

Ways of Developing Methodological Competencies of Literature Students

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Abstract

It is mandatory for the students of Croatian Language and Literature who specialize in teaching to acquire methodological competencies. Given the conditions in which, due to objective reasons, the time that students spend directly participating in teaching has been reduced to the minimum, the courses in the field of theory of teaching literature are designed with the aim of improved training of students for professional teaching tasks. The acquired experience of using various effective methods and activities in working with students is presented in the form of discussion on their practical applicability.

Keywords

methodological competencies, teaching literature, teaching methods

Introduction

In order to make it easier to define the methodological competencies that literature students should acquire in the course of their Faculty education in order to be trained at least for the beginners level work in the classroom, it is necessary to define the concept of methodological knowledge. Methodological knowledge is classified into the framework of educational knowledge, and it includes two types of knowledge which also belong to the field of education – the knowledge of the content of learning and the teaching knowledge. The knowledge of the content of learning refers to the default curriculum themes on which the students acquire basic knowledge, and this type includes knowledge and strategies, techniques and methods for successful learning that the students should be able to actively apply in their work. The teaching knowledge should be acquired by every teacher because this type of knowledge involves different teaching skills and knowledge which are acquired at teacher training faculties. The importance of methodological knowledge is evident in its comprehensiveness, because a teacher who has it and actively applies it is well-versed in the content of the subject that is taught, and at the same time masters the appropriate ways of adapting the prescribed learning content to the principles of psychology, sociology, pedagogy and didactics.

"Methodological knowledge has the character of primarily experiential knowledge, and it is essentially determined by the specific purpose of its application in education" (Bežen, 2008, p. 25). Therefore, methodological

knowledge is specific because it is not exclusively of cognitive character since it also refers to the knowledge of various teaching methods and techniques, to the affective component of the teachers' personality and their methodological inventiveness in terms of working on the basis of the learned methods and techniques, but also with the methods and techniques that the teachers should certainly be able to devise on their own.

Competency is currently a buzz word in teaching methodology, pedagogy and didactics. How to precisely define the term? This is best done by comparing the meaning of the concepts from the same semantic field. Namely, unlike knowledge (facts, theoretical categories), skills (learned through practice, and include a motion component), abilities (mental and physical capabilities of successful coping with situations where knowledge and skills are of little help), competency should be defined as the competence for successful performance, and as an area in which someone possesses the knowledge, skills and experience. Methodological knowledge refers to the cognitive area and includes skills, whereas competencies are related to the practical application of knowledge and skills in real life situations. Therefore, the training of future teachers should be focused not only on interdisciplinary linking of the knowledge of various sciences relevant to the teaching methodology of a given subject (parent science, pedagogy, psychology, sociology), but also on the acquisition and development of competencies. Competency should be the ultimate goal of teaching and the success of teaching methodology of a given subject depends on how much attention is focused on the activation of methods, techniques and the system of teaching and learning in order to enable individuals to efficiently perform the tasks of professional teachers. Therefore, apart from knowledge, competency includes experiential, psychological, voluntary, and other determinants of an individual person together with his/her preparedness for carrying out a task, which derives from the training process. Methodological competencies refer to the ability of teachers to apply theoretical and experiential knowledge in their practical work with the aim of effective teaching.

Literature Teaching Methodology is the title of a university course in which the students of the Croatian Language and Literature (as a single or double major graduate study programme) are trained to teach Croatian language in primary and secondary schools. To acquire methodological competencies, the students are systematically introduced to the live context of contemporary school with the help of different methodological approaches to teaching and learning. Therefore, these approaches should be listed and described in order to present effective methodological models for the acquisition of methodological competencies of future teachers.

Review of previous literature teaching

Teaching literature at all levels of the educational system - elementary, secondary and higher education - sums up the combination of theoretical assumptions of certain methodological techniques, i.e. in more recent times methodological technologies, and a greater or lesser degree of success of their practical application. The population that reaches only the first step of compulsory schooling, or the one that passes all the steps of schooling envisaged by the current educational policy has different experiences related to literature teaching, which, of course, given the number of teaching hours in the school curriculum, is an extremely important part of teaching the Croatian language. Certainly, the experience of current and former pupils varies depending on how the content of the literature classes was able to meet the reading needs of those same former pupils who could generally be divided into spontaneous readers and those for whom it was necessary to incite the desire to read, because they were initially not interested literary texts. In such a framework, it is interesting to note how the students of the Croatian language of different specializations view their school encounter with literature. Namely, we are talking about the type of students who, with relevant temporal distance, and in the period of raising their methodological awareness of teaching, can speak critically about their experiences in relation to literary interpretations which they witnessed personally in the course of their own schooling.

The review of current literature classes is a suitable methodological model in working with students which provides them with the opportunity to develop much emphasized critical thinking about the usual ways, i.e. teaching methods and techniques. The following example is an excerpt from a critical review by student Kristina Svalina about her experience in literature classes in the role of a pupil, but from the methodological point of view:

"In my previous education I had five Croatian language teachers. In elementary school I had both a male and a female teacher. The female teacher was excellent at interpreting fiction, but I was not happy with the way she interpreted poems. None of our interpretations was good; she always had a completely different interpretation and was surprised that none of us had seen it our own way. Personally, I was never able to interpret it her way. The male teacher I had next was mostly interested in linguistics, so that the teaching materials were mostly based on grammar, but the interpretations of literary works were satisfactory. In the first grade of grammar school I had a male teacher. There was not actually any real interpretation in his classes, e.g. after reading the book we would discuss some issues that were tackled in the work; however, not from the perspective of the characters or the work itself, but from our own personal perspective and from the contemporary viewpoint. I did not

like it at all. Talking about it is all right, but good grades were given only to those who were best at arguing. I certainly do not think that this is what interpretation should be like. Later, I had a female teacher who was quite focused on literature and the interpretation was good. Afterwards, I had a female teacher who was excellent at her job as well as interpretation. Before reading, she would always draw our attention to certain elements of the literary work we should pay attention to. She would introduce us to some features of the work as part of its own time period, and she would really arouse interest in the students to read by simply talking about the literary text. She respected our own impressions of the works. She was also excellent at interpreting poems. She would accept our opinion and she would try to guide us to note some other motifs, figures of speech, etc. She was also trying to introduce us to the world of the writer so that we could analyze the poem through this framework as well. I believe that this teacher was the best as far as school interpretation is concerned in my previous education." (Kristina Svalina, May 21, 2006, e-mail "Moja pozitivna i negativna iskustva sa školskom interpretacijom")

Thus the students are given the task to write an essay on their own positive and negative experience in previous literature teaching at all levels of education. Selected statements from such essays are read before a group of students and discussed as representative samples of practice that may be an interesting starting point for discussion and finding answers to questions about teaching literature. It is important to relate one's own experiences to methodological knowledge in order to raise the awareness, as efficiently as possible, of the future role of a teacher and the importance of his or her reflections on the teaching methods.

Discussion on methodological issues

Discussion is an excellent method to encourage students to become collaboratively active as much as possible. Thereby we achieve a desirable environment in which higher education is not based only on knowledge transfer, but also on the students arguing different points of view on an issue, which may be represented without the fear of making an error. Discussion encourages creative thinking because it can help reach original solutions more quickly, and the students use logical thinking, practice their communication skills, and boost their self-confidence and self-esteem.

Shared inquiry discussion has proven particularly useful in motivating students for greater co-operation in lectures. This type of discussion is suitable because it can engage all the students. Of course, you will not be able to involve all of the students in the presentation part due to time constraints and the large number of group members. Nevertheless, it can be resolved too, if all the students

first respond in writing to the set theses, and then several of them do it verbally. The theses are postulated as open-ended, so that there is no single answer. Therefore, the formulation of the thesis is of great importance if the main objective is the participation of all students. The discussion provides insight into the differences of opinion on an issue, and the problems such as missing the topic and the passivity of some individuals can be avoided by proper organization (Cota Bekavac et al., 2005, p. 53).

In the course Literature Teaching Methodology, shared inquiry discussion is used, for example, in discussions about reading literary titles prescribed by the curriculum. First we look at a recorded high school debate on the same subject with the instruction to select interesting and controversial statements made by the pupils for a later discussion. The students bring their reading diaries, remember the book report lessons in which they participated in the past, explain their own ways of writing interpretations of the reading assignments and similar. This is followed by a discussion on the given theses whereby students are not allowed to interrupt each other during their presentations. All students are encouraged to join the debate. The theses for discussion are open-ended or of alternative type. The following are some of the theses:

- A list of required book report reading - yes or no?
- The reading diary - yes or no?
- How to check whether the reading assignment was actually read?
- The sequence of reading assignments - from older to newer or vice versa?
- Internet and book reports - what to do about it?
- Contemporary literature as a reading assignment - yes or no?
- What to do if the majority of students did not read the reading assignment?

It should be noted that the discussion in line with the above principles is always fruitful. Students share their different experiences and ideas and solutions inspired by them. They critically review the performance of their literature teachers, commend or criticize specific methods and techniques. This is followed by a presentation with more examples of actual teaching situations based on the work of primary and secondary school teachers so that the experiences of students, pupils and teachers from the school practice are combined into one single thought unit. This unit cannot be understood without teaching methodology knowledge, which is often not fixed because there are no ready recipes for successful teaching. Students thus become aware of the fact that methodological knowledge is subject to adjustments depending on the working conditions, type of school, number of students and their age/gender/social affiliation, selected educational system, the objectives of the unit/lesson, as well as the methodological competencies of teachers who should identify the most

suitable working method for a certain content and age of the students, determine the obligations of the students, the rules of conduct and the order of tasks, and to clarify the elements of the evaluation of their work and class participation.

Reading and analysis of texts on teaching literature

With regard to the discussion on literary topics from the field of theory of teaching, the analysis and discussion of articles, essays and other types of texts which reflect on the relationship between students, literary works, curricula and teachers as part of the overall educational system is particularly useful. In this context, we could single out the "Letter to Fairy Slovinka" the epistolary collection *Hand kiss: Letters to Famous Women (Rukoljub: Pisma slavnim ženama)* from 1995 by the Croatian author Pavao Pavličić. In his letter he addresses the fairy Slovinka, a character from old Croatian literature, who symbolizes the entire Croatian and world literary tradition. The intention of the letter lies in the fact that the author, a teacher himself, is dissatisfied with the way literary works are presented to the pupils. That is, he believes that literary education in lower grades of secondary school should begin with contemporary works that are closer to the pupils, and through them, to get the pupils interested in literature in general, and only then to enrich their list of classical readings that only pupils in the upper grades are ready to properly understand and accept as reading assignments. The author proposes to change the usual way of getting acquainted with reading book report assignments in schools, and because of this, the letter has the appellative role for the purpose of better education of young readers and their introduction into the world of books, not their rejection of literature. After reading Pavličić's text the students are encouraged to talk, they are asked questions about the thesis of the letter - for example, the proposal that the curriculum should be tailored to pupils and not the pupils to the curriculum: i.e. that the works of Dante should be read by seniors, and that first grade pupils should read contemporary literature (Pavličić, 1995, p. 177), etc. This creates a problem situation in which students, due to conflicting attitudes, discuss the dilemmas in practice and through discussion develop critical thinking and build their own stance on the important topic - the issue of reading assignments in the classroom.

The French writer and literature professor Daniel Pennac is the author of the popular book *Reads Like a Novel* which deals with reading behaviour and offers interesting reflections on reading. The book can be analyzed as a whole or in parts, and its main themes can be discussed: reading literary works as a school obligation, reading for pleasure, the rights of the reader, etc. Certain theses of the book can be paraphrased and discussed - for example, that the verb 'to read' does not tolerate the imperative form, that we did not read most of the books that

have shaped us by embracing them, but by rejecting them, that well-guided reading saves the reader from everything, even from him/herself (Pennac, 1996, p. 81), etc. Discussions on such and other texts that are part of the reading required for the exam are in accordance with the modern desirable principle of approach according to which the students and teachers in the classroom should not only be acquainted with the new material, but mostly discuss it after they themselves have studied them from growingly accessible sources (Cota Bekavac et al., 2005, p. 42).

Teaching methods, techniques and teaching systems in theory and practice

It is extremely important to familiarize literature students who specialize in teaching with different methods, the rules of their functioning, their specificities, strengths and weaknesses. A brief overview with several examples is an effective means of acquiring methodological knowledge for many visual, textual and speaking methods. The students recall the use of certain methods in their schooling; they draw conclusions about the most appropriate situations for the practical application of certain methods. All the above also applies to teaching systems as framework methodological concepts of teaching with regard to the prevalence of analytical, correlation, problem-solving or any other approach to teaching literature. It also applies to the social forms applicable in teaching - individual, pair, group work and lecture, with particular emphasis on their positive and negative sides.

The tables with advantages and disadvantages, and the assumed obligation of preparing a lesson in accordance with a particular method, technique or teaching system are suitable for a fruitful discussion about teaching. It is particularly important to draw attention to the strengths and weaknesses, advantages and possible pitfalls of a particular method, as well as their overall functioning within the framework of each individual type of a lesson such as, for example, revision lessons, interpretation of a passage or a complete literary work, book reports, film and media culture, learning new literary theory or literary history contents, etc. However, it is important to follow the general concept of teaching upon which each practical implementation should rely. It is useful to introduce the future teachers to describing the advantages, disadvantages and elements of lesson plan preparation. Based on the proposals from the heuristic discussion with students in solving this task, the students should be given a list of positive and negative aspects of, for example, the analysis and interpretation teaching system and a number of requirements for the preparation of lesson plans in accordance with this system:

Table with advantages and disadvantages of the analysis and interpretation teaching system with elements of lesson preparation

ADVANTAGES	DISADVANTAGES	PREPARATION
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - tight system that does not allow arbitrariness, shallowness, improvisation - based on the ideas and experience of the entire group - applicable after reading a text, watching a movie, etc. - provides for active participation for all - students express their own opinions and learn how to listen to and accept others' opinion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - not practical with more than twenty students - only some students might prevail in the activity - if students are not motivated enough, they get passive and do not participate - requires a lot of time - can go in the wrong direction - loses its purpose when it turns into a stereotype, a mechanical reading of literary works 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - good preparation (all phases, questions, teaching aids and equipment) - requires comprehensive knowledge of the contents of the literary work, methods of interpretation and empathy with the world of the literary works - a clear plan - defining the key issues - methodological and communication inventiveness is mandatory

At teacher training faculties, the teaching knowledge is at the same time the knowledge of learning (Bežen, 2008, p. 25). Methodological knowledge is, therefore, a unique field of knowledge that should be explored in terms of its applicability. In the course Literature Teaching Methodology, the equalization of the two mentioned types of knowledge is evident in some of the frequently used methods. Students simultaneously learn the envisaged content (default knowledge), as well as the methods and techniques of both teaching and learning.

This equalization is evident, for example, in the topic on teaching systems. First, each student receives a handout with brief descriptions of two systems. What follows is the *three steps interview* method: the students first read the text, then report their newly acquired knowledge in pairs, and then the students

present to their group what they have heard and noted down from the student with whom they worked in pairs. The groups consist of four members, and they select their group spokesperson who presents the basic ideas of the text.

This is followed by the synthesis of the individually learned content by using the *circular brainstorming* method. The students are divided into groups of four members as they sit. Each group receives a paper with a theme written in the middle of the paper (dogmatic and reproductive learning teaching system, reproductive learning – explanation based teaching system, interpretation and analysis teaching system, meditative-creative teaching system, project based literature teaching, inter-textual teaching system). One student from the group is responsible for writing with a special marker pen, and each group selects a representative who at the end of the creative task reads out the most important terms. Each group has 30 seconds to write their associations related to a particular topic. After the expiry of 30 seconds, each group hands its paper over to the next group who write down their associations (the paper is submitted in a clockwise direction). After three exchanges, the students have 45 seconds to write their associations to a particular topic. Circular brainstorming ends when the paper reaches the group that had it first or after all associations have been exhausted. The groups jointly select three of the written concepts that are considered relevant to the given topic, highlight them and explain.

There are many more methods the application of which is of multiple benefits in teaching. By using them in the classroom, the students enrich their methodological knowledge by gaining insight into new methods and their rules, and by learning new contents through direct experiential learning, they assess the functioning of specific methods and techniques. Thereby they link theory and practice, not only as mere observers, but as active participants in the teaching process. At the same time, the students develop their methodological competencies as they acquire knowledge about teaching, which is both the content of learning and knowledge about learning.

Devising own methods of teaching and the application of methods from the literature

An effective way to acquire methodological competencies is devising useful methods and procedures applicable in the classroom. Such a way of acquiring competencies is particularly important for linking theory with the practice of teaching literature, and to achieve diversity of the activated ways of teaching and learning. This is a way of exploring the usability of methodological or related ideas in school interpretation of various literary works.

One of the more successful examples is undoubtedly the use of the methods from the book *De Bono's Thinking Course: Powerful Tools to transform the ways of*

thinking by Edward de Bono, a Maltese doctor, writer and inventor. The students applied the methods suggested in the book, i.e. the tools to transform the ways of thinking. Several of the suggested tools were used in the framework of problem-solving interpretation of the myth of Daedalus and Icarus, by the student Kristina Špoljarić. Firstly, the first problem is singled out: "Daedalus and Icarus decide to leave Crete." Then the method *Plus, Minus, Interesting* is announced. The method is explained to the students by telling them to make three columns in their notebooks. In the first column, they enter the title *Plus, Minus* in the second column and *Interesting* in the third column. The students are instructed to enter all the positive results of these decisions in the *Plus* column, all the negative consequences in the *Minus* column, and interesting consequences that are uncertain or any observations that are neither positive nor negative under the heading *Interesting*. When filling in the last column they can use the sentence: "It would be interesting to see if ...". The students then write down the second sentence into their notebooks, which reads: "Icarus's desire to fly shows his need for independence." The students are instructed to solve this situation by applying the de Bono tool called *Agreement, Disagreement and Irrelevant*. Once again they draw three columns in their notebooks. In the first column they write the heading *Agreement*, in the second column *Disagreement*, and *Irrelevant* in the last column. The aim of the method is to enter the arguments that confirm agreement with the situation in the first column, to enter arguments or claims which express disagreement with the situation in the second column, and arguments that are not so relevant for the given situation in the third column.

The answers to the first statement were the following: the positive outcome of the decision may be the achievement of freedom and independence, while the failure of Daedalus and Icarus's plan as well as deprivation of freedom for attempting to escape from Crete were highlighted as negative things. The answer in the third column *Interesting* was focused on the interesting possibilities that both really managed to leave Crete, or that they used some other means to accomplish their escape. The arguments confirming agreement with the second statement were Icarus's desire for freedom and his aspiration to higher levels of knowledge and enhancement of skills. The reply showing disagreement with the statement was that Icarus's desire to fly actually shows disobedience to his father and his advice. The response to the third column was that Icarus did not eventually manage to escape to freedom, and that the myth does not mention Icarus's mother who could have changed the situation. The example shows that the working methods suggested in the book were successfully applied in practice. The book emerged from the experience of proven methods for improving thinking, i.e. the methods were taken from a book that is not limited to

methodological issues which demonstrates the necessity of interdisciplinary in teaching methodology training.

The creative tasks given to students often involve solutions related to linking the working methods with the contents of a literary work. The students, for example, make a Venn diagram by means of which they compare Aesop's fables and the fables of Jean de La Fontaine, or contemplate the postulation of a provocative thesis related to the theme of an individual literary work, which should be trained because such a thesis is the starting point for the successful implementation of a network of discussions or debates.

What students become aware of as a problem that they encountered in their schooling, and which they will face once they start working as teachers, are the pitfalls of stereotyped teaching. As part of the introduction to the theory and practice of teaching literature at the graduate level studies, the students are encouraged to become methodologically inventive which should be achieved by using well-known methods and procedures, as well as by the application of self-devised methods.

The setting up of a framework task which consists of inventing the analysis of an excerpt of a literary work with the help of a type of a *literary detective* method could serve as an example of how students can be encouraged to come up with a new method. The task was to devise a way to work on a literary text that would be as close to a detective investigation as possible. In accordance with the general guidelines, a new method was devised that was announced to the students with a brief explanation of its rules and stages: task research, text analysis and public presentation. Students are divided into groups, and then each group should designate their travelling detective - the person who will be visiting other groups in search for answers. The first task is to carefully read the given literary excerpt, for example, a passage from the novel *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* written by Richard Bach, and then follow the instructions in the handout. After the investigation, the final stage is announced in which the students present their findings and the other students record them in their notebooks.

It is necessary to mention the example of a handout with highly motivating tasks in accordance with a detective investigation. The method includes rules that should be followed, there are game elements, the students play the roles of investigators, team members and *travelling detectives*. The textbook becomes a book filled with secrets, road maps and solutions, and it is also envisaged that the groups should cooperate and assist each other in arriving at the correct solutions. From the above example, it is evident that the designing and practical testing of a new or modified method is an extremely effective way to increase confidence in the performance of prospective teachers who are motivated to continually improve their teaching skills and always seek new ways of teaching and learning.

A sample handout for working in line with the *literary detectives* method designed by student Mirela Prokeš (January 21, 2013, e-mail "Priprava")

"Read the given literary excerpt from the novel *Jonathan Livingston Seagull*. To be able to analyze the excerpt, first find out what your tasks are with the help of the *Literary Detectives* game!

*Your tasks will not be easy to find,
help can only come along this line;
open your textbook and follow the instructions clearly,
to arrive at the solution quickly and dearly.*

1. Next to the page with the poem *Žalo (Pebbles)*
the tasks are only few,
but the eleventh word in Task 4,
to your first task shall open the door! **Key:** (Theme)
2. To continue to be on such a lucky spree,
Send a travelling detective into group three!
Let his voyage set you free
so that you arrive at the following **key:** (Motifs)
3. Take your textbook once more,
it washes the third solution ashore,
Turn to *Justice* and the tasks behind,
for your last task in the *Discussion* to find. **Key:** (Basic idea)"

Evaluation of literature on teaching methodology

One of the critical approaches to the theory of teaching literature is the evaluation of the professional books published in this field that are available to the students, after they have acquired basic introductory methodological knowledge. In the oral presentation, the selected student can present his or her analysis of a certain book on teaching methodology, synthesize the insights presented by the author as the expert in the respective field, and, finally, evaluate the functionality of the described knowledge and teaching suggestions. Of course, the students find the oral presentations more interesting if they are accompanied by PowerPoint presentations.

As an example of such a critical approach, the assumption of which is the assessment of the intrinsic value of the teaching methodology theory, not its unquestioned acceptance, is a review of the book *Stendhal's and Flaubert's Novels*

in a *Methodological Horizon* by the Croatian researcher Mirjana Benjak. In her book, the expert describes four models of a lesson analysing Stendhal's and Flaubert's novels with different starting points and based on different theories: Stendhal - *Red and Black*, the starting point: character analysis, methodological theory: the theory of communication; Stendhal - *The Charterhouse of Parma*, the starting point: the conceptual-thematic level of the literary work, methodological theory: the theory of curricula; Flaubert - *Madame Bovary* (2+2 teaching hours), the starting point: the origin of the theme of the novel, the characterization of the main character and the functions of other characters, modernity of Flaubert's handwriting, methodological theory: the theory of problem-solving teaching; Flaubert - *Sentimental Education*, starting point: personal history and the *great History* in Flaubert's novel, methodological theory: the theory of interconnectivity of contents. The students conclude that the book contains detailed plans for a number of lessons the realization of which is doubtful because in reality, in general, there would not be enough time for all the planned activities. The conclusion is that it is a monograph specializing in Flaubert and Stendhal's novels in the classroom, and is characterized by alternative methodological choices and several possible starting points of interpretation. In the review where students could give up to five stars, despite individual criticisms, this book won the maximum number of stars.

With such approach, the students are more engaged in thinking about the relationship between the theory of teaching and its practical application, they assume the role of the critic and they are encouraged not to be slaves to the authorities, but to critically approach teaching and review the proposals given by methodological advisors with respect to the specific educational context. The students assess what can be done in a lesson and what cannot be done, what should be adapted to the specific conditions of delivering teaching and they are familiarized with the books on teaching methodology dedicated to individual school subjects, their content and quality.

Case Study

In their comments on the curriculum content and the delivery of lectures and seminars in the courses dedicated to the theory of teaching, the literature students specializing in teaching ask for more practical examples. Such attitude and focus on specific occurrences in working with pupils is understandable for the purpose of load shedding in the psychological sense, because students want to know what to do and how to act in certain situations and how to avoid problems that can occur in literature classes. Case study was proven extremely useful in this respect. The students are introduced to an actual situation in teaching literature, and they are problem-solving the case through analysis,

synthesis and evaluation in order to grasp the factors relevant to the case in the focus of discussion.

The positive effects on the methodological knowledge of students and their encouragement to adopt the ways of solving problems that are used in real life are visible in the analysis, for example, of an introductory lesson to ancient literature at the secondary level of education. The teacher divided the class into two groups who read the same text from a textbook, but each group focused on different information. The teacher pointed out that the lesson was to be implemented as problem-solving learning in groups. The instructions for each group were given on transparencies. One group was to single out what was new that antiquity introduced, and the other group was tasked to name the authors, to extract important terms and to specify the duration of the period. They were told to write down their observations in their notebooks and to share them with other students in their group. In the case analysis, the students observed that the class was seemingly organized into two groups because there was no actual group work, but only division of the students into two parts with respect to two different tasks. There was also no interaction among the students because the work was mostly done individually. Although the teacher named the methodological system as problem-solving and creative, it was not such because there was no problem situation created that would lead to conflicting views. A more successful phase of the lesson, as assessed by the students, was the part of the lesson in which the group representatives read the answers they had written down, and then these answers were analyzed and supplemented.

The following is a further analysis of teaching situations. The teacher showed the students a completed table on transparencies and they discussed the solutions of the previous tasks in the table. Then the students were given handouts with philosophical texts from antiquity with questions about these texts. The students were organized into six groups, each having different tasks. The students in the groups first individually read the texts on philosophical ideas and theories. Then they were solving the tasks first in pairs, and then together with other members of their group. Group representatives read the texts and the answers offered by their group. The responses were analyzed and supplemented with evident difficulties in understanding the texts, and the teacher selected only few students for presentation of results due to time restraints. In the analysis of this teaching phase, the students concluded that the presentation of results showed that the teacher had chosen too difficult texts for the students. They noted that the teacher was trying to achieve correlation with philosophy, but he focused on complicated philosophical ideas and theories. Also, the teacher called only few students in the class for response, which certainly is not good because in this case most students are not engaged. Individual work, pair work and,

eventually, group work altogether are quite time-consuming. As a synthesis, the teacher gave the students the task to write a short essay on the topic about the possibilities of survival of a man from ancient times in the 21st century. As the bell interrupted the writing of the essay, the students observed that individual phases of the lesson lasted too long and that there was not enough time left to complete the last task.

The case study can be done by a descriptive oral presentation of teaching situations discussed, or the situations can be presented in the form of a text with questions. However, the method is more effective if there is a video of an actual lesson, and by watching the footage the students are viewing actual teaching in schools. Finally, through case studies of everyday classroom situations the students connect theory and its application, they are encouraged to discuss issues, develop communication skills and make their own decisions.

Lesson plan and classroom simulation

One of the main tasks of every student in the methodological training course is the designing and writing of lesson plans. The lesson plan is the teacher's personal, but also a professional document that proves the teacher's preparedness for teaching and willingness to carry out a lesson on a given or selected literary topic. The comprehensiveness is the main feature of lesson plans prepared by students who are to become future teachers. Namely, the students are trained for classroom work, and it is essential that the lesson plan and the lesson implementation are elaborated in detail to make sure that the planned lessons are implemented as successfully as possible.

The students are given a concrete or framework topic in the field of literature, and the teaching is delivered at seminar classes in front of other colleagues who play the role of pupils. Less freedom in choosing themes for lesson plans is restrictive, but the goal of such way of allocating methodological tasks is training the students for the design and implementation of all types of classes and topics set by the curriculum, because in school the contents are taught in accordance with the curriculum, not on the principle of personal preferences.

The format of the lesson plan is a blank form with individual sections that students need to complete taking into account the elements of lesson plan evaluation: content integrity and stylistic/linguistic accuracy, accuracy of methodological terminology, proper organization of the teaching phases, the appropriate use of teaching methods and techniques, methodological inventiveness. The practical implementation of the lesson plan guidelines (methods and modes of work, lesson objectives, learning outcomes, course of the lesson with its phases and situations) are scored based on the following elements: linguistic accuracy (both spelling and grammatical accuracy in writing

on the board and in the handouts), proper/timely implementation and order of teaching phases, the dynamics of communication, successful implementation of teaching methods, appropriate use of teaching aids and equipment, knowledge of the lesson content, achievement of learning outcomes. After having written the lesson plan and a classroom simulation of a 40- or 90-minute lesson, the students are told the positive and negative aspects of their work in a simulated classroom, and in addition to the lecturer, the other students join the discussion. Instead of the lecturer, selected students, two at the most, can be engaged as methodological commentators who monitor the implementation of the lesson and review it, which is a very good exercise to achieve critical distance. Thus, each student will take on different roles during the semester - of a student who is learning the teaching job, then of teaching participants (pupils), of the teacher, and, finally, the experts/methodologists who assesses the teaching process.

The competencies, particularly methodological competencies cannot be acquired without experiential knowledge. According to the American pedagogue Edgar Dale, i.e. according to the data from the famous Dale cone (Matijević & Radovanović, 2011, p. 119), as opposed to learning simply with the help of visual and textual media where after two weeks only 30 percent of what is seen is remembered, in the simulation of actual events, this percentage is much higher. Namely, the likelihood of remembering what is at the same time described, spoken and done, reaches the level of 90 percent after the same two-week period. Therefore, classroom simulation in the field of literature undoubtedly has a high didactic value as evidenced by the students in their written reviews.

Review of lesson plans and classroom simulations

The review of the written lesson plan and classroom simulation is a form of methodological self-reflection. The students need such form of a written reflection in order to round up their practical experience and assess the level of their methodological competencies. The students' reviews of the whole training process from writing lesson plans to classroom simulations show the development and maturing of their practical experience, the expanding of their knowledge and skills, i.e. the art of teaching. In their reviews the students describe the clearing of doubts, breaking stereotypes and gathering useful experience based on which they become more confident in their knowledge and abilities: "There were topics that we did not particularly like in the beginning, but after the colleagues' performance, I changed my opinion, because I realized that any lesson and can be successfully implemented if we make an effort and if we possess methodological knowledge and creativity." (Marija Božičević, November 28, 2013, e-mail "Osvrt") The students point out the advantages of teaching which is based on observation, experiential learning and focuses on the

acquisition of methodological competencies: "In addition to writing lesson plans, I consider the public appearance very useful and instructive for all students because we can learn a lot from our own experience, but also from the experience of other colleagues, and apply it when we start working one day." (Marija Božičević, November 28, 2013, e-mail "Osvrt") The aim of self-reflection is the evaluation of our own work and learning outcomes. By evaluating the results of their public appearance the students become aware of the extent of their professional capabilities and ambitions: "In collaboration with my colleagues, I expected more active participation because they had to read the literary work in advance, the topic can be discussed and interpreted it in different ways, but the expected active participation was not present, and I am not satisfied with it, but because of that I called the students out more and I can say that the learning outcomes have been achieved, which is most important. I would give myself a very good grade (4 out of 5) because you can always be better, and I understood the points that I have received, as an additional motivation for further writing of lesson plans." (Marija Božičević, November 28, 2013, e-mail "Osvrt")

Role-play

Role-play is a type of classroom simulation. The students are given the task to personify certain roles, i.e. the roles of teachers and pupils; they create as realistic a teaching situation as possible, and then, together with other students, conclude on the most appropriate action in the played scene. The following is an example of a task given to a group of four students, one of which takes on the role of the teacher, and the others take on the role of pupils:

"Your group consists of four members. One person will put himself into the role of the teacher. The other students will play the pupils sitting on chairs or standing on the other side of the classroom. In front of them is the person in the role of the teacher asking the following questions:

- What is the name of the central poetic personality of Croatian Expressionism?
- Name the title of a famous collection of poems by the poet.
- Provide at least two well-known titles of his poems.
- What are the two magazines launched by this poet?

Determine in advance only one person to answer all the questions. So the person in the role of the teacher asks a question and only one student raises his/her hand and answers the questions. The others are silent and do not raise their hands."

The goal of the above described role play game is to warn that during the lesson the teacher should not call always the same person, or just the ones who raise their hands, but should encourage as many students as possible to take part.

Methodological diary

The methodological diary is designed as a blank form document. The students take them to schools, fill in the fields while monitoring two lessons in the field of literature and draw conclusions on the situations seen during the lessons. Such way of methodological reflection is set before going to the school for official classroom practice in schools as the initial step of getting familiar with the natural school environment and the work methods of practicing teachers. This way the students check their own methodological competencies, link the teaching theory with actual situations in the classroom and evaluate the methods, modes of work, the use of teaching aids and other elements that are important for a successful lesson in the field of literature. The content of the methodological diary is structured so as to help students realize the complexity of the teaching process during a single or block schedule lesson in its entirety, and to use their methodological knowledge for the analysis of the lessons.

The content of the methodological diary covers the following:

- The main task/objective of the lesson - describe briefly the global objective of the lesson.
- Teaching phases, the time used - enter the name of each teaching phase and in parentheses the time that was spent on each phase.
- Teaching objectives - enter individual outcomes of educational and functional objectives.
- Explanation of teaching steps/activities - enter the teaching steps and activities (what the teacher does, what the students do, the type of questions asked and similar).
- Teaching methods - enter the names of the used teaching methods.
- Modes of teaching - enter the modes of teaching (individual, pair, group work, lecture).
- Teaching aids - enter the name of the teaching equipment and/or aids used.
- Comments - enter own observations on the teaching phases, objectives, steps, methods, modes, teaching aids.
- Achieved correlation/integration/actualization - enter your own observations about the correlation (connecting literature with similar and/or different contents), integration (linking elements of the same literary content), actualization (linking content with real life).
- Own design of the lesson - describe how the student would implement the analysed lesson (in whole or in part the same, with improvements, new methods and modes, etc.).
- Questions and Answers - enter the answers and advice given by the teacher to questions about his/her experience related to the methods, modes of work and other indicated methodological issues.

- Review of the methodological diary - enter your own comments and views on the methodological diary, encounter with live classes, etc.

The success of the methodological diary as a critical form of methodological consideration is evident in the comments made by the students who are satisfied with earlier visits to school, while they are still having methodological courses at the Faculty, which allows for comparison of theoretical knowledge and its realization in practice. The improvement of methodological competencies as a result of fulfilling obligations in connection with the methodological diary is visible in the following comment made by a student:

"This diary was of great help in my methodological training because I could finally see the methods that I had learned in theory and saw them used by my colleagues, but now in actual classroom teaching of literature. This way, I realized the importance of all elements of the lesson plan preparation and how a good preparation of a lesson is important for a successful delivery of a lesson, and that it is important to maintain working atmosphere in the classroom, but at the same time a relaxed atmosphere for the pupils and the teacher to feel comfortable and to achieve the best results possible" (Dražena Vujanović, April 28, 2012, e-mail "Dnevnik").

Classroom practice in schools

In addition to the methodological diary as a suitable form of learning outside the Faculty, classroom practice in schools is undoubtedly of great benefit to the professional development of future teachers. Students go to primary and secondary schools as practice classroom; they observe sample lessons delivered by their teacher-mentors, their colleagues and prepare for the delivery of their own lessons in literature. They are also introduced to school operation and basic pedagogical documents. The aim of classroom practice in schools is to train students to practice self-preparation and teaching of Croatian language and literature in elementary and secondary schools and develop their ability of self-analysis and self-evaluation of their own competencies. The major advantage of school classroom practice is to engage students in a real context of action in connection with the various issues surrounding the teaching process such as the teaching phases, the use of methods and modes of work, identifying the specifics of communication between the teacher and the pupils.

Conclusion

Methodological competencies are the key teaching qualifications. The concept of competency is complex and does not only refer to knowledge and skills, but also includes a number of other elements such as ethical values, social status,

possession of a diploma, knowledge of different skills, etc. An important characteristic of competent professionals is the possibility of successful action, i.e., if applied to methodological competencies, the possibility of a teacher being successful in teaching pupils. Therefore, to achieve such expertise, the emphasis in the studies or any other type of education should not be on the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but rather on learning, experience and achievement of competencies. The methodological competencies are the objective of the training of students in the courses devoted to the theory and practice of teaching literature, and all the above described methods, techniques and procedures are subordinated to this goal - the practical application of methodological knowledge with the aim of successful performance of the job of a Master of Education of the Croatian Language and Literature.

Acknowledgements

The author of the article wishes to thank Blaženka Šoštarić who translated the article from Croatian into English.

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