



## WHAT QUALITIES SHOULD A TEACHER HAVE TO BE ABLE TO TEACH CHILDREN TO READ AND WRITE IN AN EASY AND ENJOYABLE MANNER?

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*"Academic pedagogy should inspire developmental wisdom"*

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### Abstract

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In today's world, requirements regarding communication are increasing. Proper communication behaviours are desirable not only at school but primarily out of school. In adult life, they allow one to find a job or a suitable position. We know that a well-spoken person has an easier life. The modern teacher should pay attention to language education of children and the youth at every stage of their schooling, but mainly children at the pre-school age or early at school. Therefore, teachers should teach the correct variety of spoken native language, in other words, correct communication behaviours. In today's Polish educational system this aspect is profoundly neglected. Teachers should run systematic orthophonic exercises, designed to improve the function of the tongue, lip and soft palate. Well-trained teachers will have essential knowledge and skills to work with children with a lisp for this group is the most numerous at pre-school and during the first school stage. They should run many pronunciation exercises to improve those children's clarity of speech. Teachers should conduct emission exercises and pay attention to the way children use their vocal folds. A modern teacher should be a good therapist who can help each pupil who has not been taught to

read and write. Such training is possible with the innovative glottodidactic native language method, developed and perfected by Prof. Bronisław Roctawski. Using his long-time research conducted since 1972 in Polish preschools and schools, Prof. Bronisław Roctawski has authored an educational system that focuses on reading and writing abilities of young children. In 2016, the Author started her research among teachers and students of various educational establishments, focusing on the effectiveness of this method. The outcomes of the research will be analysed by means of standard statistical tools.

The paper presents a theoretical background of teaching how to read and write used in native language glottodidactics developed by Prof. B. Roctawski, making a reference to research carried out in 2016 by the Author of this paper. The main thesis of the paper derives from the assumption that:

A teacher with glottodidactic skills is able to teach children the spoken and written variety of Polish and suitable communicative responses. He or she should help each pupil who has not been taught to read and write.

#### KEYWORDS

Innovative method, Polish language education, language education, learning to read and write, teaching aids, glottodidactics.

## What do pedagogy students need?

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Above all, they need comprehensive and accurate knowledge. This statement is obvious, yet many early education students do not have the basic knowledge to be able to teach children linguistic education. Future teachers do not understand the essential language issues necessary for teaching reading and writing. Currently, pedagogical studies are being chosen by those who want to complete studies without making much effort. Many students in the field of pre-school and early school pedagogy think that anybody who knows the alphabet can teach reading and writing. The Author is not alone in such thinking, since Professor B. Ročowski frequently written about "special care" teachers in his many publications (Ročowski, 2009 and 2012). Teachers who are poorly prepared to perform their professional duties cannot teach children how to read and write, and they usually want to rid themselves of these learners who are a nuisance. Then, they refer them to pedagogical and psychological advice centres to determine that these learners are dyslexic, dysgraphic, dysorthographic, or simply refer them to special schools. Many teachers lay blame for difficulties in reading and writing on a child and his/her parents, and they do not see the gaps in their basic training. The above statements do not concern all teachers and students. Luckily, there are also such teachers who passionately develop knowledge required for working with children and continue to battle for good-quality pre-school and school education.

For years we have witnessed permanent reforms of the educational system, as a result of which disputes among education reformers, scientists, pedagogues and psychologists take place. Pedagogues are in favour of teaching reading and writing to 6-year-olds, whereas psychologists are against it. These disputes do not always positively affect teaching methods in schools. In 2016, as a result of further reforms being carried out by the Ministry of Education, it was decided that 6-year old children should be able to read, whereas writing was postponed to the next stage at primary school. Also, the so-called "paper" education has long been discussed, where teachers are more concerned about their own

professional development than teaching children. This poor quality of the Polish educational system is opposed by Professor B. Roctawski, who since 1977 has consistently been developing his own educational system and teaches glottoeducators, i.e. teachers who keep watch over language education of children in early school education.

## How to overcome reading stereotypes?

Native language glottodidactics requires quite a lot of effort from the teacher. Teachers who are poorly prepared to work in this profession must overcome many stereotypes. The largest difficulty for them is to be able to differentiate two worlds: the world of letters and the world of sounds. They usually associate the world of sounds with the world of letters, not being able to segment words into sounds, and even syllables. Instead of sounds, they provide letters, so they do not understand orthographic and orthophonic rules. Although the Polish language is classified as one with an alphabetic writing system, it is not fully alphabetic. Over the centuries, since the Polish writing system was created, many changes have occurred, leading to the situation in which one sound (phoneme) can be written with two words today, and even with one of three, four or five letters. You cannot teach children reading and writing, as well as correct pronunciation without this knowledge.

Each glottodidactic educator is able to differentiate between the world of sounds and the world of letters. A teacher who recognises the world of sounds knows the world that is experienced by a child. As early as at birth (and even during her foetal life), a baby experiences the spoken version of the native language. She may have a serious encounter with the written version in the oldest pre-school group and in primary school.

A teacher, who is a glottodidactic educator, possesses one more skill much needed to prepare children for reading and writing: he or she is able to articulate sounds in isolation. In the traditional teaching this skill is often ignored or even incorrectly interpreted. Teachers supply sounds, which their pupils utter incorrectly with vocalisation: sy, ry, my, wy, fy, py, etc. Good knowledge of the

sound structure of words and good articulation of sounds in isolation allows one to teach children how to synthesize words from sounds they have been provided with – and this is the basis of teaching reading. A child who has not learnt to synthesise words with sounds does not possess an important tool to verify the correctness of word segmentation into sounds and accepts errors in analysis. In the Polish language there are certain sounds and their combinations which are especially difficult, so children find it useful to be able to synthesize. Words containing the so-called nasal vowels ę and ą are difficult to be segmented into sounds. Children who have not acquired well the skill of synthesising, while analysing words with these sounds, instead of saying "ę" they say "e" and "o" instead of "ą".

Professor B. Ročłowski claims that "the traditional method of introducing letters by teachers at the time of well-developed linguistic knowledge is very outdated and ineffective (Ročłowski, 2001). A glottodidactic teacher exposes a child to all letters since the beginning of the teaching process. During play children have the chance to combine and compare letters, and thus have an opportunity to learn a letter through its distinctive features, differentiating it from all others. Letters learnt in this way are easily memorised and recognised. Children playing with logo blocks<sup>1</sup> from the earliest years have contact with both printed and written letters, as well as upper case and lower case letters properly arranged in space. For games, extremely important in terms of teaching, a glottodidactic teacher also uses a letter carpet.<sup>2</sup> Children skip onto

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<sup>1</sup> LOGO® blocks developed by Professor B. Ročłowski are intended for teaching to read, write and do maths. The package consists of 150 blocks with a full set of 44 letters (36 primary letters and 30 non-primary letters marked with red and 8 polygraphemes), digits, punctuation marks and mathematical symbols. The blocks contain 4 basic grapheme options, i.e. written lower case and upper case letters and printed lower case and upper case letters, each of these variants refers to the same phoneme (sound). A capital and a small letter is supplied in line guides. At the bottom of each block there is a green strip, which allows children to place the block properly and correctly see each letter or digit. The alphabet presented on the blocks is slightly different from the one used in text books. The Author has introduced new polygraphemes to it: ni, zi, ci, dzi, si, as well as letters: ą, v, x. All polygraphemes have been called the alphabet letters.

<sup>2</sup> The letter carpet developed by Professor B. Ročłowski, apart from features allowing you to teach the phonemic analysis and visual and motor coordination, is very convenient for use in pre-school settings, home settings or in the open air.

a letter found on the carpet and this letter can be quickly memorised. In this way, children absorb letters, which are quickly and very well associated with the sounds.

In traditional education children read using a spelling technique which B. Ročłowski calls "a pseudotechnique". Spelling makes it difficult for a child to develop a mature reading style and it can make such reading style devoid of content. By spelling, a child creates only a phonic structure of text, but does not get reach the content. Such learners are said to read without comprehension (Ročłowski, 2012. p. 28). Also, in the traditional reading education, other teaching mistakes are common that deprive the child of reading comprehension, for example, giving children home assignments to learn how to read a text which has been selected and read out by a teacher in class, which at home it is often read out by their parents. In such a case, the content is well-known to the child, and she often recreates the text from her memory.

A glottodidactic teacher, whom Professor B. Ročłowski calls "a 21st-century teacher" (Ročłowski, 2012), acts in a different way. In the initial reading tasks, the technique of "sliding" from letter to letter (from sound to sound) is introduced, which makes a child progress to mature reading. Children can use the "sliding" technique after they have acquired the skill of synthesising words from sounds together with difficult areas (Ročłowski, 2012, 28,29). Children educated by teachers using glottodidactic methods very rapidly reach the mature reading stage, they are keen on reading and willingly reach for books and become readers.

I would be useful to relate the above findings to empirical research carried out by the Author in the highest pre-school groups in the Lubelskie Province and in Warsaw on a sample of 120 learners. Teachers work with the groups of examined children using native language glottodidactics and the traditional method commonly used in kindergartens as well as by parents at home, who do not know any glottodidactic methodology, teaching their children to spell. The examined children were given a short text to read made up of 16 words,

69 phonemic ones. The children, while reading by spelling, were able to synthesise only short two-sound words, and had difficulty with longer words, as a result of which their reading lacked comprehension. By reading with the "sliding method", from sound to sound or from syllable to syllable, they easily synthesised words and remembered the contents of the text being read.

## How to overcome difficulties in writing?

Learning how to write is definitely more difficult than learning how to read. Some children learn how to read virtually without the assistance of adults. Some people claim that a child has learnt to read on her own. The Author has not heard opinions that a child has learnt to write by herself. Learning how to write takes longer and consequences of improper teaching are delayed in time. Dysgraphia is first mentioned as late as the third grade of primary school, and not infrequently in higher grades. The same can be said about dysorthography. Deficiencies of "traditional" methods for teaching to write have been apparent for many years, not only among learners (Ročławski, 2001).

Teachers who teach children to read should know if the language a child uses is ideographic writing, phonetic and ideographic, syllabic, consonantal, or alphabetical. In alphabetical writing a graphical sign (letter) is linked with the smallest linguistic part – with a phoneme (commonly with a sound). Ročławski distinguishes 36 speech sounds in Polish and a pause which is used for separating units higher order, i.e. words. If the Polish writing system were fully alphabetic, then for marking the 36 sounds 36 letters would suffice, out which we are able to make an infinite number of texts, and even sentences. Writing systems based on syllables, morphemes or letters use very large sets of graphical signs. In syllabic writing systems there are a few hundred, while in ideographic or combined writing systems there are several dozens of thousands. The Polish writing system is said to be alphabetical, but it creates many problems. The alphabetic nature is fully preserved for many sounds: i, y, a, ę, q, r, l, z, dz, d, m, n, w, b. Polish abounds in words which are made up of orthographically easy sounds. Unfortunately, teachers do not know that. Without this knowledge and without the knowledge of letters that are difficult

in the orthographic and orthophonic aspect, teaching reading and writing cannot be based on a child's thinking, progress to knowledge and discovery of linguistic phenomena. Methods for teaching to read and write that do not take into account these issues have little value, since they do not allow a child to become involved in the discovery of their own language and development of thinking skills (Ročławski, 2011).

In teaching orthography Professor B. Ročławski proposes an essential change in the approach to orthographic rules. As a result of his inquiries, he has resolved to divide letters into primary letters (a, q, b, c, cz, ć, d, dz, dź, dź, e, ę, f, g, ch, i, j, k, l, ł, m, n, ń, o, p, r, s, sz, ś, t, u, w, y, z, ź, ż) and non-primary ones (ci, dzi, h, ni, ó, rz, si, zi). He proposed to mark primary letters in black, and non-primary ones in red. With this division of letters one can learn Polish better and acquire the skills of reading and writing. He referred to a notation using primary and non-primary letters as orthographic and orthophonic because it rules out many orthophonic difficulties hidden in written text. Such a system of notation is especially precious for children with hearing defects and those who have not acquired the spoken variant of the Polish language well. Orthographic and orthophonic notation helps to see how a word should be pronounced and gives pupils a good knowledge of speech sound structure. This connection is instrumental in teaching the orthography rules of Polish. You cannot teach children how to write correctly without a good knowledge of its rules (Borowska, 2016). To teach these things a glottodidactic teacher uses *Słownik ortograficzno-ortofoniczny* [A Dictionary of Orthography and Orthophony] and auxiliary academic papers in the series titled *W krainie reguł ortograficznych* [In the land of orthographic rules] by Professor B. Ročławski.

A glottodidactic teacher combines teaching orthography with teaching logical thinking and creativity. He/she first directs learners' attention to acquiring distinctive features of letters, and then the starting point and the route to trace a letter. In this way children develop the melody of writing. Glottodidactic teachers teach children how to write using loop and non-loop techniques (Ročławski, 2008). Learners draw letters without interrupting the

traced letter. Children often grip their writing tool very tightly, which causes that the minor motor ability of the three fingers holding the tool is becomes rigid, and as a result it leads to fatigue and discouragement. A glottodidactic teacher shows how to select a writing tool and patiently teaches how to use it. Children learn how to write softly and flexibly in this way.

A glottodidactic teacher deals with children in such a way that they become fond of writing. Such a teacher ensures that writing becomes associated with recording meaning, which is the essence of writing. A glottodidactic teacher does not furnish children with mindless tasks that consist in rewriting texts or filling ready-made sentences with words. The opportunity of relatively rapid acquisition of reading and writing skills brings a pupil much closer to reading books and using literature. Parents should demonstrate the joy of reading to their children from their birth, and teachers starting at the youngest pre-school stage.

## Conclusions

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The native language glottodidactics method developed by B. Ročlawski, in line with contemporary trends, permits a different approach to the education of children and to their emotional and social growth. The method extends preparation time needed by pupils to start learning reading and writing in order to minimize time devoted to learning how to write fluently and read fluently with comprehension. Thanks to a specially adapted and arranged process of teaching, creative thinking is developed, cognitive skills are fostered, and the child learns individual and group work, develops responsibility for an entrusted task, and above all the pace of work is adapted to the abilities and needs of the learner. The author of the method pays particular attention to correct orthophony (pronunciation), regarding it as the basis for correct reading and writing. The method implements exercises improving the function of the child's speech organs, and enables the child to produce speech sounds accurately. The method offers new techniques of teaching to read and write. Breathing exercises are given special emphasis. The teaching programme for reading and writing offered by this method provides an opportunity for individualized

treatment of pupils. Each child has her own rhythm and pace of intellectual, social-emotional and physical growth, therefore she should be approached individually. Lessons involving this method foster logical thinking and creativity, and the opportunity to learn reading relatively fast makes her familiar with literature. Native language glottodidactics brings order to the child's world of phones and letters.

Native language glottodidactics is not every teacher's cup of tea, who may think that they can teach children. This method is suitable for those teachers who wish to make every pupil happy and are particularly attentive to the needs of the pupils who are not blessed with special talents. Children educated with this method like school, even if very demanding, provided that well-trained teachers work there.

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