schools of the city of Saransk, Russian citizens. The outcomes reflecting mastery of the learning material varied. In the first group, characterized by lack of standard samples of Russian speech, except for the speech of the instructor, overall interest for literary samples was insignificant, while the second group exhibited a willingness to engage in reading activity and a solid interest in literature. In a climate of evident conformism, in the absence of analytical preconditions in conceptualizing a literary text in class, and in the absence of a need to self-withdraw in examining contentious issues of an analytical nature, migrant children could discuss in the enclave, in a lively manner, various topics, images, and characters.

The third level deals with cultivating reading competence as a competency dominating a migrant's educational space. In the authors' view, it would be wrong to single out, within the context of mainstreaming reading activity, the types of active reader, compelled reader, and passive reader. And here it is not about the possibility of formally classifying as passive readers those who listen to the text of a literary work and classifying as compelled those who are "doomed" to study literary works (most often, this group includes an overwhelming majority of non-native speaker learners as well). An active reader is distinguished by being prepared more thoroughly to perceive a literary sample (displaying an interest in the history

of the work's creation and the place and significance of its content in the author's creative biography and a willingness to engage the philosophical, culturological, and textological types of commentary, etc.). Therefore, a key objective for the language-and-literature teacher is to requalify the reader learner into an active and thinking participant in the educational process. Having assigned a priority role in the process of cultivating reading competence in migrant children to the language-and-literature teacher, the project's developers are currently implementing at the Educational Advisory Center for Language-and-Literature Teachers at Municipal Educational Institutions special enhancement programs for general education teachers and additional education instructors working with migrant children (e.g., 'Methodology of Teaching Russian as a Second Language', 'Innovative Technology in the System of Literary Education in Polyethnic Schools', and 'Methodology of Teaching Russian Literature in a Polyethnic Educational Environment').

Given that, as an operation, reading consists of a number of characteristic successive functional components, it helps to schematize the skills central to the successful mastery of a literary work at the highest reading-learning level: analyzing a literary text from a perspective of literary-studies, language, and esthetic characteristics within the era's historical and social/political context; interpreting a literary work having in consideration its genre characteristics; determining the unity of the global literary process and its parts; possessing a command of theoretical/literary terms which will be employed in conceptualizing and mastering the material read; conducting a comprehensive analysis of modern samples of Russian literature; being able to determine major forms of the use of mythological heritage by Russian writers; engaging in integrative activity in exploring interdependent processes in Russian literature; generating a culturological, historical, and philosophical commentary to the samples of Russian literature one has read; being able to interpret the narrative and poetic manner of the literary legacy of a specific writer.

Following the first-time reading, it is required to identify the author's hermeneutic circle through the use of non-traditional types of work with the text (e.g., resolving the issue of the work's attribution, drawing on the author's initial editions for comparison with the main text, exploring the literary work through the lens of the other arts, or organizing a scholarly debate on contentious issues related to interpreting the work).

Currently, work continues regarding the assimilation of novel aids for reading and implementation of computer technology in the educational process in the school for migrant children. This helps exploit today's extensive IT potential based on an interactive approach interrelating the reading and exploring of literary texts, which is what finds realization in the process of cultivating the reading competence of learners, including migrant children.

4. Discussion

Russia's current migration situation is one of the new challenges of today. In light of the processes of adaptation, which is crucial for the trouble-free coexistence of the receiving community with migrants, and integration of migrant children into the existing cultural space, there arises the need to develop new approaches, programs, and methodologies aimed at helping migrants and their children cultivate proper ties with the new environment they are entering. In this context, education is regarded as the more democratic, mass-scale, accessible, and humane – in essence and content – institution capable of ensuring the adaptation of migrant children.

The authors view literary education as one of the fundamental areas for designing integration and adaptation strategies in respect of migrant children, as it should help introduce them to the moral and esthetic riches of classic and modern literature and to the spiritual wealth of the Russian people and its history and culture.

A literary text serves as a tool for communication which helps expand one's notion of the psychology and mentality and the past and present of another ethnic group, while reading activity can be viewed as a projection of the degree to which migrant children have adapted to living in the receiving country. An example of how to introduce a migrant child to the spiritual/moral values of Russian culture and cultivate in them the ability to grasp the gist of literary works they read and fathom the figurative nature of literature as a phenomenon of

word art is a prolonged program for mastery of reading techniques developed by instructors from the Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute and tested at a school for migrant children set up within the Minor School Academy.

5. Conclusion

The educational environment, which offers significant potential in terms of helping one integrate into the host nation's culture, ought to become a crucial institution for the sociocultural adaptation of migrant children. In this regard, it helps to focus on resolving issues related to developing the theoretical underpinnings of the methodology of working with migrant children. Literary education may be viewed as a constructive adaptation strategy to adopt to assist migrant children.

The identified stages in the development of a reader individual from the milieu of migrant children (initial, middle, and top) help model the activity of a language-and-literature teacher, specify the methodology of their work, and forecast the outcomes. The process of a child learning to read activates the latter's entire activity potential – from perceiving the world described in a book to perceiving social reality at large. A learner gains experience using learning information, which ensures turning objective knowledge into personal concepts, shaping their reading competence. As they transit from one level to another, migrant children develop a sustainable need to turn to books, which is going to not just serve as a tool for translating concepts but help foster the notion of reading as an activity capable of turning the author's experience coded in the text into one's personal experience.

An important tool for the successful adaptation of migrant children into the educational/cultural environment is the development of adaptational/educational programs. An example of how to introduce a migrant learner to the spiritual/moral values of Russian literature and culture and get them to better fathom the gist of works they read is the Adapted Literature Curriculum for Migrant Children tested at the Evsev'ev Mordovian State Pedagogical Institute.

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