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Methodological Problems in the Curricular Framework for Learning the Latin Alphabet as the Second Alphabet in Serbian Language Teaching

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Extended summary

The Latin alphabet, as an alphabet of Serbian language, is taught in the second term of the second grade of primary school. The specificity of learning the Latin alphabet lies in the fact that pupils are already literate at this stage. The First Grade Primary School Curriculum (2004) allows teachers to choose one of the three methods of teaching letters – monographic, group or complex method. In addition, there is no specific order prescribed for teaching the letters of the first alphabet. The letters are grouped freely, in accordance with linguistic and methodological principles. The Second Grade Primary School Curriculum (2004) prescribes only one method of the Latin alphabet teaching and learning, including the order in which the letters should be introduced. The curricular framework for learning the Cyrillic alphabet allows teachers to choose one out of three methods. When it comes to learning the Latin alphabet, the curricular contents are strictly defined – the letters are to be taught in groups and in a specific order. It is unclear why, at the beginning of learning how to write, and when it is assumed that not all children have mastered reading and writing, the selection of methods is quite open and free, whereas in the second grade, when pupils already know to write in Cyrillic, the curriculum prescribes the exact order in which the letters should be taught and learned.

The paper analyses the curricular contents related to learning the Latin alphabet. The goal of the conducted research was to analyse the curricular solutions for teaching and learning the Latin alphabet as the second alphabet as well as the textbooks used for this purpose. Descriptive method was used in the research, while the analysis of the pedagogical documentation was the se-

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lected research technique. The research sample consisted of four approved textbooks for learning the Latin alphabet. The curricular frameworks for learning the Cyrillic and Latin alphabets were compared first. The results indicate that the two frameworks are incoherent. It is quite uncommon that the methodology for teaching and learning the first alphabet, which is always more complex and difficult to acquire, is set rather freely, while the methods for learning the second alphabet are strictly prescribed. The curriculum allows the teachers to choose one of the three methods for teaching the Cyrillic letters. When it comes to learning the Latin alphabet, the curricular contents are strictly defined – the letters are to be taught in the groups of letters. It is not logical that the curricular solutions for learning the Latin alphabet do not give teachers room to choose among several methods, namely, to choose the method that will suit the pupils' abilities, which is the fundamental methodological principle in learning reading and writing. By applying methodological criteria, teachers would be able to choose the most appropriate approaches that would meet their pupils' needs. The research findings also indicate that there is an inconsistency between the prescribed order of introducing letters in the curriculum and the one presented in the textbooks. The *Curriculum*, according to the analyses presented in this paper, is not clearly defined. The second grade textbooks currently used for learning the Latin alphabet, which do not follow the prescribed groups of letters, are illustrative of the fact that there is a growing need for a different curricular framework. To determine whether the curricular order of the letters is adequate or not, we compared the placement of certain Latin letters (the first and the last group) in the *Curriculum* with their placement in the textbooks. In the *Curriculum*, the letters S, V, R, H are placed in the last group (from letters 27 to 30), while in the textbooks, for instance, the letter S, is among the first ten letters. These textbook deviations from the prescribed rules can be justified because the letter S in Serbian language has high frequency. It is questionable whether the Latin letters Đ, Ž, Lj, Nj, Ć, F, Č, Š should be taught before the letter S. Similarly, as block and cursive letters S и Š, written in the Latin alphabet, have the same graphic structure, there is no methodologically justified reason to teach them separately. Our assumption is that the authors of the textbooks were guided by the linguistic and logical principles, overlooking the instructions set in the *Curriculum*.

In conclusion, the prescribed curricular instructions should be revised to match the curriculum for learning the Cyrillic alphabet. In this manner, teachers will be given more freedom to choose the methods for teaching the Latin alphabet. Given that the curricular instructions for the first alphabet do not prescribe the order or the grouping of the letters, the same principle should be applied to learning the Latin alphabet. The analysis of the textbooks shows that not a single textbook conforms to the *Curriculum*. There are logical reasons for this non-conformity. The authors of the textbooks for learning the Latin alphabet introduced the more frequent letters earlier than prescribed and deliberately made their own order of introducing the letters to reach the functional texts as soon as possible. The paper offers suggestions for the improvement of the prescribed method of learning the Latin alphabet which amount to choosing one of the many methods of learning reading and writing in another alphabet. The group processing of the letters must remain in the syllabus, but without the prescribed order in which the letters should be introduced. There is also a possibility of introducing the complex methods of learning the Latin alphabet.

Key words: Serbian Language curriculum, introducing literacy skills, methods of introducing letters, order of learning the letters of the Latin alphabet, learning the Latin alphabet.

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