

CHILDREN – DRUGS - LITERATURE

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Abstract: *Authoress of this treatise evidences occasion how to connect the educational areas Language and communication through language and Humans and Health. Her analysis of the books Říše Agord by Daniel Hever and Jmenuji se Alice by Ivona Březinová (of two authors who give themselves to the problems of drugs addiction) proves that acquirements of the area Health education can be helped on reading of suitable literary works.*

Key words: *Framework educational programme for basic education, children's literature, problems of drugs addiction*

The Framework education programme for primary education guides a qualified teacher, more than in previous programmes, towards the creative integration of educational fields. The addition of the Human Health and Language and Language Communication fields can provide one such opportunity for integration.

The connection between these two fields is not immediately clear. Whilst respecting certain procedures, a sensitive and gentle integration can bring clearer results than a teacher's specialist and maybe colourful explanation of the theme. It is because of this fact that one of the elements of the Language and Language Communication educational field is literary appreciation, which leads pupils to „such experience and knowledge that might positively influence their approach and their life values ... and also lead to the development of their emotional ... perception“¹, wherein I would like to emphasise the words experience and emotional. An experienced teacher can lead pupils to such an end gradually, but it all depends on the individual abilities of the pupils in a rational and sensitive sphere.

We shall attempt to substantiate the possibilities of integrating the aforementioned educational fields through the analysis of two works of literature for children and young people, which in their content tackle the problem of drug addiction: Daniel Hevier's Říše Agord (The Land of Gurd)² and Ivona Březinová's Jmenuji se Alice (My Name is Alice)³.

¹ Framework education programme : www.vuppraha.cz

² HEVIER, D. *Říše Agord*. Bratislava: Hevi, 2001. Czech version: Prague: Amulet, 2001. Translated by Josef Brukner.

³ BŘEZINOVÁ, I. *Jmenuji se Alice*. Second part of the trilogy *Holky na vodítku*. Prague: Albatros, 2002.

After 1989 the flights made by young people into the „attractive world“ of oblivion, relaxation, colourfulness, i.e. the world of drugs, was a mark of the enforcement of the rights of free decision-making and at the same time an expression of the management of certain confrontational situations. Drug addiction as a negative accompaniment to modern society has for several decades been at a global level a medical, sociological and psychological problem. Its reflection in literature creates a forum for friction between portrayed and ethical reality, and thereby for discussion with subsequent socially desirable results.

Literary works on the theme of children and drugs may be expressed in various genre, thematic and stylistic formats. The aim of the author's strategy is always, however, to attempt to play a role in the formation of a system of values for school pupils and, through an author's „action“, to create a socially required and desired „reaction“.

In *The Land of Gurd*, Daniel Hevier has chosen fantasy as a method of communicating with the reader, whereas Ivona Březinová in her book *My Name is Alice* brings across a factual atmosphere. Should we start with the premise that the reader makes the world of the literary work his/her own by understanding and grasping the ideas and then by playing an emotional role, the titles of both books offer leeway for a positive reader response. The „Land“ cannot possibly be an ordinary world, and the „girl“ in the title promises a view into the life of an adolescent contemporary. From the outset the reader supposes that he/she „understands“ the title, and therefore has no problems entering into the essence of the work. In order to decode the text pragmatically in this case means accepting the information given on the existence of drugs, the methods of obtaining them and their consumption; it describes the pleasant and later unpleasant effects, the ways to recognise the limits of one's self-control, and the institutions that can help. Cooperation between the pupil and the teacher at this level is dependent on the rational interpretation of the text: a primary school pupil interprets the facts contained within the text, the teacher evaluates its integrity or lack thereof, tests the depth of the pupil's ability to find their way around the text, their ability to find key words, to appropriately express their opinion of what they have read, to reproduce the text, or to reproduce the main ideas.

In Daniel Hevier's book a first-year primary school pupil should be able to recognise that it is a fairy tale, to decipher the key words such as Gurd, Relaed, Ysatsce, Retpmet⁴, etc, thereby leading to the rational understanding of the contents of the book. On understanding the work in its entirety, the pupil should reach a level whereby during the rational intake of the book he/she might better and more often enter into the bilateral relationships between each formal elements in the work and become emotionally involved with them.

The pupil is supposed to identify with the heroine of the story, Lucinka. He/she should identify with her feeling of a boring (although safe) home life („One evening, when there was nothing left to do in this world“), to welcome the impetus to begin the tale, from which there is an expectation to escape from the humdrum of life, and find a liking for hallucinogenic intoxication („the fantastic Ysatsce flower!“), following which one experiences the adventures and becomes emotionally involved with the changes in

⁴ In order to decode these words, we read them backwards.

Lucinka's personality. After a period of surrender and hesitancy the heroine ceases to listen to the temptation of the fantastically chimaera characters, and instead of pleasure the drugs begin to cause fear and anxiety and Lucinka, after several changes in events, actively changes from the archetypal image of a fairy tale character (not undergoing an internal development) and becomes a person who is able to make her own decisions about her life direction: at the end of the journey Lucinka finally „knew that she would never again return to the Land of Gurd“.

Hevier has brought the timelessness of the theme up to date (drugs are without question an evil of our time) and used the poetic means of the fantasy genre to this end.

The realistic situations in the opening passages „soften“ the absurd atmosphere; Lucinka, initially a non-fictional, later a fairy-tale character, defines a clear space for the understanding in the reader of the inherent laws in the relationship between real life and artificially-gained abandon.

The Education for Health educational field is therefore gaining an important helper. In a model situation pupils who have been made aware of the book may practically apply that which they have made their own through reading: the temptation from drugs is strong, but in the emotional background the rationally well-founded rejection of its acceptance is immediately activated.

Another approach to the reflection of the aforementioned point of view, whereby children follow day-to-day life and adapt their behaviour accordingly, has been selected by Ivona Březinová in her trilogy *Holky na vodítku* (Girls on a Lead)⁵. In her work on drug addiction entitled *Jmenuji se Alice* (My Name is Alice) she has gambled on providing factual information in a work of literature⁶, and through this she has gravitated towards a useful aim, which is the rejection of all kinds of childhood addictions and she has conformed all the levels of communication to this end. In order to realise a line of understanding she has set aside an area for a documentary and stylised part which is in diary format and illustrates the heroine's records of her own experiences. Alice writes them to herself on the recommendation of her doctors as a therapeutic aid suitable for drug addiction withdrawal. Aware of the necessity for emotional interaction with the readers, the author has „added“ a cognitive level that leads us towards the favourite theme of girl teenagers – prose with the girl heroine (diary format, girly crushes). Both planes alternate in the text and both these elements are differentiated graphically in the boldness of the typeface.

By alternating these two levels the author monitors the confrontational angles of perspective: she individualises the analysis of the girl's failings (diary) and generalises the problem by providing a literary overview (narrator). In both elements, however, an „adult“ aspect prevails, the urgency of the „adult“ problem is formulated predominantly by the narrator, and the difficulty of his task is also clear

⁵ BŘEZINOVÁ, I. *Holky na vodítku*. Prague: Albatros, 2002, 2003. *Jmenuji se Ester*. Prague: Albatros, 2002. *Jmenuji se Alice*. Prague: Albatros, 2002. *Jmenuji se Martina*. Prague: Albatros, 2003.

⁶ The first part *Jmenuji se Ester* is centred on the problem of gambling, the third part is centred on mental anorexia.

in the girl's records („My name is Alice and I am a drug addict. I will be one forever because although I feel cured, my desire for drugs will be in me until death. Well, you just try and live with it. Actually ... don't.“ – end of book).

A more mature reader would probably expect a greater degree of analysis of the psychology of the character. We do not, however, search for deeper internal monologues in the heroine's diary; the diary is in effect a fictitious outline of one possible reality scenario, and the author's input remains, despite all endeavours, at the level of a commentated reconstruction of each episode. In both cases, probably more so in the diary, the appeal of the text is heightened by vulgar language („There wasn't much left to do and they left me to snuff it.“; „I couldn't be arsed“; „you dirty junkie“). It can be stated, therefore, that the complicated nature of the journey that Alice took, and at the end of which she stated, relieved, that she „was clean“, is convincing only when simply reading through the lines. We find out in this way who Alice actually is, how her family works, and what preceded her „drug period“. This is followed by a description of the heroine's doubts about life, misunderstandings on the part of those close to her, problems in school, and the plot continues in an attempt to extricate herself from her dependence; the subsequent healing of the heroine is a catharsis. A more complicated interpretation of her route is linked to the openness in the description of the moving theme and the closing statement that even a cured drug addict is not insured against possible regression.

Contrary to the sensitivity reflected in Daniel Hevier's childish figurativeness and sentimentality, Ivona Březinová's raw description of the signs of drug addiction, the description of the experiences of a drug addict in the family, in school, in the community of her peers, by staking out the path that leads to drugs and the instruction as to how to seek help.

This is however a conscious strategy by the author; using an acceptable format for adolescent readers (diary format, female heroine), Březinová wants to illustrate the real danger, its roots, manifestations, deceptive attractiveness and the terror of the return journey.

Should we stretch the problem to the teaching process in the Human Health educational field, we cannot overlook its contextual parts, which expect that one of the outputs to be the pupil's ability to piece together the health and psychosocial risks linked to the abuse of addictive substances. In this respect Ivona Březinová's book is a graphic „aid“. The experienced author has, however, dressed up this „aid“ in a readable format with a suitably selected title (a girl's name), a documentary creative element (the diary urges us to identify with her), a repellent title illustration (Jozef Gertli Danglár), vocabulary and style in dialogues that reflect the abbreviated speech of adolescents and a happy end that softens the depressive content.

When providing a concrete commentary, other titles⁷ may be added to the books by Daniel Hevier and Ivona Březinová. Both books may be described as works that provide an up-to-date reaction to a global problem, and both are in their literary contexts

⁷ Compare also: John, R.: *Memento*, 1987; Keuls, Y.: *Matka Davida S. narozeného 3. července 1959*, 1988; Christiane, F.: *My děti ze stanice Zoo*, 1987; Holka, P.: *Normální PAKO*, 1993; Schindlerová, R.: *Petro, co je trip?*, 1997; Thomas, J.: *Jízdenka do Říma*, 2001; Šimulčíková, J.: *Jako na houpačce*, 2001 (where there are foreign titles the year of publication in the Czech version is given).

positively appraised by critics and readers alike⁸. In addition, the book by Ivona Březinová has been happily „sent“ into the world of doctors.“⁹

If one of the aims of literary appreciation is to bring pupils experiences that positively influence their life customs, and then link their educational content with the themes that are live in the field of Education for Health by means of literary works, a suitable selection may aid a qualified teacher to create and develop the required key competencies in pupils that are understood as a collection of attitudes that are important for the personal development of the pupil.

DĚTI – DROGY – LITERATURA

Souhrn: Autorka se v článku soustřeďuje na možnost propojení vzdělávacích oblastí Jazyk a jazyková komunikace a Člověk a zdraví. Závěr, že osvojení dovedností v rámci tematických okruhů oboru Výchova ke zdraví lze podpořit četbou vhodně volených literárních děl, dokládá analýzou knih Daniela Heviera Říše Agord a Ivony Březinové Jmenuji se Alice, jež se obsahově věnují problematice drogových závislostí.

Klíčová slova: Rámcový vzdělávací program pro ZV, problematika drogové závislosti, literatura pro děti

8 Daniel Hevier's book *Říše AGORD* was awarded the Czech Gold Riband, and the book *Holky na vodítku* by Ivona Březinová was given an honorary position in the Suk enquiry – Čteme všichni.

9 MUDr. Petr Žižkovský: The books from the cycle entitled *Holky na vodítku* show engagingly and in an understandable format the problems associated with today's adolescents, where emotional certainty in the family may lead to several serious problems. They are written not nly for adolescents, but also for their parents, who have already forgotten about „their times“. – from the introduction to the book *Jmenuji se Alice*.