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Serbian author's fairy tales in primary school textbooks:
playing with a puppet

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Abstract. *Introduction.* Attributing characteristics of living beings to inanimate objects and extending them to almost all the properties of life (reproduction, birth, development, and death) indicates a shift in the boundaries in children's understanding of concepts and processes. It directly affects the relationship that a child establishes with life and the readiness to accept puppets in Serbian language classes and fairy tales as a literary genre closest to the process of students' maturing. If we examine the fairy tale through the prism of puppets and puppet theater, we can expect that an innovative approach to educational practice will result in pushing the boundaries of play, as well as easing the transition process from play activities in preschool institutions to fairy tales in first-grade reading textbooks. Changes in the educational process inevitably lead to amendments to the Regulations on the Curriculum in order to align the instruction process with the cognitive and age-related abilities of first-grade primary school students. The extent to which the content of the Serbian language curriculum in the first grade of primary school has changed can be inferred from the example of Serbian original fairy tales. *The purpose of the study.* Identify opportunities to identify and improve overall student performance indicators using the example of an original fairy tale in primary school first grade. *Materials and methods.* Through a comparative analysis of the didactic-methodological model of first-grade primary school readers from publishing houses BIGZ školstvo, Eduka, Zavod za udžbenike i nastavna sredstva, Kreativni centar, and Nova škola, we will attempt to examine the changes in original fairy tales in contemporary conditions and verify their alignment with the Regulations on the Curriculum. We will identify and provide opportunities for enhancing general achievement of students in the areas of Speech, Reading Skills and Comprehension, and Literature at all levels. *Results.* Upon examination, we have related the prevalence and potential of puppet play, using the example of puppet theater

designed in a way that transforms the faceless puppet into a teaching aid that serves as a mediator between the child and the fairy tale. The development of skills and competencies related to the social, emotional, and aesthetic aspects of first-grade primary school students is linked to children's development, acquisition of knowledge, and competencies at the level of the educational process, emphasizing the importance of opportunities for enhancing children's play through the example of fairy tales. *Conclusions.* Therefore, the contribution of this paper is reflected in the proposal to improve the position of Serbian original fairy tales in the first grade of primary school, identifying specific possibilities for enhancing general achievement of students through questions, assignments, and tasks that are part of the didactic-methodological model.

Keywords: original fairy tale; reader; first grade; general achievement; puppet theater; puppet play; student

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Сербская авторская сказка в учебниках по литературе для первого класса начальной школы: возможности игры с театральной куклой

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Аннотация. *Введение.* Приписывание признаков и свойств живых существ неодушевленным предметам и распространение их почти на все формы жизни (размножение, рождение, развитие и смерть) говорит о сдвиге границы в детском понимании понятий и процессов. Это оказывает непосредственное влияние на отношения, которые ребенок осуществляет с жизнью и на готовность воспринять театральную куклу в преподавании сербского языка и сказки как литературного жанра, наиболее близкого к процессу взросления обучающихся. Если посмотреть на сказку через призму театральной куклы и кукольного театра, то можно ожидать, что новаторский подход к образовательной практике не только приведет к смещению границ игры, но и смягчит процесс перехода от игровой деятельности в дошкольном учреждении к сказкам из учебника по литературе для первого класса начальной школы. Изменения в образовательном процессе неизбежно приводят к внесению изменений в Правила учебного плана с целью приблизить обучение к познавательным и возрастным возможностям

учеников первого класса начальной школы. *Цель работы* – определить, насколько изменилось содержание программы обучения сербскому языку в первом классе начальной школы на примере сербской авторской сказки. Преимущество статьи отражено в предложении улучшить положение авторской сказки в первом классе начальной школы, выявить и конкретные возможности повышения общих стандартов успеваемости учащихся на примере вопросов, указаний и заданий, входящих в дидактико-методический аппарат. *Методология и методы.* Путем сравнительного ознакомления с дидактико-методическим аппаратом учебника по литературе для первого класса начальной школы издательств БИГЗ школа, Эдука, Институт учебников и учебных пособий, Креативный центр и Нова школа авторы выясняли, как авторская сказка изменилась в современных условиях, проверяли соответствие с Правилами по программе преподавания и обучения, определяли и предоставляли возможности для улучшения общих стандартов успеваемости обучающихся по направлениям «Культура общения», «Умение чтения и понимания прочитанного» и «Литература на всех уровнях». *Результаты.* Рассмотренный материал был объединен с репрезентацией и потенциалом игры с театральной куклой на примере кукольного театра, спроектированного таким образом, чтобы превратить безликую куклу в инструмент обучения, который является посредником между ребенком и сказкой. *Заключение.* Развитие умений и компетенций, касающихся социальных, эмоциональных и эстетических аспектов развития учеников первого класса начальной школы связывается с развитием детей, приобретением знаний и компетенций на уровне образовательного процесса с целью повышения значимости возможностей совершенствования детской игры на примере сказки. **Ключевые слова:** авторская сказка; учебник по литературе; первый класс; общеобразовательные стандарты успеваемости; кукольный театр; игра с театральной куклой; ученик

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Introduction. Contemporary society and busy lifestyle limit the time parents spend with their children. In such conditions, children often feel lonely, so it is not uncommon for them to convey some of their experiences and events, enlivening moments and emotions through play, conversations with puppets, both at preschool and at home. We observe that the puppet is an important didactic support that allows families, educators, and teachers to get closer to the child, to understand his emotions, interests, and desires through the puppet. “Children’s games with stage puppets in kindergarten strongly engage the child, intellectually and emotionally, to

contribute to the development of creative abilities, especially the development of the child; the child spontaneously and directly expresses his intimate experience of the world through the puppet” (Pokrivka, 1985: 32). After the preschool age and preparing the child for school, first-grade students, often through reading and analyzing various texts, have the opportunity to participate in play activities, create stages and characters for them, often including simpler puppet forms and shapes.

At this age, fairy tales are closest to students, allowing them to explore the world of imagination and fantasy, unreal events, motifs,

and characters. In the younger primary school age, fairy tales have a significant impact on the student's personality. On the other hand, the importance of the puppet is of immeasurable significance for the development of the student's personality. Piaget (1980, cited in: Coher & Ambrose, 1993) describes intelligence through the constructivist-developmental theory as the ability to adapt. Intelligence develops through the child's interaction with the environment and as a result of the child's actions, using mechanisms of reflexive abstraction. Fairy tales allow children's imagination to expand its content, introduce new characters, miraculous situations, unusual encounters, extraordinary struggles between good and evil, from which they will emerge as winners alongside the main protagonist, aesthetically, emotionally, and intellectually more mature, and spiritually enriched. Considering that the fairy tale as a literary genre and the puppet, firstly as a plaything and then as a teaching aid, "will follow him until man needs his own mirror, which means – forever" (Jurkovski, 2007: 20). The dual nature of metaphor on the level of comparison with humans, but also on the level of the puppet itself, reveals its new connotations. Therefore, we define the puppet as a simulacrum in the dual sense of the term. By comparatively examining the influence of fairy tales on shaping the worldview, which is inseparably linked to the overall spiritual shaping of personality, and by stimulating the general development of children and particularly contributing to the development of moral consciousness, we can conclude that the usage of puppets in education enables the acquisition of knowledge accompanied by emotions that influence academic achievement. "Puppet play is effective because it corresponds to the child's visual orientation, his actions are based on movement. The lifeless puppet comes to life, this miracle becomes a reality that can be experienced again and again. The child enjoys this miracle even if only moving the

puppets. The child becomes a creator-magician"¹.

Puppet play, as a diagnostic tool for play, can be used in the educational process in an innovative and productive manner that enables the recognition and naming of emotions based solely on the puppet and its position. Considering that the puppet does not have a face, or more precisely, facial features are not depicted, it transforms into an obvious teaching aid that helps students express their feelings related to the experiences in the fairy tale.

The cognitive, aesthetic, and ethical functions of fairy tales and puppets are inherently interconnected, and the essence of educational effect lies in including many phenomena and events from life, while also possessing uncertainties that stimulate students' imagination and creativity. In this way, students' spiritual world enriches and enhances their personality. For children, the puppet is an object of aesthetic, emotional, and intellectual enjoyment because through puppets telling fairy tales, children build their personality, form their worldview, attitudes, and opinions, and in order to build values, it is necessary to analyze the motives in the fairy tale to the level of demystifying the fairy tale itself. Through puppet play, a child can be punished and rewarded, can be strong, powerful, wonderful, to express their desires, and all without consequences. Just as through fairy tales, a child will adopt socially desirable and responsible behavior, through puppet play, they will adopt patterns of behavior. "Through play, problems are solved, we can determine the level of child development, adaptability, observational skills"², which in an integrative approach to fairy tales would mean that the student will adopt the educational function of the fairy tale.

In the mutual interaction and synergy, the child – subject and the puppet – object alienate their basic properties, and thus their functions

¹Kockica – Lutkarska igra – dijagnostika igre – Bábjáték-Puppet play. Available at: <https://www.kockica.co.rs/product/lutkarska-igra-dijagnostika-igre-babjatek-puppet-play/> (accessed 24 March 2024).

²Kockica – Lutkarska igra – dijagnostika igre – Bábjáték-Puppet play. Available at: <https://www.kockica.co.rs/product/lutkarska-igra-dijagnostika-igre-babjatek-puppet-play/> (accessed 24 March 2024).

are exchanged. The result of the synergy phenomenon (association) represents the birth of a figure capable of life, which is not identical with either the puppet or the child; it is something else that only finds realization in the child's imagination, and their association builds a new dialectic of existence based on the mystery of animating the inanimate. The usage of puppets in the first grade of primary school through fairy tales can have a multiple role in the development of first-grade students, who have transitioned from play activities to activities involving tracking, understanding, and implementing acquired knowledge. Introducing playful motifs, and puppets into the teaching process can lead to the effect of conditioning, resulting in the liberation of the emotional experience of the student, so the puppet will become a means by which the student expresses thoughts, feelings, and experiences related to what they have read or heard instead of just being a teaching aid.

If theater and stage³ are introduced as teaching aids in Serbian language classes while learning about fairy tales, then the recapitulation lesson transforms into a lesson of creative expression for the child, who will express the level of understanding of the fairy tale and the level of personal maturity through play, at the content evaluation level.

According to Lazic (Lazic, 2020: 78-79), "poems, fairy tales, stories, fables, and any other literary work can serve as inspiration for dramatic play or dramatization. It is important that the text includes certain characters, has a plot, dialogue, and preferably humor, and is interesting to children." The ways in which dramatic activities are linked to the processes through which children become acquainted with poetry and prose are very diverse, ranging from observing various forms of theatrical art in which dramatized texts from literature are used (theater performances with live actors, puppet theater,

shadow theater, tabletop theater, picture theater, etc.), all forms in which children take on all roles of adults (directing, decorating, acting, puppet animation, etc.) to independent dramatic games, improvised based on literary texts or events from real life (Dotlic and Kamenov, 1996).

The purpose of the study. Identify opportunities to identify and improve overall student performance indicators using the example of an original fairy tale in primary school first grade. The contribution of the work is reflected in the proposal to improve the position of the author fairy tales in the first grade of primary school, identification and concrete the possibilities of improving the general standards of student achievement by example questions, assignments and tasks that are part of the didactic-methodical apparatus.

Materials and methods. For the purposes of scientific work, the following scientific methods were applied: method of theoretical content analysis, descriptive method and analytical-synthetic method. In order to discuss fairy tales in the younger grades of primary school, it is necessary to note the changes that have occurred in the current *Curriculum Regulation for the first grade of primary school*⁴. By making a comparative analysis of the current *Curriculum Regulation in the field of Literature* and the *Regulation on the Curriculum for the first and second grade of primary school*⁵ in the field of *Epics*, we can conclude that it is unacceptable that the current *Curriculum Regulation* does not include any fairy tales, unlike the Regulation on the Curriculum for the first and second grade of primary school, which included Desanka Maksimović's "*Bajka o labudu*" ["Swan Fairy Tale"] and Branko Ćopić's "*Suncev pevac*" ["The Sun Singer"] fairy tale. Interestingly, the current *Curriculum Regulation for the first grade of primary school* does not include any fairy tale authors in the domestic reading list.

³ Kockica – Pozornica 4+. Available at: <https://www.kockica.co.rs/product/pozornica/> (accessed 24 March 2024).

⁴ Regulation on the Curriculum for the First Cycle of Primary Education and the Curriculum for the First Grade of Primary Education: 10/2017-1, 12/2018-1, 15/2018-1, 18/2018-1, 1/2019-18.

⁵ Regulation on the Curriculum for the First and Second Grade of Primary Education" ("Official Gazette of RS - Educational Gazette", No. 10/2004, 20/2004, 1/2005, 3/2006, 15/2006, 2/2008, 2/2010, 7/2010, 3/2011 - other regulations, 7/2011 - other regulations, 1/2013, 4/2013, 14/2013, 5/2014, 11/2014, 11/2016, 6/2017, and 12/2018).

Furthermore, it is necessary to check the alignment between the *Curriculum Regulation*⁶ and the Readers for the first grade of primary school published by various publishers such as *BIGZ* (Jović, 2018), *Eduka* (Jović, Jović, 2017), *Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva* [Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids], (Vučković, 2011), *Kreativni centar* [Creative Center] (Marinković, Marković, 2018), and *Nova škola* [Nova School] (Ćuk, Ivanović, 2018).

The current *Curriculum Regulation* in the field of *Literature* does not include any fairy tales for educational interpretation in the first grade of primary school, which leads us to the conclusion that it depends on the authors of the Readers for the first grade of primary school whether they will fully comply with the *Curriculum Regulation* or provide opportunities for improving the position of fairy tales in the Readers for the first grade of primary school. As for the publishing house *BIGZ, the Reader: Serbian language for the first grade of primary school, GUARDIANS OF IMAGINATION* (Jović, 2018), in accordance with the *Curriculum Regulation* in the field of *Literature*⁷, also does not include any fairy tales for the first grade of primary school.

As for the publishing house *BIGZ, the Reader: Serbian Language for the first grade of primary school, GUARDIANS OF IMAGINATION* (Jović, 2018), in the field of *Literature*, also does not include any fairy tales for the first grade of primary school. Regarding the publishing houses *Kreativni centar* (Marinković, Marković, 2018) and *Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva* (Vučković, 2011), it can also be noticed that they do not include any fairy tales for the first grade of primary school. The publishing house *Eduka* (Jović, Jović, 2017) also follows the current *Curriculum Regulation* and does not include any fairy tales for the first grade of primary school, while the publishing house *Nova škola* (Ćuk,

Ivanović, 2018) includes *Bajka o labudu* [Fairy Tale of the Swan] by Desanka Maksimović and *Bajka o livadi i skakavcima* [Fairy Tale of the Meadow and Grasshoppers] by Stevan Raičković.

Research Results and Discussion. We will determine the possibilities for identifying and improving general achievement standards of students as illustrated through the example of an original fairy tale. We will demonstrate the possibilities of achieving general achievement standards using the examples of *Bajka o livadi i skakavcima* [Fairy Tale of the Meadow and Grasshoppers] by Stevan Raičković and *Bajka o labudu* [Fairy Tale of the Swan] by Desanka Maksimović. Considering that *The Tale of the Swan* by Desanka Maksimović is included in the publishing houses *Eduka* (Jović, Jović, 2017) and *Nova škola* (Ćuk, Ivanović, 2018), we will attempt to provide a comparative overview of the questions, tasks, and assignments of the didactic-methodological model and determine the achievement of general standards for students in the fields of Speech, Reading and Comprehension Skills, and Literature at all levels. We will also demonstrate the possibilities for identifying and improving general achievement standards in these fields using the example of “*The Tale of the Meadow and the Grasshoppers*” by Stevan Raičković.

The questions, assignments, and tasks of the didactic-methodical model for “*The Tale of the Meadow and the Grasshoppers*” by Stevan Raičković are oriented towards *achieving the general achievement standards of students*. By asking “*Why did the grasshopper appeal to the inhabitants of the meadow?*” the requirement 1CJ.1.2.2. of the general achievement standard in the field of Reading and Understanding of Texts at the basic level is met. To meet the requirement 1CJ.3.2.7. in the same field but at the advanced level, the question should be formulated as follows: “*How did the inhabitants of the meadow react when the grasshopper*

⁶ Regulation on the Curriculum for the First Cycle of Primary Education and the Curriculum for the First Grade of Primary Education: 10/2017-1, 12/2018-1, 15/2018-1, 18/2018-1, 1/2019-18.

⁷ Regulation on the Curriculum for the First Cycle of Primary Education and the Curriculum for the First Grade of Primary Education: 10/2017-1, 12/2018-1, 15/2018-1, 18/2018-1, 1/2019-18.

arrived? Explain your opinion.” The questions “What did they think of him?” “Who devastated the meadow?” “Why didn't the grasshoppers touch the bushes?” are formulated in a way that meets the requirement 1CJ.1.2.2. of the general achievement standard at the basic level in the field of Reading and Understanding of Texts. To meet the requirement 1CJ.3.2.7. in the same field, but at the higher level, the question should be formulated as: “How did you imagine the end of the tale? What did the meadow look like at the beginning, and how did it look at the end of the tale? Who acted correctly: the inhabitants of the meadow or the grasshoppers? Explain your opinion”.

Improving the lessons with puppets and puppet theater would contribute to the development of critical thinking at the level of content analysis and synthesis. A task aligned with the *general achievement standards* of students would involve making puppets: a meadow creature and a grasshopper, aiming to develop motor skills and adopt socially desirable behavior. This approach would contribute to organizing a thematic day and project planning for Serbian language classes, expanding beyond just one lesson. Therefore, the task directed towards students within the didactic-methodological model should read as follows: *Make a puppet based on the Tale of the Meadow and the Grasshoppers. Choose an insect whose behavior you support. Write a couple of sentences explaining why you chose the specified insect.* Dušica Bojović emphasizes that drama in education is successful as an educational tool because “children primarily learn to walk and talk through imitation. They build their personal history and group identity based on family stories and photo albums. Children integrate information with data from other sources in their environment, forming their identity through activities similar to drama games” (Bojović, 2008: 11). Thus, drama and dramatic activities and games are very close to children. “The system of drama play provides significant opportunities for the development of creative abilities in the education of children. It is close to the child because it contains all the

elements of children's play, and the richness of its content and forms represents multiple reasons why the child always gladly returns to it, once it has become familiar with the pleasure of engaging in these games” (Bokšan-Tanurdžić, 2001: 11). From the aspect of our topic and the development of socially desirable behavior in students, the dramatic method can be effectively used for the comprehensive development of the following elements: self-confidence and positive self-concept (risk-taking in front of other children), imagination, empathy, tolerance, cooperation, creativity in problem-solving, humor, expression of emotions, relaxation, self-control, self-discipline, trust, social awareness, building values and attitudes, and aesthetic values.

Another significant advantage of drama activities is the essential correlation among subjects: Serbian language (literary text), Visual Arts (scene, costumes), Music, Physical Education (play and movement), etc. The example of the mentioned fairy tale by Stevan Raičković leads us to the possibility of addressing the fairy tale according to the principles of project-based learning. Therefore, in the art class, students would create dramatic puppets and a theater stage, in the music class, they would find, in collaboration with the teacher, suitable musical accompaniment, while in the physical education class, they could devise movements to mimic certain inhabitants of the meadow.

As for the publishing house Nova škola, which is the only one to include Stevan Raičković's “Fairy Tale of the Meadow and Grasshoppers,” the questions and tasks of the didactic-methodological model are at the basic level of general achievement standards. Therefore, we advise teachers to familiarize themselves with the general achievement standards in order to motivate students for the reception and interpretation of the fairy tale, which would involve finding adequate answers to questions formulated at the intermediate and advanced levels of general achievement standards. However, it should be noted that teachers first need to acquire certain knowledge not only about general

standards but also about puppetry in order to apply them at all. They need to know how puppets are made and from what materials. Then, they should be familiar with the different types of puppets to choose the method of animation (from above, below, or in front of the animator), for example: two-dimensional puppets (shadow puppets, stick puppets, paper puppets) or three-dimensional puppets (hand puppets, sock puppet, glove puppet; on sticks – rod puppets, cone puppets, javanese puppets, vietnamese water puppets; string puppets – marionettes and sicilian puppets; giant puppets, costume puppets; mechanical puppets, assemblage puppets; trick puppets; object puppets, etc.).

The preparation of a teacher who uses puppets and puppet improvisation in Serbian language classes, as well as in other classes, must be structured in such a way that it is known exactly when the use of puppets will have a better effect than the application of other teaching methods and resources, thus contributing to better and faster understanding of facts. It should also be borne in mind that applying puppets and puppetry in class activities does not mean to do it constantly, at all costs, and in all situations. It is a measure to be considered in class when any teaching methods, activities, and resources are used. Similarly, when puppet improvisation is used in Serbian language classes, it would be desirable to use several shorter improvisations. These improvisations should present a problem, set its essence, and search for possible solutions with the children. Moreover, a puppet can present a problem or its aspect, and then encourage children to seek new solutions. This is one way to implement creative and problem-based literature instruction.

Conclusion. Telling fairy tales develops children's artistic sensitivity and stimulates creativity. Fairy tales, as a genre full of the fantastic and miraculous, invite imagination, because after reading or listening to them, children expand upon them with their own imagination. Continuing along the path of the fairy tale, “they dream of traveling or embarking on a great adventure of the main character, in which he/she manages

to overcome all challenges and confront evil in order to achieve the ultimate goal, which is always in the service of good and noble” (Stakić, 2019: 146). As such, the fairy tale and the triumph of good at the end of the fairy tale do not encourage a child toward passive optimism, but rather toward an active engagement with the world.

Considering that the questions in the analyzed didactic-methodological model are directed towards first-grade primary school students, it is unacceptable that the questions are formulated only at the basic level. Even more unacceptable is the fact that publishing houses such as *Eduka*, *Kreativni centar*, *BIGZ školstvo*, and the *Zavod za udzbenike i nastavna sredstva* do not provide any fairy tales for the first grade of primary school, but thereby follow the current *Regulation on the Curriculum*, which deprives the world of first-grade students of the understanding of a world rich in poetic images and characters, colors and sounds, symbolism, and wisdom, experienced through reading fairy tales by the greatest Serbian writers. It is interesting to note that the Regulation on the Curriculum for the first grade of primary education once included Branko Ćopić's fairy tale “Sunčev pevač,” while in the current Regulation on the Curriculum, we cannot find any of Branko Ćopić's fairy tales, only an excerpt from the novel *Mačak otišao u hajduke* [“The Cat Went to the Bandits”] in the third grade. The mentioned points lead us to the fact that a teacher can independently organize short puppet improvisations as needed. The essence of all these activities is to make literature classes diverse and interesting for students, to eliminate the templates and formalism that undermine the quality of teachers' methodological approaches, and to make the lessons engaging. Furthermore, involving all participants will contribute to a general activation of students during the class, as well as in their leisure time. It will also enable students with lower academic achievements, as well as those with learning and developmental disabilities, to participate and contribute to the collective project, which represents an achievement of every class. The playful nature of these

activities, which can be closely linked to fairy tales, is particularly pronounced, which is especially appealing to children both because of the fairy-tale characters and the use of puppets.

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