Chapter 13
Metacognition in the Teaching of Literature

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter the problems of metacognition in the teaching of literature is considered. Artistic text is understood as a learning problem or assumption of developing cognitive and reading skills and the acquisition of literary terms in lower secondary education. Depending on the specific objectives of the analysis and interpretation of a literary text in the context of didactic communication and in accordance with the ambition to develop thinking and ability to learn, the author suggests teaching strategies and methods that participate in the processing and development of (factual, conceptual, procedural, metacognitive) knowledge of literary science, especially at higher levels of cognitive thinking.

INTRODUCTION

Metacognition is the ability to learn or acquire knowledge about knowledge/cognition or as the ability to observe one’s self during thinking and reflect on one’s own thinking. Flavell (1976, p. 232) characterized metacognition as an effective monitoring and subsequent managing of cognitive processes in order to achieve a specific objective (as cited in Zovinec, Krejcova, Pospisilova, 2014, p. 14). “Knowledge is considered as metacognitive when it is actively, strategically used and will ensure the aim.” (Zovinec et al., 2014, p. 15). There are two basic components of metacognition: metacognitive knowledge, which is knowledge of cognition that is awareness and declarative, and knowledge and beliefs about cognition (Zapotocna, 2013) that include knowledge of cognition and cognitive processes.

Metacognition is not only knowledge about cognition. Thus, as was noted by Krykorkova and Chvala (2001), metacognition has the “character of a bird’s eye view above our cognition, learning and thinking” (as cited in Zapotocna, 2013, p. 11). Metacognitive knowledge includes an understanding of one’s own way of learning. A student should reflect on his own learning preconditions, learning strategies, learning process and their results (compare to Gavora, 2008, p. 116). She/he should know himself and his own knowledge-level, different types of tasks and problems and ways to solve them, learning strategies and
adequate learning conditions. He should use his strategic knowledge, knowledge of heuristic methods, and knowledge of cognitive entitlements of different types of tasks and so on.

According to Fisher (2004), a child who is learning is a child who is thinking. That is why it is necessary that the child has to learn actively, through different types of tasks and strategies or methods of solving, to develop higher thinking processes. In the process of learning the child has to get to know the different types of cognitive knowledge and cognitive processes. The child does not only need to acquire knowledge and solve problems but also has to plan, evaluate and look for the sense of the learning process in order to think.

In this chapter, teaching methods and strategies will be suggested that participate in the processing and development of (factual, conceptual, procedural, metacognitive) knowledge of literary science, especially at higher levels of cognitive thinking. These methods and strategies help modifying cognitive processes and improving metacognition.

BACKGROUND

According to the revised Bloom’s Taxonomy (Anderson, & Krathwohl, 2001, p. 268; Valent, 2007), which was extended with a (second) dimension of cognitive knowledge (factual, conceptual, procedural, metacognitive knowledge: knowledge, understanding, application, analysis, synthesis, evaluation), the dimension of cognitive processes includes six processes that are expressed by active verbs: to remember, understand, apply, analyze, evaluate and create. With a proactive approach to learning and thinking, it is in particularly necessary to develop the last three processes of that list.

Development of higher levels of thinking is associated with the “metacognitive control” (Fisher, 2004, pp. 14-15) or with training of metacognition, because thinking as processing of information is comprised of input (e. g. knowledge), output (e. g. problem-solving) and control (e. g. search for the meaning of the acquired knowledge).

Nowadays it is possible to identify the strategies and methods of personality development of pupils/students (Fisher, 2004; Zapotocna, 2013; Zelina, 1996; Zovinec, Krejcova, Pospisilova, 2014) that lead to the achievement of specific objective – to develop higher cognitive knowledge and higher levels of thinking. Pupil should acquire not only knowledge but also knowledge about knowledge/cognition, thus about processes of learning, as well as about the possibilities of regulation of cognition, thus managing meta/cognitive processes of cognition and learning (Zapotocna, 2013). Fisher (2004) defines ten teaching strategies that develop thinking and learning (learning with thinking, asking questions, planning, discussion, mental mapping, divergent thinking, cooperative learning, tutoring, evaluation, creation of the learning community). According to Fisher (2004, p. 15) the ability of information processing includes input, output and control (metacognition). The basics of metacognitive strategies and skills that provide a good level of assimilation of the strategy are selfmonitoring, selfcontrol and creative selfregulation (Zapotocna, 2013; Zelina, 1996, p. 15). During the reading of the artistic text they are “monitoring, evaluation and regulation of the reading process – with an emphasis on understanding of the artistic text” (Gavora et al., 2008, p. 81). Metacognitive processes ensure active learning that is more efficient (Gavora et al., 2008), and therefore from our position on the topic we ask questions that stimulate evaluation of artistic text in the phase after reading. The reader does not use the whole repertoire of metacognitive processes at the same time, he selects metacognitive activities based on his control, preferences or which processes are required by teaching task or characteristic of a particular artistic text (Gavora et al., 2008, 86). We
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