ABSTRACT

When Lithuanian infants and children up to age three become orphans, they are often sent to live in homes for infants with development disorders (further infant orphanages) where all the rearing they get comes from the caretakers who work there. Therefore, this article seeks to discover the outlooks on teaching the mother tongue and attitudes on language teaching in general of the caretakers at the infant orphanages. Based on an analysis of foreign and Lithuanian scientific papers, the methods of teaching children under three their native tongue are presented.

Keywords: child, infant orphanage, caretaker, mother tongue.
RESUMEN

Cuando los bebés Lituanos y los niños hasta la edad tres se quedan huérfanos, a menudo son enviados a hogares para niños con trastornos de desarrollo (más en orfanatos) donde toda la información y la educación es de la responsabilidad de las personas que trabajan allí. Este artículo procura descubrir el modo de enseñanza de la lengua materna y las actitudes ante la enseñanza del lenguaje en general de los responsables de los centros de acogida/orfanatos. Basado en la análisis de trabajos académicos de autores lituanos y de otras nacionalidades, se presentan estas formas de enseñanza de la lengua materna a niños menores de 3 años.

Las palabras clave: niño, orfanato infantil, vigilante, lengua materna.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The pertinence and topic. This past year theoreticians and practitioners of the education sciences and sociology (LeCroy, Milligan, 1991; Lochman, Coie, Underwood, Terry, 1993; Juodaityté, 2003, et al) both at home and abroad have paid considerable attention to the ways children are brought up to live in a complex society. According to Salkauskas (1992), the first factor affecting a child’s rearing is his family. When there is no family, educators can end up in charge of the child’s upbringing for a number of reasons: objective ones, such as the death or incapacity of the parents; or subjective grounds, such as domestic abuse, narcotics abuse, or simply the unwillingness to keep one’s child. Either way, these children end up with the infant orphanage as the primary educational factor rather than the family, which raises questions about the actions and competency of caregivers.

The 2007 Lithuanian Education Law and the pedagogical and psychological literature (Zukauskiene, 1996, Ališauskiene, Gudonis, Mikulenaite, Petrunyte, Radzevičienė, 2003, Bajoriūnas, 2004, Radzevičienė, 2006 et al) emphasize the necessity of teaching children social skills, which, in the case of infant orphanages, is directly linked to native language teaching. Ergo, to improve a child’s social skills it is helpful for him to successfully socialize with other children and adults, which also encourages identity development and fosters adaptation to the surroundings. For an individual to learn a language, he has to spend a certain period of developmental growth in an appropriate educational environment. Children under three living at infant orphanages do not have that opportunity, nor do they feel the sympathy of their parents, the variety in educational approaches or the organic relationship they have with their parents.

In Lithuania, orphaned children under the age of three live at one of six orphanages that specialize in infants and young children. Naturally, the children at these institutions participate in various forms of communication: they speak in one fashion with their peers and another with the caregivers, teachers, and other personnel. According to Karaliunas (1997), Nauckiinait (2000), Glebuvien, Leleikien (2003), Piaget (2002), Grabauskien (2006) et al, if a child is to learn to speak, he must be exposed to people speaking as an example. Ivanov (1978) adds that a child without contact with people
and their speech during the first critical stage of development will never be able to master a language perfectly.

Children without the experience of family care do not create an appropriate behavior model: they are shy, apprehensive, insecure in their surroundings, cannot deal with stress (Kvieskiené, 2002), and do not know how to express their emotions. This is why it is vital for educators at infant orphanages to know their charges especially well and be able to pass on to them the most important means of developing their language skills and abilities. Educators must focus on interaction during the teaching process: based on theory, the linguistic situations created for children have to encourage them open up a dialogue, share their ideas, and form values. However, the research done in Lithuania to analyze the language learning that takes place in infant orphanages is limited.

Research Object—the teaching of the native tongue at infant orphanages.

Research Objective—to explore the particulars of children’s native language learning process at infant orphanages.

Research Methods—an analysis of academic literature, document content analyses, a written survey, and SPSS program output of data collected by empirical research.

Research Methodology and Organization. One group of educators included staff from infant orphanages in Vilnius, Kaunas, Klaipėda, Alytus, and Šiauliai. They have direct contact with children living there, and the research results reflect the opinions at those homes.

The total number of teaching staff at these schools is 102; 57 took part in the research. In synch with principles of research ethics, respondents could participate in the research regardless of age, race, creed, or other restriction. (Charles, 1999, Rupšiené, 2007) Nevertheless, all of the participants were women; clearly women are more likely to choose this profession than men. The research subjects ranged in age from 26 to 69: 26-39 made up 36.9%; 40-59 made up 57.8%; and 60-69 made up 5.3%. The participants have long careers working in infant orphanages. Of the respondents, 67.4% have been working there for sixteen to twenty years; 15.8% answered 21-25 years. Nearly all—94.7%—have university bachelor’s degrees in an appropriate field of pedagogy. These research results confirm earlier research done by Rupšiené, Leliūgiené, and Baršauskiené, in 2004. According to these authors, there are no programs within higher education in Lithuania that
qualify graduates to work as language teachers in orphanages. The qualification required for the work is simply college or university degree in pedagogy. Therefore, the people that work there are from various subject fields and are primary, preschool, or yet another kind of teacher.

The research was done in 2008. Quantitative research was done with groups using written responses in the form of a survey. This article presents questions representing the three branches of research. Branch #1 is demographic data. The questions discovered the respondents' gender, work experience, educational background. Branch #2 is the differences between the infant orphanages. The questions assessed such things as the number of children per group, conditions for the children to learn their mother tongue, and the roles of teachers throughout the teaching process. Branch #3 is the particulars of native language teaching at the infant orphanages.

2. RESEARCH DATA ANALYSIS

Rupšien, Leliągien, and Baršauskien (2004) said that educators working at child care homes often complain that they are psychologically exhausted by frequent conflicts and uproar among the children. The research results show that teachers at infant orphanages work with large groups of children (figure 1). More than half of the respondents work with twelve or more children in a group—this decreases the time spent with each child and restricts the one-on-one communication with each learner, which is vital to native language learning.

Educators at the infant orphanages indicated that when trying to pattern teaching conditions on the family model, it is necessary to ensure individual contact with the child to satisfy his psychological and social needs, to individualize his language content, and to reorient his activities in group work. The first step towards reaching these conditions is to reduce the number of children per teacher to 6-7 by increasing the number of groups or institution or encouraging foster families. In summary, the educators believe the children would reach better language learning results if the group sizes were decreased by at least 25%.
The data analysis shows that the teachers at the infant orphanages use various methods in teaching the mother tongue (figure 2). As scientists have discovered (Glebuvienė, Leleikienė, 2003 et al), children at early ages enjoy dialog that creates scenarios; ergo, lessons are not appropriate at such an age when children are mobile and inclined to examining and familiarizing themselves with their surroundings.

Of the teaching forms used by the infant orphanages staff, the game is the most appropriate: it is purposeful, and the educator can connect it to observations, tasks, musical activities, pronunciation exercises, nature, and role-playing.

When teaching infant orphanage residents under the age of three, it is very important to choose the proper work methods. From a methodological point of view, the important thing is that none, not even the most advanced and modern methods can ensure a positive result, if the educational process is not operating systematically (Bukantienė, 2007). It was therefore appropriate to the research to determine what methods the respondents used in language teaching. It was established that they use storytelling,
conversation, miming, games, and demonstration methods. The result showed that not all study participants clearly understood the concept of the game method of education and could not identify any methods of this type. They mentioned "communication, various tasks, holidays, entertainment, field trips..."

Based on the constructivist approach, analytical learning is inseparable from activities and experience; this highlights the purpose and involvement in the learning. Children acquire experience from cooperation with teachers, and their interests and activities become the center of learning. However, because children's language level and maturity of throughout the groups varies, they cannot all be taught in the same way. As each group has more than one teacher, a very important factor to learning is to evaluate the progress of each child, systematically and uniformly recording the achievements of the child in language development. The results of this study show that all respondents noted the achievements of their children (in journals, by writing characterization, filling out children's development tables...) (see Table 1), but it should be emphasized that in many cases children's language achievements are not recorded systematically (only once or twice every six months).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Child Language Achievement Records</th>
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<tr>
<td>Frequency of Recording Children's Language Learning Progress at Infant Orphanages</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constantly, by children's development tables</td>
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<tr>
<td>Constantly, by writing children's characterization</td>
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<tr>
<td>Keeping a journal</td>
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<td>Quarterly evaluations</td>
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<td>Quarterly characterizations</td>
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<td>Yearly reports on a child's language achievements</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yearly individual program creation, in which a child's language achievements are noted</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anecdotal information on children's language level written into the minutes of the infant orphanages staff meetings</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Vérinèlis (1995) and Early Education Guide (2001) are two programs written for Lithuanian preschool-aged children. Based on the survey data all respondents use these books. However, the study participants believed that each institution has its own custom program prepared based on its needs and abilities: this leads to the
generalization that in Lithuanian infant orphanages there is currently no unified approach to teaching the mother tongue to children less than 3 years of age.

Children end up in orphanages for a variety of objective and subjective reasons; 45% of orphans are not even visited. Another 32% of orphans are visited less than once a month by a parent or other relatives (Paulauskienė, 2006). Having noticed this already, Braslauskienė (2002) emphasizes that a child’s welfare at an orphanage depends on the strict sympathetic values of the teacher and a desire to aid his well-being and future. The research results show that teachers at children’s orphanages tend to pull the other staff members into the native language learning process in order to push the limits of the socialization process. The experiences of communicating with different kinds of people helps a child learn to live with and among people and get used to the reality of life. Unfortunately, admittedly, most of the children at orphanages are not often able to talk to anybody beyond the walls of the orphanages.

3. CONCLUSIONS

1. Teachers at infant orphanages understand the importance of language teaching at these institutions, but not all of them have delved deeply into the specifics of the process. Bearing in mind that children under 3 years of age tend to interact by dialogue in the creation of certain linguistic situations, educators develop language through games and by linking learning to other activities. However, quite often educators also use language lessons as a form of education, which is not suitable for children at this age because of their mobility, and their tendency to explore their environment.

2. The infant orphanage teachers who participated in the research study try to include other orphanage staff in the language teaching process when possible. They also promote participation of children’s parents or other relatives in the process to increase experience, orientation, socialization, and development.

3. At infant orphanages, children’s learning of their mother tongue takes place under specific circumstances. Therefore, to date there is no single educational program that can be used according to universal parameters to teach orphans their native language.
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