

STRATEGIES USED IN THE ONLINE TEACHING OF ROMANIAN LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL

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Abstract: The period of lower schooling, corresponding to the cycle of fundamental acquisitions and the beginning of the development cycle, has as finalities the adaptation to the exigencies of the school system, as well as the initial literacy. In this sense, the school curriculum for Romanian language and literature aims at the development of the oral and written communication competences, as well as the development of the competence of understanding the oral and written message. All this is gradually consolidated, depending on the specific competences of each year of study.

The current context of society exposes a series of educational imperatives to which school has to connect its goals. Thus, the education system faces two major challenges: shifting the focus from the traditional sphere to the modern sphere (in which the basic dimensions are creativity, critical thinking, application, learning through discovery, experimentation, collaboration, etc.) and effective implementation of technology information and communication in the teaching process. In this sense, the present study presents a series of active-participatory teaching methods, tools and virtual means that can be successfully applied in the teaching-learning process, as well as strategies for combining them under the umbrella of general competences provided by the school national curriculum of Romanian language and literature for the primary cycle.

Keywords: active-participatory teaching strategies, virtual learning environment, Romanian language and literature, primary cycle

Introduction

The lower schooling period begins around the age of 6/7 years when a complex process of the child's progress starts. During this period, the young learner gathers knowledge and develops psychological abilities essential for the evolutionary stages that will continue. If in the preschool stage the game, under its various forms, represents the predominant activity, in this period the main activity becomes learning, associated with playful activities (Tomșa, 2005).

From the perspective of schooling periodization, the stage of lower schooling includes the cycle of fundamental acquisitions, represented by the preparatory, first and second grades, and the beginning of the development cycle, consisting of third and fourth grades. (Tomșa, 2005) From the point of view of intellectual development, Jean Piaget mentions that this period is represented by the stage of concrete operations, when a series of mental operations crystallize, such as: reversibility, capacity to preserve quantity, weight and volume, inductive reasoning and analogical reasoning (Sălăvăstru, 2004).

Thus, against the background of the reorganization of the cognitive structures, in this stage, young learners acquire fundamental knowledge for their intellectual activity, such as reading, writing, arithmetic skills.

Theoretical background

In the primary cycle, the curriculum for Romanian language and literature supports the development of the first two conventional languages previously mentioned. The current curriculum demands a new paradigm of curriculum design, a model that intensifies the communicative-functional aspect of the integrated learning of a language, communication and texts. (Programa școlară/The curriculum, 2014). Thus, it goes from passive learning about the Romanian language and literature to the active study of this subject. Therefore, during the lower schooling, the formation and development of communication competence is considered, resulting in the development of four types of integrative skills: understanding the oral message, oral expression, understanding the written message, and written expression. (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, vol. 2).

With the aim of developing reading and writing skills and oral expression, in the preparatory, first and second grades the subject is called Communication in Romanian.

The preparatory class is the one that introduces the child to school life, facilitating the transition from playful activities in kindergarten to activities in which learning is the specific activity. Thus, from the perspective of the Communication in Romanian subject, the aim is to improve the speaking skills, as well as to facilitate the acquisition of the conventional literacy from the first grade, by developing the phonemic hearing. Therefore, from the preparatory grade the pupils learn to divide words into syllables, syllables into sounds and to identify their sound composition (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, vol. 2).

In the first grade, the development of oral expression skills continues, moving from simple questions and answers to extensive linguistic constructions. Simultaneously, the development of reading and writing skills is considered, using the phonetic, analytical-synthetic method. Starting from the level of speech (phonetics), analysis is applied, developing students' ability to delimit sentences in the speech flow and words in sentences, as well as the habit of correctly dividing words into syllables and syllables into sounds; finally, it integrates the synthesis, the reverse process of the analysis, that is the restoration of the syllables, of the words, and of the utterances (Mitu, 2006, p. 27).

For the development of reading and writing skills, the phonetic, analytical-synthetic method is associated with the exercise method, with explanation, demonstration, storytelling, heuristic conversation and didactic game which, on the one hand, meets the playful requirements of students' age, and, on the other on the other hand, determines them to actively participate in the assimilation of various knowledge, preventing monotony in the classroom.

For this significant acquisition, three stages are followed: pre-alphabetical (practicing the decomposition and recomposition of syllables, words, their correct

pronunciation, as well as writing graphic elements: dashes, sticks, ovals, etc.), alphabetical (starting with learning the letter *a*, gradually consolidating the process of converting sounds into graphic signs) and post-alphabetical (reading and writing skills are strengthened) (Zlate, 2006).

In the second grade, the area of knowledge of small schoolchildren expands, as they start discovering texts, in prose or verse, from Romanian or world literature. The contents of the texts considerably influence their progress, developing their active vocabulary and consolidating their oral and written expression skills (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, vol. 2).

In the third and fourth grades, the subject is called Romanian Language and Literature and brings more complex tasks, requiring well-established oral and written expression skills that they transform into skills, integrating elements of communication skills. In relation to the literary and non-literary text, oral and written communication skills are formed, as well as language skills for mastering the correct expression and writing. Therefore, the last two classes of the primary cycle create the beginning of the development cycle when the formation of skills and abilities to apply language knowledge in the analysis and interpretation of literary or non-literary texts starts. (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, vol. 2).

As students manage to master the technique of reading, throughout the primary cycle teachers insist on developing the instrumental function of reading, i.e. mastering the technique of intellectual work, valuing books and developing a positive attitude towards reading. In this sense, the explanatory reading is a systematized action that must provide the basis for developing the habit of using the book as a basic element of intellectual work; presentation, explanation and implementation of ways to extract ideas from a text and analyze them; developing students' ability to critically present ideas from books (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, vol. 2).

The explanatory reading represents a literary analysis of the texts, adapted to the young learners', cognitive features, which supposes the completion of several stages, such as: the preparation for the reading, realized through a suitable conversation; full reading of the text (through independent activity); reading on fragments and analyzing them; drawing up the simple plan of ideas; integral reading of the plan of ideas and development of a generalizing conversation; restoring the synthesis of the text (by full reading or narration). (Zlate, 2006).

In other words, the explanatory reading includes a set of methods (conversation, heuristic conversation, explanation, demonstration, storytelling, etc.) that lead to the development of the students' skills to understand and appreciate a literary text: "to make each student understand and feel what he has read, be able to represent the images, ideas, feelings contained in words and sentences, fully assimilate what he has read, as the eye photographs a character, a scene, a landscape that is looked at carefully". (Dottrens et al., 1970, p.119).

The directions of development of modern society, a „liquid modernity”, as Zygmunt Bauman calls it, due to the fact that it is in a continuous process of

transformation as an effect of the accentuated progress of communication and information technologies, outline a new perspective on the concept of “learning”. (Ceobanu et al., 2020).

Thus, in the face of this avalanche of transformations to which the current world is exposed, “the individual must be prepared for change, must anticipate the future, he must be ready to face the unpredictable” (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, Vol. I., pp. 389). Therefore, in order to prepare the present generations of students, the teacher has to create favorable contexts for the development of their skills to make connections between ideas, to discern between eloquent and unimportant information, to create, to explore, to analyze, to experiment and to solve complex situations, and to work with others.

Active-participatory methods stimulate the development of an active attitude on the part of students, being based on epistemic curiosity, on the desire to research, to discover, to effectively participate in the formulation of problems and their solution. They support teachers’ efforts to create learning experiences based on “receptivity to new experiences, sought and solved through exploration, deduction, analysis, synthesis, generalization, abstraction, concretization, emphasizing the realization of connections among meanings and requiring a deep intellectual, psychomotor, affective and volitional involvement.” (Oprea, 2006, p. 150).

Active – participatory methods: an overview

As the present study also aims to outline a brief illustration of active-participatory methods as well, an overview of the most common methods is done below, starting from the classification of Pânișoară & Manolescu (2019, vol. I).

- methods based on conceptual analysis

Concept maps consist of a schematic representation of concepts illustrating the connections among them. It is an important tool for teaching, learning and assessment because, on the one hand, they can be integrated at all levels and subjects, and on the other hand, they can be used both by the teacher in presenting the new content and by the students when illustrating their thinking and understanding.

The Venn Diagram is a schematic method of rendering ideas, highlighting the area of intersection between two or more conceptual categories, in order to develop students’ ability to understand the connections among various notions, ideas, etc.

Task cards represents an active - participatory method that involves completing a figure by associating the question with the correct answer, followed by explaining the relationship between them.

The lotus technique implies deriving relationships among concepts and ideas, starting from a main topic. Eight secondary ideas are noted around the central topic, which, in turn, will become the basic topics for the eight water lily flowers.

Fishbone technique involves the representation of a diagram in the form of the skeleton of a fish, its head being the problem that needs to be solved, and the skeleton will illustrate the plan of possible solutions.

- methods based on developing creativity and solving problems

Brainstorming aims to stimulate students' creativity and encourage spontaneity, the issuance of innovative ideas for problematic situations, based on the principle of admitting any idea and removing criticism. The coordination of this method involves three stages: the productive phase (developing as many innovative ideas as possible), the incubation stage (examining the ideas issued) and the evaluation stage (choosing the most convenient solutions according to the considered problem).

Starburst is a method of stimulating creativity that involves identifying as many questions as possible and, implicitly, as many relationships among concepts, based on a central topic/problem, starting from a standardized series: What? Who? Where? When? Why? .

The cube technique facilitates the understanding of a subject, analyzing it in depth based on the tasks that appeal to the operations of thinking: "Describe!", "Compare!", "Analyze!", "Associate!", "Apply!", "Argue for and against!".

The snowball/pyramid method involves combining individual activity with that performed in groups in order to solve a task. This method stimulates learning through cooperation and develops students' self-confidence by checking ideas formulated individually, first in small groups, then collectively.

- reflection-based methods

Question – Answer Ball Throw is a method of developing students' ability to communicate (through questions and answers) what they have just learned. The method is based on a game of throwing a ball from one student to another: the one who throws the ball asks a question to the one who catches it, he offers the answer and throws the ball, formulating a new question. The student who does not provide the correct answer is eliminated from the game, and the answer will come from the one who asked the question. It is a method that combines cooperation with competition, favoring the updating and consolidation of knowledge, as well as the exercise of interpersonal communication skills, the ability to ask questions and identify the appropriate answers.

Thinking Bubble Technique starts by studying a narrative or dramatic text and supports the reader in identifying the relationship between the external environment of the characters and the internal one (thoughts and feelings).

The Here and There technique is used to identify the features of characters in literary texts, asking students to imagine how the characters would behave in different contexts outside of the narrative.

- role play methods

Thinking hats represents an interactive game, to develop students' creativity, starting from the interpretation of the roles offered by the chosen hat; students have the freedom to say what they think in accordance with the role they represent. Six thinking hats are brought into the game, each with a color that determines the role: the white hat (reflects objective thinking), the red hat (provides an emotional representation of events), the black hat (offers a pessimistic, gloomy perspective on the situation), the

yellow hat (reflects optimistic thinking), the green hat (encourages creative, innovative thinking), and the blue hat (offers a perspective focused on control and organization).

Frisco resembles the method of thinking hats, having as an implementation principle the interpretation of a certain role, analyzing the problem from several perspectives: conservative, exuberant, pessimistic and optimistic. This method is based on an organized version of brainstorming, challenging students' thinking, imagination and creativity.

- methods based on the development of cooperation

The Jigsaw method is based on team learning, each student having a study topic in which he must become "an expert"; subsequently, he has the responsibility to train his classmates on the topic which he studied in depth and analyzed together with other "experts" in the same task.

Creative controversy is a useful method for developing students' ability to interact, for developing creativity, problem-solving and decision-making skills. This method is similar to the debate, but it is built on the principle of reaching a concession from all participants, the end not involving the establishment of a winner.

All these methods are easy to implement at any age in the teaching-learning process. Being used together with the phonetic, analytical-synthetic method and the explanatory reading, through the interactive configuration they have, they bring a significant contribution in the development of the four types of integrative skills considered throughout the primary cycle in Communication in Romanian / Language and Romanian literature: understanding the oral message, oral production, understanding the written message, written production. Moreover, they represent effective ways of students' active participation and, implicitly, of relaxation, against the background of the playful character that incites curiosity, the desire to research, to discover, to participate effectively and creatively in approaching certain contexts. In other words, active-participatory methods create the appropriate framework for forming the students' profile in accordance with the educational imperatives of the present knowledge society, organized by the wide movement of new technologies.

In the increasingly pronounced context of information technologies, the use of technological means in the educational process has become an urgent need. They offer all educational stakeholders a wide range of resources, tools and fundamental teaching methods, to support, facilitate and streamline the teaching-learning process. They expand learning experiences, support ubiquitous learning/u-learning, offering the possibility to access resources independently in time and space (Ceobanu et al., 2020).

In this context, the use of computer-based training as a teaching method or as a form of e-learning enhances training, supporting interdisciplinarity in designing and implementing learning programs, diversifying teaching strategies, and generating an interactive framework (Ceobanu, 2016).

Specifically, the teacher has today a wide range of virtual methods and means that he can combine in line with the purpose of teaching, such as: digital educational resources (movies, encyclopedias, virtual museums, etc.), educational software

(programs created in order to achieve a set of educational objectives), virtual training environments - real-time interaction platforms (Zoom, Google Meet), online collaboration platforms that facilitate the transfer of documents (Google Classroom, Edmodo, Moodle, Docebo, etc.), online applications for: creating presentations (Power Point, Prezi, Sway, etc.), organizing virtual billboards (Lino, Padlet, Wallwisher, etc.), creating stories (My Storybook), creating videos, comics (WeVideo, Edpuzzle, Scratch, etc.), creating collaborative documents (Google Docs), creating concept maps (MindMeister, Text 2 Mind Map, etc.), creating clouds of words (Wordle, WordArt), and of educational games and interactive exercises (Kubbu, Wordwall, ClassTools, etc.). (Pânișoară, Manolescu, 2019, Vol. I).

These mentioned means outline the area of effective online tools in the instructional process, which can be easily implemented at any curricular level and in any activity, if they are subordinated to the educational objectives and included in a didactic strategy planned by the teacher. In Stan's vision, the didactic strategy presupposes "the unique, original combination of several methods and procedures that inevitably correlate with certain teaching materials and with a determined way of organizing the educators' activity (individual, pairs/ group, whole class/lockstep)." (Stan, 2014, p. 149).

Examples of good practices

We present, below, three examples of sequences / teaching activities, developed on digital support and designed for the primary cycle for Communication in Romanian / Romanian language and literature, which have in view the development of oral and written communication skills, as well as the acquisition of knowledge to master ways of expressing in the mother tongue by young learners.

Example (1)

Class: I

Subject: Communication in Romanian

Theme: Autumn

Lesson topic: The sound and the letter "a" (Mihăilescu, Pițilă, 2018)

Lesson type: acquisition of new knowledge

Form of organization: frontal, individual

Purpose: development of reading and writing skills and oral expression

Operational objectives:

-to mention at least 5 words that contain the sound "a", identifying its position in their structure;

- to make at least 3 sentences representative of the given images, based on previous knowledge;

- to analyze at least 3 sentences, identifying the order of words, syllables and sounds.

Teaching activity carried out during the lesson:

Using digital educational resources adaptable to the educational objectives considered in the first grade, students are presented with a suggestive image for autumn. They have the task to identify as many objects whose name contains the sound “a”. Using the Jamboard application, which is a digital whiteboard, students divide the identified words into syllables, establishing the position of the “a” sound inside them, then making sentences.

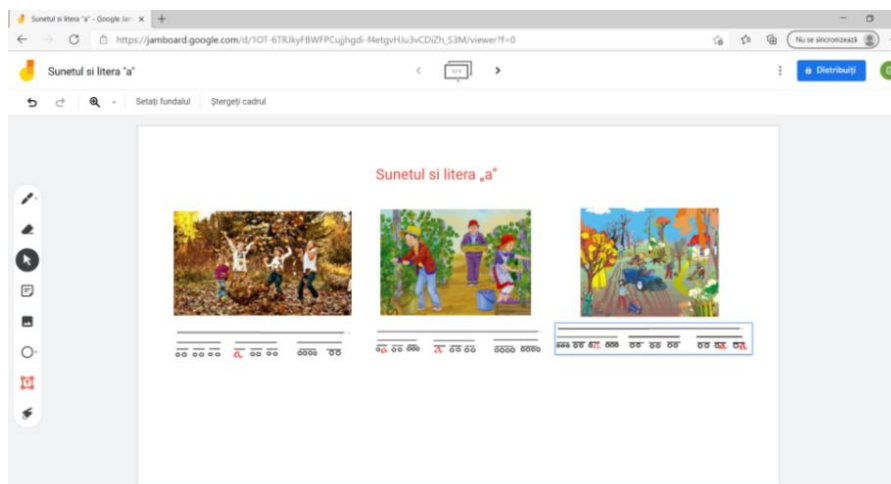


Figure 1. Jamboard “a” sound and letter

Subsequently, the brainstorming method is implemented; the students have the task to find other words from the lexical field of autumn that contain the sound “a”. Next, the new words are divided into syllables, identifying the position of the sound “a” inside them and composing, starting from them, various sentences.

Starting from the speech level, a sentence is chosen that will be subjected to analysis, making the graphic representation by: establishing the number of words, dividing them into syllables, identifying the sounds in each syllable, and the position of the sound “a” in each of the words. Finally, the synthesis is applied, i.e. the reverse process of the analysis, reorganizing the syllables, the words, the sentence.

Regarding homework, the students are presented with 3 images representative of the activities carried out in autumn on the Jamboard digital board. The task is to individually compose sentences, based on these images, which to represent graphically, establishing: the number of words, their division into syllables, the representation of sounds in each syllable, and the position of sound and letter learned in each of the words.

Example (2)

Class: II

Subject: Communication in Romanian

Theme: We learn to behave!

Lesson topic: Dialogue in concrete situations

Supporting text: "What a boy!" after Octav Pancu - Iași (Mihăilescu, Pițilă, 2020, pp. 72-73)

Lesson type: mixed

Form of organization: frontal, individual

Purpose: development of reading and writing skills and oral expression in relation to the literary text

Operational objectives:

- to identify all the essential relations between the main ideas of the text, based on the guidelines offered by the teacher;

- to formulate correctly at least 5 questions regarding the studied text, based on previous knowledge;

- to identify at least 5 features of each character, based on the discussions in class.

Teaching activity carried out during the lesson:

After the students have read the text entirely, going through all the stages of understanding its content, a conceptual map will be completed in front of the class to illustrate the relationships between ideas. For this, the online application Mind Meister or Text 2 Mind Map will be used, the final result being, subsequently, posted on the online collaboration platform used for the transfer of documents, at the classroom level, Google Classroom.

After that, the *Question – Answer Ball Throw* method will be used, adapted to the configuration of an educational game offered by the online application Wordwall, namely, Random Wheel. Thus, students will have the task to ask classmates named by the random wheel indicator questions based on the text. The mentioned student will answer the received question, turn the wheel further and ask a new question to another classmate. The student who does not know the correct answer leaves the game, the answer being provided by the one who asked the question.



Figure 2. Question – Answer Ball Throw method on Wordwall

Finally, students will be given homework to create word clouds, with the topic "Characterization", using the Wordle or WordArt application. For each character, they will represent a cloud of words and, without mentioning his/her name, they will

compose a visual riddle. The homework will be uploaded on the Google Classroom platform, and, during the following class, the best-made cloud of words will be shown to the class, asking the students to guess who the character is. Then, the “creator” of the cloud of words, will present in 40 seconds the characterization of the mentioned character.

Example (3)

Class: IV

Subject: Romanian language and literature

Theme: Parts of speech

Lesson topic: The Adjective

Supporting text: „Un om năcăjit”(excerpt), by Mihail Sadoveanu (Hardulea, Balcan, 2017, p. 74)

Type of lesson: consolidation and systematization of knowledge

Form of organization: frontal, individual

Purpose: development of the grammatical component of oral and written communication in relation to the literary text

Operational objectives:

- to apply correctly all the adjectives identified in the text in formulating the content analysis questions, based on the explanations offered by the teacher;

- to analyze correctly all the adjectives identified in the given text, based on previous knowledge;

- to associate at least three aspects described in the external plan of the text with the inner dialogue of the characters, based on the explanations offered by the teacher.

Teaching activity carried out during the lesson:

In class, students read the text at first sight, emphasizing all the identified adjectives. To verify the comprehension of the text, the Wordwall application is used, engaging students in an interactive game based on the “task cards” method in which the meanings of the word structures will be discovered, all of them including the identified adjectives. Through a short heuristic conversation, students are oriented to explain the relationship between terms, thus aiming at improving students’ oral expression skills.

Then, based on a SmartArt illustration created in Power Point / Word, the *Starburst method* is used, giving students the task to find as many questions as possible, based on the topic of the text, starting from a standardized series: What? Who? Where? When? Why?. The questions must contain the adjectives identified in the text and emphasize the connections between the ideas. After a general conversation about the text, students will analyze each adjective in turn, identifying the nouns that accompany them.

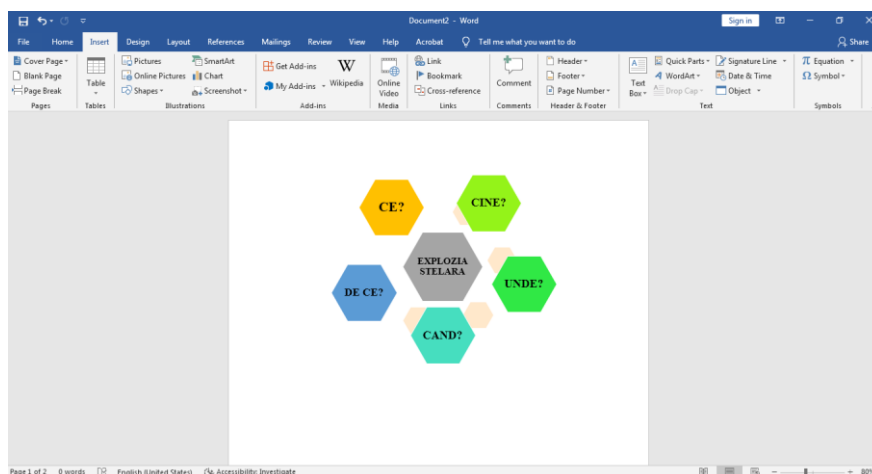


Figure 3. The Starburst method using SmartArt

After solving this task, students are given homework, which is built on the active-participatory method *Thinking Bubble*. Thus, they are asked to imagine and note the inner dialogue of the characters in the text, in correlation with what is presented externally and, subsequently, to reverse the position of nouns with the adjectives used. Finally, students will upload the topic on the class' online notice board, under the heading "Thinking Bubble", using the Padlet application. During the following Romanian language and literature class, the online notice board will be displayed, the teacher discussing with the students the aspects they have noticed.

Conclusion

Beyond the theoretical background regarding the effectiveness of using new technologies in the instructional process, the learning sequences / activities, seen as an example of organizing active-participatory teaching strategies in the online environment, include a wide variety. Thus, the teacher can manifest his imagination, combining various means and online tools under the umbrella of primary school-specific methods or a variety of methods considered modern. All this facilitates the transmission and understanding of the contents, arousing the students' motivation, their epistemic curiosity, as well as the desire for active involvement.

Against the background of playful character, but also of some tonalities correlated with today's students (digital natives) of inherent understanding of digital technologies, interactive educational strategies, strictly required by the imperatives of the current knowledge society, but also by the massive changes triggered lately in the educational system creates an optimal framework for the development of the skills and competences necessary to face the unpredictability brought about by this "liquid modernity".

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