

LEARNING AND TEACHING GERMAN LANGUAGE AT KINDERGARTEN. METHODOLOGIES AND COLLECTION OF READINGS

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Received: 30.05.2013; Accepted: 19.12.2013; Published online: 16.08.2014

The importance of foreign language learning is often emphasized by our parents, teachers. The world grows open, Europe gets closer to us if we speak other languages. We can have several opportunities if we make international contacts. Topic of my thesis is currently of high relevance in connection with the development and changes of our educational system. Every day, we have newer and newer foreign language educational programmes, activity books, audiobooks released. Our children have the chance to learn foreign languages sitting in front of television watching the most popular cartoon characters. Today, we can come across programmes aimed at children in various fields and forms. English is undoubtedly the most popular language to learn. There are no or only a few German programmes of this kind.

Keywords: kindergarten, early language learning, German language, language learning, methodology

Teachers wishing to teach English can have several collections of children literature readings, complex works containing practical advice. As opposed to this, books containing methodologies, poems, nursery rhymes necessary to prepare German language activities can only be obtained with a lot of efforts and by matching works. Useful articles, readers prefer language teaching from an early age. Instead, they are aimed at school age, based on the fact that children already have the ability to read and write in their mother tongue. Consequently, my thesis might be regarded as a work to fill that gap for nursery pedagogists preparing German language activities. It contains the methodology descriptions necessary to plan and organize the activities, and a thematic plan to prepare the German language activities of the first year, it contains a collection of children literature readings and songs with nursery rhymes and songs in correspondence with interests of children of nursery age and characteristics.

Research

The purpose of the research was to compile a thesis that contains methodology descriptions, practical advice, experiences, and a collection to thematically and annually list German poems, songs and nursery rhymes selected expressly for children. Their language, therefore, is simple, they are short, melodic and easy to teach through exercises.

Methodology

To bring about ability toward learning a foreign language, it is necessary to gradually remove, or minimize as much as possible, the use of the mother tongue. The chance for children to use the devices of the activities helps a lot. Doing so, they can easily recall what they have just learnt. New information becomes imprinted faster and more deeply (Bauer, 2000:75).

At nursery age, comprehension is brought about by several inputs. The attention, perception, memory, imagination, thinking, emotions, will of the children all contribute to this process. The children apply speech skills, motions and situations already acquired to comprehend a foreign language.

It is an efficient method if the children perform the action hearing the foreign language word, seeing the device. At nursery age is defined by mechanic learning, therefore, action, manipulation is important. This way, the children get new information with a thing attached to it making them comprehend it. This way, comprehension becomes a natural and spontaneous process.

Language acquisition theories

When learning a foreign language, the process to call is in fact not language learning but language acquisition. It is necessary the skills by which children can comprehend certain situations and react to them should be formed. During foreign language activities, actions to perform are internalized becoming skills. Later on, they become automatic, parts of complex actions, finally, they become skills.

During empiric language acquisition, language acquisition takes place merely through experiences. According to nativist theories, everybody possesses a language acquisition device (LAD), biologically programmed. Piaget has provided a cognitive explanation to the matter of acquisition, saying that language skills are embedded in thinking and cognitive processes, leading to Vigosty and Brunner to bring about a socio-cognitive explanation (Kovács, 2009:30-33).

Language acquisition is triggered by making right questions. The questions are to arouse children's interest, curiosity, having making contact and acquainting realized. It is important not to ask too many questions, keeping playful side of the activity.

Acquiring poems, nursery rhymes is to take place after the pedagogist's presentation, knowing the contents and plenty of repeats. Children can acquire melodic and rhythmical poems attached to actions.

The expression action rhyme often used in the English language meaning saying poems accompanied by actions (Kovács, 2009: 142). First, the pedagogist is to introduce the whole poem, then the words are to be interpreted.

Acquisition

The first and most important step is to arouse the children's interest, This is followed by actions, manipulations, plays, demonstrative pictures. This is the way that new knowledge becomes processed. This should only be followed by a lot of repeats and practice preferably having memorizing realized through exercises (Kovács, 2009:36).

Basic principles during language acquisition at kindergarten

In Hungary, one of the biggest mistakes of language teaching is that it concentrates on grammar and not on the fact the languages should be used as a tool of communication. It is important that children should get to know situational exercises, conversational idioms at this early stage.

Children between ages of four and seven cannot write, therefore, verbalism is very important. Describing and explaining exercises is to take place verbally. These should be short and easy to comprehend. Using mother tongue during foreign language activities is not exclusively kept out. In the beginning, it is necessary that the pedagogist should speak their mother tongue as well. It is also vital that the pedagogist should say foreign words and expressions with the right pronunciation.

What children at nursery school mainly do is play, having their personality, relationships develop, they get their experiences and knowledge. Therefore, the fact that activities should be playful is important.

Creating groups in foreign language activities needs taking a lot of care. Groups with 10-12 children are ideal. It should not exceed 15.

Motivational devices

Motivation is a positive connotation toward learning (Bauer, 2000:59). Before the activities, it is worth talking about the foreign language with the children. It is the nursery school pedagogist's task to make them look forward to the first German language activity.

The attitude of the parent is also important. The personality of the pedagogist greatly influences the children's motivation. He or she should be kind, sympathetic, should have the ability to create a pleasant emotional atmosphere making the children feel safe in his or her company. The pedagogist should smile a lot, be happy, praise many times if the children really do well during the activities, and should give encouragement to the ones in need of it. Children fundamentally have the desire to prove. They need success and appreciation. Therefore, they should be given the chance to solve exercises individually but the ones that are more passive should not be neglected either. Special care toward everyone should be materialized during foreign language activities as well.

The process of learning control starts with motivation. To have it, demonstration is of high importance. Long lasting, aesthetic devices in relevance with pedagogical methods should be chosen to arouse children's interest, for instance colourful pictures (Bauer, 2000:64). Too colourful, too complicated, loud devices should not be used because they might divert the children's attention, causing something quite opposite.

Diversity should be taken care of, interesting, new inputs should be provided. Situations bringing about wonder, surprise, emotions hold also strong motivational power.

Methods and expectations

Planning activities starts with defining exercises, then methods are to be chosen, then methodologies are to be organized (Bauer, 2000:114).

When recording new knowledge, method of conversation is the most obvious, sitting around on carpet, asking the children questions. It is helpful to attach the new knowledge to common experiences.

To strengthen new knowledge, to bring about skills and proficiency, repeats are indispensable. Children imitate the adults, therefore, introducing the pedagogist is a viable method. Presenting objects and pictures, making children act, manipulation are all methods good to apply. Auditive demonstration also deserves a mention, though it has to be kept on mind that audio recordings can only hold the children's attention for a short period of time. Songs, poems are to be taught with this method.

Plays often used in the Hungarian language to develop memory (barkochba, tongue-twisters, fingerplays, pictures plays and so on) are to be applied during foreign language activities.

One of the most important goals to archive is that the children should dare to start talking in the foreign language. Dramatization and pupation are excellent methods to develop speaking skills, to facilitate speech production, and to arouse the courage to speak.

Methods and planning

The method to be applied is the one that takes the children's age characteristics into account. It is such a characteristic that their interest turns to the objective world. This bears an important part in choosing the topic. Emotional and mental effects are to be applied together, since children are emotion-bound at this age. It is important to keep the activities jolly and varied. It can greatly facilitate the willingness of the group if the activities are fast paced and facile. The pedagogist is to be able to organize and control willingness. If children's individual participation and experience of success is provided, it can make their motivation and interest increase. However, it is fundamentally the personality of the pedagogist conducting the activities that has the greatest motivational effect. It is often said, and I have also experienced that during my professional expertise so far, that the group is like what the pedagogist is like. In the group of the cheerful singing pedagogist, the children happily sing, and in the group of the nursery school pedagogist excellent at origami, the children handily do origami. Naturally, the pedagogist conducting the foreign language activities has the same great influence on the children belonging to his or her group. "Teaching" is to be the most successful, imprinting is to be the deepest if all senses of the children are made involved in the learning process. New knowledge can be demonstrated in several ways such as in an auditive, visual way and through

actions. Their memory attached to pictures and situations are highly developed. If more than one association is attached to knowledge, imprinting is deeper, reproduction is faster (Bauer, 2000:105).

Verbal introduction is also important, though, when working with this method, there are a few factors to be paid attention to. The first is the pace of pronunciation. When teaching new words and expressions, it is important that they should be pronounced slowly, distinctly and with the right articulation. This way, incorrect imprinting can be avoided. It is also important to pay attention to rhythm of pronunciation, rhythm and stressing is a great aid. For instance, words can be said clapping in rhythm with the syllables. Intonation is also vital. Intonation, rhythmicity helps acquisition in the similar way as rhythm does. Besides, exclusive verbal communication is to be avoided. Verbal directions, long introductions to exercises make attention go weak.

Children while doing activities gain knowledge through experiences. Rhymes accompanied by actions, songs, plays satisfy their desire to act. These action oriented activities are the most popular among children too.

It is important that actions, words, expressions should be regularly repeated. This way, the knowledge does not become imprinted only in the short term memory. However, it should be kept in mind that children can get bored by their favourite plays, therefore, it should be thought over several aspects in a very precise way to be taken seriously and plan the activities.

The activities are to be built on plays unconditionally. Children's imitation ability, fresh imagination and extremely rich fantasy-world can ease on language learning. During the plays, the children's inhibits can be resolved, their trust can be gained making them participate later in activities in a braver, more active way, and their willingness to speak spontaneously can be facilitated. Motivation required to learning can be brought about by playfulness, then the curriculum is to be planned in a most precise way. The curriculum to learn is to be created consequently.

The pedagogist is to be adapted to the level of development of the learners. Several aspects of the group should be paid attention to, such as age, sex, and choice on the right curriculum and methods. The pedagogist is to be flexible, be skilled in high standard methodologies of pedagogy and psychology and have accurate preparation of nursery school pedagogy and psychology. Individual and common treatment are to be equally balanced during the activities. Not only are the active children to be attended but everybody is to be given individual exercises. Learning in groups has a lot of advantages, bringing about a better competitiveness and enthusiasm in the group as well as accomplishment, which gives a huge sense of achievement to the children. The pedagogist conducting the foreign language activities is to have educational tasks just as a nursery school pedagogist does. In their job, they are to develop materializing children's conscious attention and logical thinking and to facilitate speech development in mother tongue. The pedagogist is to gain knowledge about courteousness habits, practice cultivated human speech. The pedagogist is to widen the children's intellectual horizons, to form a positive attitude about other peoples and cultures and to develop the children's aesthetic sense with nice devices, puppets and material of songs.

Assessment at nursery school

The most important information is to be defined by the quality and quantity of the verbal display of the children during activities (Bauer, 2000:121). Individual and group performances are to be assessed continuously. A control assessment is to be performed making it clear whether goals set earlier have been achieved, if not, what the reason might be, what methods have been working well, what planning methods have been the ones that should have been given a better consideration.

The children participating in German language activities acquire at least 100-150 words and expressions by the end of the first year, they get acquainted with general forms of greeting, names of the objects used in everyday life, names of animals and plants and they count from 1 to 20 in the target language.

In nursery school groups the assessment can be performed by several observations. Occasional and continuous assessments can be performed aimed at the whole group or at a certain child expressly. During the assessment, the willingness, vocabulary development, pronunciation of the children is to be highlighted as well as their performances in the foreign language. The words, expressions used unintentionally and created spontaneously should be made a note of. Nursery school pedagogists and parents' feedback are to be considered. Do the children tell anything about the activities? Do they tell the rhymes at home? Do foreign words appear in their play? This and similar kind of questions are the ones that nursery school pedagogists and parents are to be approached with.

Planning activities

Foreign language activities at nursery school need an accurate planning performed by the pedagogists. Wrong foreign language activities can spoil the children's pleasure about language learning for life. It is important to bring about positive attitude in them. The children gladly ask about the German equivalents of certain objects shaping the flow of the activities at the same time.

It needs a special planning that the children should be given exercises to have a sense of achievement provided by solving them, which develops their personality and makes them braver and more self confident. They have positive emotions brought about, wishing to experience them again. And this is when planning is joined by repeats. It is important that the structures of the activities should be broadly the same, making the children know it and follow it on their own. It is not boring for the children if a play is played five or ten times. Repeats make them feel confident, and actual willingness of the children are always to be relied on.

It should also be taken into consideration that children at nursery school have their attention scattered, therefore, it might be easily diverted. Conscious, intentional concentration is not yet present in them. They keep looking at toys in the group room, talking or dealing with objects around them ready to be brought back to the activities by a word, a slight gesture or dropping their names.

Structure of thematic is also to form an integral part of planning with mainlines also defined by the children's fields of interest. Topics preferred are the ones suiting their personalities. They always love talking about animals, meals, family, everyday situations (medical treatments, shopping, excursions and so on.). Structure of thematics is to be organized in relevance

with seasons and religious and national holidays. They prefer and understand existent topics much more. When compiling thematics, usability is of high importance to consider. The children are not to be taught words and expressions that are complicated and not possible to use in everyday communication. Instead, figures of speech, words used in everyday language are to be taught. After building up own thematics, the pedagogist is to make a decision on material of songs and rhymes. The topics are to be related to the lyrics. Collection is to be reasonable and logical.

Organizing activities

Foreign language activities are to happen under organized circumstances. The task of the pedagogist is to provide the necessary conditions. The most important conditions are the personal ones including professional and linguistic skills, creativity, accuracy and intelligence of the pedagogist. The personality of the learners also influences the organizing processes, their age, maturity, motivation and endurance are also to be taken into consideration.

Next step is providing the material conditions, the devices of the activities. Based on thematic plan prepared in advance, it can be chosen what exercises are to be accomplished during the activities, and a list about organizing the activities can be made in relevance with these exercises. It can be recorded onto this list what devices to acquire, when to acquire them and where to acquire them from.

Choosing the date needs further organizing. The foreign language activities are important to be harmonized with other services provided by the nursery school to adapt to what the children can take, given that they are more tired in the afternoon hours than in the morning. If the foreign language group is made up from members of different nursery schools groups, activities of those groups are also to be considered.

When organizing the activities, the appropriate place is also very important to choose. To run the activities smoothly and unproblematically, it is necessary to have a permanent place that is possible to use on every occasion. This is to be agreed with the nursery school director and the nursery school pedagogists. The equipment of the room is also to serve the success of the activities. Fundamental equipment qualifies tables, chairs, storage wardrobes, and a big carpet.

German language acquisition at nursery school

1. *When do children have to start learning a foreign language?* – The ideal period is at the age of four-five. As most nursery school services, they happen in the afternoon, German language activities start in October. It is important not to confuse daily schedule. There are two possibilities to choose from on dates: arriving time in the morning and playtime in the afternoon. Both have advantages and disadvantages. In the morning it cannot be expected that everybody can participate in the activities, the nursery school pedagogist has to register the children on arriving, and the continuous elevenses can also cause problems in the course of the activities. On the other hand, the children can concentrate better in the morning, they are more productive, they solve exercises, do rhymes, play. If the activities are planned to be in the afternoon during playtime, it should be considered that the children are more tired and cannot concentrate that much. If they cannot

go out to the yard that day due to bad weather, it is a real challenge to hold their attention.

2. *How long and how often?* – To achieve goals determined, at least two activities are to be held every week. The introductory activities are to be shorter, 8-10 minutes long. They are not to exceed 30 minutes, ideal activities are to be 10-12 minutes. If longer, the children's attention and interest goes weaker, possibly experiencing fullness. The pedagogist is to adapt to actual conditions of the children and to handle the time period in a flexible way.

3. *How many learners in the groups?* – In case of the language learning group, 16-18 learners is considered to be too many. There is no possibility to have individual exercises, checking up on mistakes. A group of 8-12 learners is the most effective, in which case it is easier to pay attention to individual performances, to give individual exercises to the children, they can get a word in, talk in front of their fellow learners, they can get experiences of success. This way, the degree of motivation increases and the degrees of disciplining decreases. With smaller groups, the pedagogist can help the language development of the children more effectively.

4. *Where to conduct the activities?* – In the group room, only with children involved in the activities. This solution is the most advantageous because the attention of the children is concentrated on the pedagogist conducting the activities. As the other children are not present, there are no other sounds and happenings in the background to divert their attention.

Devices

The activities fundamentally require devices, but nursery school groups are generally well equipped. Every nursery school has the most basic toy devices, for instance dolls, teddy bears, toy cars, plush animals, balls, colourful building cubes and so on. These give great opportunities to the pedagogists. Puppets also form an integral part of basic equipment being a great help when playing stories and roleplays with the children. Draught-screen might be also necessary for puppets theatres. The writing materials, colour pencils, scissors and glues of the group can be used too, which help do group exercises with the children. Nursery schools have different financial backgrounds, therefore, playful educational packages, colour picture stories might be missing. The pedagogist, however, can substitute these with drawing pictures by hand or printing them, which can be made aesthetic and long lasting with lamination.

The teachers conducting the foreign language activities

Foreign language activities at nursery school can be conducted by nursery school pedagogists, teachers with a foreign language degree and general language and foreign language secondary school teachers. Most effectively, the activities are to be conducted by nursery school pedagogists with language certifications. The question, however, might appear, namely, what knowledge and qualities the pedagogist is to have.

The most important characteristic the pedagogist should have is his or her love towards children. The pedagogist is to be able to give emotional continuity to the group, to be goal-oriented, to have good organizing skills and to be able to make emotional relationships with the children because it is what makes work together effective. Bad community atmosphere can provoke resistance, aggressivity making interest minimized. The way of

thinking of the pedagogist is to be flexible and to have the ability to react fast because during work with children, the course of the activities is to be mentioned if already happened. The children shape the course of the activities with their questions, willingness and momentary interests, this is what the pedagogist is to adapt to, realizing possibilities induced by sudden happenings. It is indispensable that the pedagogist should have professional and language skills, be creative and have good handicrafts and musical skills.

Organizing tasks outside kindergarten – keep learning

It is often a problem that the continuity of language learning started at the nursery school is not organized, therefore, it is not verified essentially either that the children that participated can later learn a foreign language more easily than the children that have their first encounter with languages at elementary school. It would be important to organize occasions where the children can continue language learning not to miss the one-three years until foreign language teaching starts at school too. These activities can be conducted by language teachers practising at elementary school, making the children acquainted with their future teachers. During playful exercises, more relaxed "lessons", positive emotional relationship is to be created between them (Bauer, 2000:130).

Summary

In Hungary, foreign language teaching bears a distinguished part. Every day there are new and new articles in the newspapers, magazines. Problems, improvements, reform possibilities of language teaching belong to our educational policy. In the 21st century language learning is indispensable. Generations growing up will already have the need for knowing not only one but two foreign languages beside mother tongue. Undoubtedly, the English language is more well spread and popular than the German language. Whether we like it or not, we meet it, countless number of English words, expressions have been integrated in our everyday language usage. Based on my personal experiences, I think it can greatly ease on language learning if children first meet the German language. It is in any case useful if this meeting happens before starting school.

My thesis is divided into three parts. The first part is a comprehensive methodological summary for conducting foreign language activities. The year around thematic plan making up the second part contains 32 activities sorted into topics, it contains words, expressions to acquire, various forms of activities, titles of songs, nursery rhymes related to the topic, and devices to be possibly used. The third part is a collection of children literature readings and songs. It contains more than 100 selected poems and songs sorted into 15 topics. In my thesis, I wish to verify actuality and usefulness of foreign language learning. I wish to attract pedagogists and parents' attention to the opportunities given by the German language. My experiences verify that children like foreign language activities, gladly participating in them. These activities make children's weekdays more interesting, their knowledge becomes richer.

I wish to settle pedagogists and parents' doubts about foreign language learning at early age and to promote German language activities.

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