

A PRIMER IN THE ROMANIAN LANGUAGE IN THE CONTEXT OF SCHOOL REFORM IN SERBIA

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Abstract: A complex process of the school reform in Serbia has promoted a whole range of new elements in the teaching in the Romanian language.

Apart from teaching staff training and new program development, new textbooks were published. We are talking about *The Primer* in the Romanian language, a workbook *In the World of Letters* and *The Primer Companion*.

The textbooks are published under the patronage of the Institute for Textbook Publishing, Belgrade, written by Brandusa Zujka and prepared within the Program of the Romanian language as a mother tongue for the 1st grade of elementary schools

The *Primer* suggests a new way of organizing of school activities, revealing the secrets of reading and writing to small children, i.e. pupils.

The Primer Companion is created with an aim to provide the teachers who work with 1st primary school grade pupils with orienting instructions for teaching reading and writing in better conditions.

The workbook *In the World of Letters* supplementing *The Primer* is outlined and realised in accordance to *The Primer*.

The Primer, together with the work book *In the World of Letters* and *The Primer Companion*, published with an aim to introduce the teaching of the Romanian language into the context of contemporary teaching, reveal their real value only in everyday work with pupils.

Keywords: teaching in the Romanian language, the primer, school reform, new strategies, reading and writing at beginner’s level.

***“Consider a student a torch you will light
to later glow in its own gleam”
(Plutarch)***

A complex process of the school reform in Serbia has promoted a whole range of new elements, appropriate for contemporary teaching demanding a new approach to educational contents.

In accordance to the reform measures initiated by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia in the academic school year 2003/2004, the changes were at the same time introduced in the teaching in

the Romanian language. Apart from teaching staff training and new program development, in the spirit of innovative measures, new textbooks as well as operational documents were published to apply the provisions of the school curricula.

In order to identify a moment the teaching in the Romanian language is going through, as well as to constructively participate in completing the innovative picture of lower elementary school grades, an effort will be made at representing concisely and realistically the first textbooks in the Romanian language created in the context of educational reform in Serbia and used in primary schools with teaching in the Romanian language. We are talking about *The Primer* in the Romanian language and a workbook *In the World of Letters*, first edition in 2005 and second edition in 2009 and *The Primer Companion* published in 2007 and again in 2010. The publication and using of these books in the 1st grade of elementary school have been approved by the Secretariat for Education and Culture of the Province of Vojvodina.

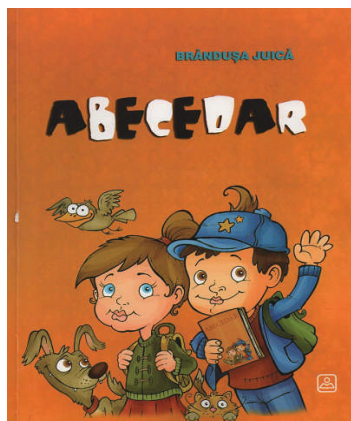
The textbooks are published under the patronage of the Institute for Textbook Publishing, Belgrade, written by Brandusa Zujka and prepared within the Program of the Romanian language as a mother tongue for the 1st grade of elementary schools, published in the normative act *Special Grounds of the School Curriculum for the 1st grade of primary education and upbringing*, issued by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia, in Belgrade in 2003.

In projecting the textbooks, apart from legislative and methodological approach, significant attention has been paid to special conditions of the socio-cultural context in which the teaching in the Romanian language is organized and carried out, preserving and nurturing our mother tongue.

The Romanian language as a mother tongue is acquired spontaneously during the first years of child's life. Afterwards, the improvement is reached through numerous and various contributions, out of which the contribution of the school seem to be the most important and the most efficient. In the school context the Romanian language serves as an instrument of knowledge and communication means and permeates the whole process of education and upbringing. The Romanian language children speak when they enter school starts to develop and their ability to express suitable content of their ideas, thoughts and feelings is increasing.

The teaching of the Romanian language as a mother tongue in the lower grades of primary school is of great importance since its aim is to nurture oral and written language skills of students, as well as to promote accurate, contemporary, aware and expressive manner of expression. During

this period the process of Romanian language acquisition comprises both assimilation of reading, writing and grammar knowledge and formation and development of the skills in these fields.



The new *Primer* represents publishing continuity of a series of primers, written by ProfDr Trailo Spariousu; at the same time it is a novelty, having in mind that the book suggests rather than imposes a new way of organizing of school activities, revealing the secrets of reading and writing to small children, i.e. pupils.

Prepared according to dialectical coexistence of phonetic method, analytical-synthetic and global method, the current primer provides pupils with an opportunity to acquire in an easier way, as well as

accurately the pronunciation of sounds in a variety of combinations of syllables, to recognize written letters, as well as to transform letters from syllables and words into sounds.

The acquisition of reading and writing is a basis for all school activities, being the instrument of intellectual work. The classes of reading and writing simultaneously contribute to the broadening of knowledge horizons and realization of upbringing aspect of the curriculum.

Apart from opening up possibilities for the acquisition of the skills of accurate and conscious reading and writing, the reading and writing classes encompass the following: activated and enriched manner of pupil's expression, from both the aspect of accurate pronunciation of each sound and the aspect of grammar, development of memory, attention, intellectual operations (analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalization), development of creative abilities of children and interest in learning, creating of aware and persistent attitude towards this activity. Furthermore, the classes contribute to reinforcement and elaboration of children knowledge on the nature surrounding us, as well as to the formation of positive character features of pupils.

180 classes a year, i.e. 5 classes a week are anticipated for the acquisition of reading and writing skills by the school curriculum for the 1st grade of primary school. The processing of the *Primer* includes two periods: preparatory period of reading and writing and reading and writing at beginner's level.

The duration of the preparatory reading and writing period is determined according to children's abilities, up to 4 weeks, which is the time needed for the acquisition of some knowledge and skills, necessary for reading and writing acquisition. Reading and writing at beginner's level is the longest period, approximately 90 lessons and refers to the processing of letters and groups of letters.

The preparatory reading and writing period (*The Primer* 4-25 page) comprises the lessons aiming at learning about a sound, a word and a sentence, as well as acquisition of a variety of graphic elements. These lessons are considered the basic elements in the realization of aims and tasks stated in the *Primer Companion*.

The contents of *The Primer* helps a teacher in realization of the most important aims and tasks anticipated for the preparatory reading and writing period.

The development of children reception, as a significant reading and writing aim, can be realized according to various pictures presented at the first pages of *The Primer*. In such a way, prior representations of children (fruit, birds, animals, toys, various professions) are reinforced, while the range of these representations can be broadened, starting from the immediate setting: first day at school, classroom, school kits... to more distant settings. These pages will help with the processing of the notions of a sentence, a word, a syllable, a sound

During this period the preparation for reading is supplemented by the preparation for writing. This aim is reached through play, writing of graphic elements and drawing according to a model.

Reading and writing at beginner's level, the main period of reading and writing skills acquisition, aims at a teacher familiarizing pupils with the sounds and letters of the Romanian language, with linking them into syllables, words and sentences, as well as with writing of letters as components of words and sentences. The pictures from *The Primer* open up possibilities for a teacher to enrich the vocabulary of pupils, to nurture moral features and develop knowledge.

Having in mind that a syllable is the simplest unit for reading acquisition, the period can be divided into three phases in accordance with the level of difficulty involved in the word structure.

The first phase comprises monosyllable and two-syllable words consisting of direct or reversed syllables. *The Primer* pages contribute to the reinforcement of previously acquired syllables, regardless whether the syllable is in the same or is a part of a new word.

During this period children start to read sentences and shorter texts. Respecting the principle of gradual shift from less to more difficult, it is started with the sentences consisting of two words followed by shorter texts consisting of two or three sentences. In order to compose as clear as possible as well as a variety of textual material, drawings are used instead of words when words involve letters that have not been previously processed by children.

Each page of *The Primer* appropriate for this phase provides the teacher with the following material: illustrations (according to which the teacher leads conversation with pupils); word columns (needed for the composition and analysis of words in regard to their reading within the text); the text pupils should read and retell; a model of writing according to written letters at the bottom of the page.

In the end of this phase *The Primer* contains examples for writing of simple sentences using written letters.

Within the period of reading and writing at beginner's level (*The Primer*, pages 26-114) the following types of lessons are carried out: the lessons of getting acquainted with the new sounds and letters; the lessons for dealing with the columns of words and sentences; revision lessons; reinforcement lessons; pupil knowledge evaluation lessons.

The Primer Companion also refers to the aims and tasks anticipated for the period of reading and writing at beginner's level.

The Primer contents suggest the topics representing natural and social realities. Starting with the first school day and presenting conditions in which pupils will work, it is aimed at reinforcing, arranging and enriching the representations and notions on objective reality (family, games and children's preoccupations, various man's activities, important holidays, animals...). As much as it was possible, efforts were made to represent the topics as a sequence of seasons, opening up possibilities for a teacher to use concrete examples.

The Primer contains the first knowledge on grammar and orthography, as well, of course, in its simplest form. The pupils acquire a concept of a sentence, a word, a syllable, a sound, the meaning of question mark or exclamation mark... etc.

The Primer has relatively clear pages where children can easily find their way through pictures. The pictures are suggestive, with bright colours, cheerful, appropriate for psychological needs of pupils who are beginners. They guide observations of pupils towards noticing of an idea and its expression in a sentence, forming selective perceptions and contributing to formation of general operations.

The Primer Companion is created with an aim to provide the teachers who work with 1st primary school grade pupils with orienting instructions for teaching reading and writing in better conditions.



According to its structure, *The Primer Companion* consists of two chapters containing several sub-chapters and *The Final Conclusion*, where the educational standards prescribed for the end of the period for processing *The Primer* are stated. The first chapter – *Teaching Methodology Aspects of The Primer* – the following contents are covered: *The general aims of learning the Romanian language as a mother tongue in the 1st grade of elementary education and upbringing*, *Operational tasks anticipated for the preparatory period of reading and writing and for the period of*

reading and writing at beginner's level and *The types of lessons specific for the preparatory period of reading and writing and for the period of reading and writing at beginner's level*. The second chapter – *Organization and realization of reading and writing lessons* – presents the methods of lessons organization for both preparatory period of reading and writing and for the period of reading and writing at beginner's level.

Even though the current *Primer* is conceived according to dialectic coexistence of phonetic method, analytical-synthetic and global method, which have already been used, the lesson structure is featured by certain changes demanding use of some innovative teaching methods and means, or a new way of their implementation. Both contents and the way of content realization in *The Primer* impose the need for some instructions necessary for each anticipated task to be realized.

Learning activities are realized in a variety of contexts, subjected to everyday pedagogic learning program. The smallest didactic unit is a class, considered a basic unit. A class, i.e. a lesson remains the basic form of didactic activity, through which a teacher organizes learning process in a certain period of time, according to the demands of the curriculum, adjusted to the school timetable. The lessons have to be prepared and their preparation is based on the contents (topics, texts, learning situations), on didactic methods and suitable teaching means. It is recommended that during the same class didactic activities should be used in an alternative way whose

aims is the formation of accurate and aware reading or acquisition of accurate writing, determined by accurate pronunciation.

There are several types of lessons: the lessons of new knowledge acquisition, the lessons of systematization reinforcement, the lessons of forming of knowledge and skills, revision lessons, as well as evaluation lessons, but they do not have determined typology, their structure is not mandatory but orienting.

The course of the Romanian language in the 1st grade in primary school can consist of the following parts: activities of recognition of a voice in a word, perception of a printed letter, noticing illustrations, reading of a word column, representation of a written letter, preparatory writing exercising, writing of a written letter and word, if the level of the pupils' abilities in the class is suitable.

In spite of the fact that *The Primer Companion* suggests a model for each lesson comprised by *The Primer*, it is important to mention that the use of the *Companion* is not pattern-like. On the contrary, with the help of these indications, hopefully useful, the teacher will choose the means, methods and procedures that suit the covered contents and the conditions in which a class takes place, with the *Companion* having solely orienting role.

The workbook *In the World of Letters* supplementing *The Primer* is outlined and realised in accordance to *The Primer*. According to the phonetic method, analytically-synthetic and global method, the workbook suggests thorough learning of writing and reading through various exercise, grading of difficulties and training pupils for participation in communication demanding use of constructive thinking. Learning takes place according to direct use of letters, syllables, words, sentences and punctuation marks. Various exercises ensure revealing of similarities, differences, associations and numerous interdisciplinary correlations.

Certain types of exercises open up possibilities for pupils to form their own personal opinion, to learn how to express arguments to support their attitudes, to develop oral and written expression; other exercises attract pupils to the wonderful world of reading, developing interestedness in reading.

All types of exercises ensure an accurate reception of a written message, enrichment of vocabulary, accurate use of the Romanian language in concrete and versatile contexts of communication, stimulating creativity and freedom of choice of children; they are also adjusted to the fields of interests specific for the age of pupils.

The workbook *In the World of Letters* offers opportunity for teachers to choose exercises suitable for the composition of the pupils in the class

they work with (homogeneous, heterogeneous and undivided class). The workbook is an instrument available to parents through which they can have insights into their children's school success.

We conclude our presentation underlying that *The Primer*, together with the work book *In the World of Letters* and *The Primer Companion*, published with an aim to introduce the teaching of the Romanian language into the context of contemporary teaching, reveal their real value only in everyday work with pupils.

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