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Original
scientific paper

Images of Traditional Serbian Culture in the Serbian Language Instruction in the Lower Primary Grades

Paper received: Sep 24 2017
Paper accepted: Nov 6 2017
Article Published: Feb 7 2018

Extended summary

In the systemic preschool and primary school education, children are continually introduced to the world of culture through the speech development activities and in the language and literature classes. The Serbian language instruction should build, in almost all its aspects, the relationship between the pupils and Serbian culture, as well as the culture in general. The analysis of the curricular content demonstrates the presence of an inextricable link between the culture and the language and literature instruction. Many texts on the compulsory reading lists and the subject contents are, indeed, cultural contents as well.

Due to the complexity of the concept itself and the various fields covered by the school subject, the field of study presented in this paper was limited to the images of traditional (folk) Serbian culture explored in the literature classes. As the notion of traditional culture has no single definition, it was more closely defined by taking into account the general definition of culture, the dictionary definition of tradition and the properties immanent to the traditional culture (continuity, informality, regularity, anonymity of its creators who are at the same time the audience, according to Sokolović, 1970: 8-31).

The texts containing the elements of traditional culture and included in the readers for the subject Serbian Language and Literature were taken as a starting point in this research. Numerous texts of both traditional and fine literature contain, sometimes in the plain view, and sometimes hidden, the folk images and scenes. The readers contain numerous texts which preserve our ethnographic material and offer an opportunity for discovering our rich cultural heritage. Due to the diversity of the genres in the folk literature, we focused exclusively on the compulsory texts, leaving out many optional texts which are also the valuable and endless

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source of folk culture. The goal was to present the diversity and richness of beliefs, lifestyles, behavioral patterns and spiritual tenets pertaining to one nation. The focus was not only on the methodological design of the contents of the national curricula and the readers, but also on the opportunities and challenges of giving a more important role to these contents in the Serbian language instruction. The paper presents the elements of traditional culture identified in the following texts: the poem “Hleb” by Vladimir Andrić which is analysed in the first grade of primary school; the folk tale “Sveti Sava, otac i sin”, analysed in the second grade; the folk poem “Marko Kraljević i beg Kostadin”, analysed in the third grade; the folk ballade “Jetrvica adamsko koleno” and the non-fiction, popular science text *Od pašnjaka do naučenjaka* by Mihailo Pupin, both analysed in the fourth grade. Given that the selected works represent only a segment of the materials that can be used for learning about the elements of Serbian culture in the literary texts for the lower primary grades, the texts included in the compulsory reading lists which correspond to the topic of the research are also listed in the paper.

The identification and interpretation of the symbols of the traditional Serbian culture is important because it encourages learning about the national identity, which is generally one of the goals of education. By reading and discovering various aspects of a literary work, it is possible to identify the images of this type of culture as they appear in the text. The authors of the school readers undoubtedly recognize the specific segments and use the literary and artistic texts for productive discussions about the cultural element in the texts. A richer didactical and methodological apparatus in the readers would contribute to a fuller realisation of the literature curricula and of the school subject Serbian Language. The textbooks should encourage a continuous rethinking of the cultural domains, both the traditional and the modern ones. The analysis of the texts included in the readers showed that there was plenty of the reading content pertaining to national culture that should have its place in the lower grade classes, not only for the purpose of its interpretation, but also for preserving and respecting the traditional culture, as well as for increasing the pupils’ interest in everything that belongs to the field of culture. The analysed elements of traditional culture in the school readers can be systematised for the purpose of displaying the diversity and richness of beliefs, lifestyles, behavioral patterns and spiritual tenets pertaining to one nation, and which have or should have educational relevance in the Serbian language instruction.

Key words: traditional Serbian culture, curricula, literary text, reader, methodological apparatus.

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