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Interpretation of literary texts as learning
A constructivist model of teaching literature

Thesis Booklet

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1. Problem setting, objective

The professional literature on the teaching of literature has long perceived the processes that make the situation of this subject uncertain at the most diverse points. The unfavourable trends in the development of attitudes towards learners and societal attitudes and the increasingly urgent problems in the field of knowledge concept are not independent of the common challenges facing the entire school system. We must also face the fact that the results of educational science may only benefit from practical work, and the traditional learning environment is extremely resilient to innovative endeavours.

Our dissertation aims to contribute to the solution of both sets of problems. The model we have developed offers novel answers to the questions mentioned above, while our work also explores the conditions for introducing innovation into practice.

At the heart of the thesis is our recognition that the interpretation of literary works can be captured in a productive way with the learning concept of constructivism. In this case, "personal knowledge", which is constructed during learning, can be described as an adaptive relationship developed with an emphatically linguistic experience.

Our paper pursues a dual purpose: a theoretical and an empiricist. We develop a theoretical concept based on the basic theorem just described, and empirical research confirms the benefits expected from the model, and on the other hand reveals aspects of pedagogical reality relevant to the implementation of innovation.

2. Structure of the thesis

On the one hand, the first part of our work (chapters 1-10) carries out the interdisciplinary theoretical foundation of the learning theory model, and on the other hand IT draws conclusions from the mentioned fundamental principles regarding the components of the learning environment of text interpretation and the constructivist learning theory itself. The empirical research published in the second part (chapters 11—14) fulfils a dual function: it reveals the variables most relevant to the practical introduction of our learning theory concept in the learning environment of grammar school text interpretation.

The dissertation defines the basic concepts of constructivist learning theory (Chapter 2) following an unconventional problem suggestion (Chapter 1) and then analyses the philosophical and psychological sources of constructivism (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 corresponds to the process of literary interpretation with the learning concept of constructivist learning

theory. We place our model among the typical concepts of contemporary literary teaching: in Chapter 5 we analyse the characteristics of positivist and problem-centric literary teaching. Chapter 6 makes us aware of the literary-theoretical assumptions behind our thinking. In the framework of the detailed development of the concept, we first consider the broad set of problems of prior knowledge which is crucial for constructivist learning theory (Chapter 7), conceptualize the knowledge resulting from interpretation (Chapter 8), and finally we examine the consequences related to evaluation (Chapter 9). In Chapter 10, we present new aspects and possibilities of constructivist learning theory that are emerging from our model.

The introduction of the second major unit, which deals with empirical research, provides a general picture of the research questions, participants, sampling and applied methods, and discusses the multifaceted relationship between theory and pedagogical practice, and analyses the specific, non-anomaly-free relationship between constructivist learning theory and measurements (Chapter 11). The following chapters describe the results related to the variables studied: student theories about meaning (Chapter 12) and adaptivity (Chapter 13). The practical operation of the concept developed in the theoretical part is confirmed by the pedagogical experiment presented in Chapter 14.

3. Methodological considerations

During the theoretical development of the model, we considered it important to develop our innovation on a broad literature base. The aim of the extensive literature search was not only to simply list the professional findings on the subject, but also to present our innovation to the professional public in a critical reflection of the results so far and in comparison with them.

In approaching the problem, we insisted on the educational science focus, but we also strived to raise awareness of the interdisciplinary nature of the topic and to indicate the diversified nature of its relationship. We considered it important to enable our theoretical considerations to be dialogued in the fields of literary science, philosophy and psychology in addition to educational science. Building and maintaining the possibility of dialogue is particularly important in our case because our concept has significantly different consequences from contemporary school practice.

Among other things, this dialogue is also served by the fact that we kept in mind the materials of the much-cited, summarizing manuals and the models with the greatest impact on school practice during the processing of Hungarian and international literature. In Chapter 5,

we position our own suggestion in relation to the most decisive positivist approach to Hungarian classroom work and to problem-centric literary teaching models with the most significant theoretical and practical results. The contrasts that inevitably emerge in the process of confrontation can contribute to an awareness and thus a genuine discussion of the implicit literary-theoretical and pedagogical assumptions that guide the methodology of textual processing in schools. The argumentation, which does not shy away from critical comments, is not driven by the need for exclusivity, and we are convinced that our dissertation, by giving equal weight to the pedagogical and literary-scientific aspects, instead of placing the models in question in a hierarchical order, creates the conditions for a discourse in which the subject-related and pedagogical virtues of both the positivist and the problem-centred approaches can be demonstrated in a more precise way than ever before.

The constructs investigated in empirical research - in particular learners' theories of meaning and adaptivity, and the individuality of their interpretations - are highly complex, difficult to grasp, and almost entirely unprecedented to measure. In addition to a particularly careful consideration of the methodology and a long period of development of the tools used (worksheets combined with questionnaires), this required a larger sample to be taken. Data were taken from 1165 students from 49 student groups in 14 schools. We wanted to generalise the results of the study to the basic population of Hungarian high school students (those following the high school curriculum). For representativeness, in addition to a larger than usual number of items, the sample was stratified by geography and age.

The first part of the two-page worksheet contains the same items for all students: questions about different background variables (Likert scales), the most reliable source of the meaning of the poem (multiple choice), and the various aspects of János Pilinszky's poem Négysoros (liking, adaptivity, goodness, meaning). The two versions of the worksheet differ in respect of the unit of the second part, which contains questions about Ágnes Nemes Nagy's poem, entitled *Diófa*. The 'A' type version controls student work with direct regulators that fit the problem-centric literary teaching model, while the 'B' type version uses direct regulators formulated on the basis of the theoretical model of learning theory developed in the theoretical part. The item following different tasks, requesting a brief wording of the meaning of the poem, is the same again in the two versions, as is the repetition of the questions asked about the *Négysoros* and the demographic questions closing the worksheet.

The research questions of all three chapters were answered by analysing and interpreting the combination of quantitative and qualitative data (methodological triangulation), and although this sometimes had greater scope implications, we sought to

document the steps of the process transparently both in terms of statistical calculations and coding.

The chosen methodology allowed the inclusion of short lyrical works. From a theoretical conceptual point of view, however, it can be seen that our model does not contain a genre-specific component, so we consider the results to be extendable to the interpretation of epic and dramatic works.

4. The theoretical part

At the beginning of our theoretical reasonings, we considered it necessary to clarify the content of the basic concepts of constructivism that we often use. Here, of course, we relied heavily on the works of István Nahalka and Erzsébet Korom, who defined the Hungarian reception of constructivism, as well as on fundamental works of international literature such as Glasersfeld's studies and Brooks & Brooks's 1999 handbook. Since we wanted to expand the possibilities of constructivist learning theory, which was optimized for teaching mathematics and science subjects in an innovative way, it was inevitable to explore the philosophical and psychological roots of constructivism, as well as research into newer international literature.

In our thesis, we laid the foundations of a new literary teaching concept that defines the interpretation of a literary work with the learning concept of constructivism (Table 1).

	Constructivist concept of learning	**Interpretation of literary texts**
active knowledge construction	Knowledge is the result of the active construction of the learner.	During the interpretation of the work, a personal, previously non-existent knowledge is constructed.
preliminary knowledge systems	Preliminary knowledge systems of the learner play a crucial role in the construction of knowledge.	The meaning possibilities of the work may be updated depending on the student's prior knowledge systems.
report construction	Learning as a knowledge construction is essentially a process of constructing meaning: their own meaning is given to the new information by students.	During the interpretation of the literary text, the work is saturated with meaning for the student.

	During meaningful learning, there is a significant change in the student's knowledge system.	The interpretive routines used in everyday communication do not yield results in the case of literary language, and the understanding of the work presupposes a continuous review of these approach models.
conceptual change		
adaptivity	Learning is an adaptive change that occurs in a system.	Interpretation gives the learner an explanatory power in relation to the text. It has a valid meaning for the *student* (it is not the reproduction of a report for someone else).

Table 1. Interpretation of Literary Texts as Learning

We have not only compared our theoretical foundations to research on constructivist theory of learning — and through it to (science) philosophy and (cognitive) psychology — but also to the schools of modern literary theory and the most important subject-pedagogical paradigms. This realization of the interdisciplinary nature of the topic, also reflected in the use of reflective concepts, provides the conditions for multi-faceted discussability and the continuation of research. Conceptualizing the interpretation of the literary text as learning also sheds new light on the components of the learning environment. In the relevant chapters, direct (author's biography, author's intent, literary history, topic designation, intertextuality, finished interpretations) and indirect regulators (theories about meaning, adaptivity of solution routines, curricula and curriculum layout, subject knowledge), knowledge constructed during interpretation and its evaluation were put in novel contexts. Our concept also shows the terminology of constructivist learning theory, especially optimized for teaching mathematics and science subjects in a new focus (Table 2).

Key Concept of Constructivist Learning Theory	Learning Mathematics and Natural Sciences	Interpretation of Literary Texts
Goal	Constructing certain knowledge, becoming one's own (e.g. the shape of the Earth).	the construction of one's own (unique), coherent, "other" (different from that of others) knowledge.
optimum output	An understanding of the	A wide variety of

	object or phenomenon under study.	understanding of the object, phenomenon under consideration.
prior knowledge	Exploring, purposeful matching; addressing the moments that help and support or inhibit understanding.	To mobilise the widest possible range; to make the most of the complexity of the possibilities to relate to the text.
new experience	Constructed, understood and anchored knowledge explains new experience (they fit into the theory.	New experience inspire a continuous reconstruation of understanding.
misconception	An adaptive explanation from the learner's perspective, but different from the scientific consensus; emphasis on relation to consensus.	Placing the understanding of others above one's own; substituting e.g. canonicalized interpretations for one's own understanding; constructivism emphasises the transitory nature of all understanding.
adaptivity	Knowledge is consistent with new experiences, explains them well (makes phenomena predictable).	1. A literary work receives an individual meaning in accordance with individual experience. 2. Comparing one's own reading experience with that of others: one's own reading holds its place, accepting the reading of others.

Table 2. The key concepts of constructivist learning theory are science and mathematics, and in the context of literary interpretation

5. The empirical investigation

5.1. Research Questions

We are looking for answers to the following questions regarding the operation of indirect regulators:

1. What explicit or implicit theories determine students' thinking about the meaning of a literary text:

   - Where do students derive the meaning of the literary text?
   - What does the meaning of the literary text consist of according to the students?

2. What explicit or implicit theories determine students' thinking about the peculiarities of the literary work that offers them the experience of adaptivity?

In relation to the impact of direct regulators, we will address the following research questions:

3. What difference does the problem-based model of teaching literature make to students' attitudes towards the text they read and the learning theory concept presented in the theoretical section?

4. What difference does the use of direct regulators that fit the problem-centred literacy teaching model and the learning theory concept presented in the theoretical section make to the specificity of students' text interpretation?

5.2. Hypotheses

Based on our prior experience gained during the practical work, as well as the lessons learned from the processed literature, we expect the following answers to our research questions:

1. *Hypothesis — Students' theories of meaning*
    a. The interpretation of the text of the majority of high school students is determined by a theory that derives meaning from the author of the literary work or from the correspondence of the text to reality outside the literature, tracing it back to the intention of a consciousness outside the work.
    b. The interpretation of the text of the majority of high school students is determined by a theory that considers the meaning of a literary work to be detachable from the text and thus identifies it as a statement, a lesson that can be conveyed by paraphrase.

2. *hypothesis — Students' theories about the adaptivity of literary works*

    - The majority of high school students name thematic identification or lack thereof as a criterion for an adaptive literary work for them.

3. *Hypothesis — Student attitudes towards the read work*
    a. After the tasks solved following direct regulators that fit our model of learning theory, the students give a more favourable answer to the question of pleasing the read literary work than after the tasks solved following direct regulators that fit the problem-centric literary teaching model.
    b. After the tasks solved following direct regulators that fit our model of learning theory, students judge the literary work they read more personal ("more real for them") than after the tasks solved following the direct regulators that fit the problem-centric literary teaching model.

4. *hypothesis — Uniqueness of text interpretations*

> Direct regulators that fit our learning theory model are more likely to be followed by students' individual (i.e., different from other solutions in the student group) text interpretation than direct regulators that fit the problem-centric literary teaching model

5.3. The result of the hypothesis check

The studies carried out convincingly confirmed the hypotheses. Among the variables measured during the experiment (adaptivity, liking, goodness), we can only detect a significant difference in the case of adaptivity. Further investigations were carried out with the data related to the other two variables, which resulted in the rejection of the null hypothesis. However, beyond the fact of justification, the results obtained allowed a more nuanced approach to the factors under consideration. Our dissertation thus also gives an opportunity to formulate important research methodological learning. The results may also encourage the planning of further research.

6. Conclusions, proposals

Based on the results of our theoretical thought and empirical investigations, we can formulate the following conclusions and suggestions regarding the design of the learning environment of text interpretation.

It is advisable to provide students with as many opportunities as possible when they encounter the literary work with as few preliminary instructions as possible, without "attuning" or orienting tasks, and then share their reading experience as an experience equal to that of others.

If the text is to be "made to speak" in its linguistic construction and ambiguity, and notto be seen as a document of a biographical situation or a literary historical narrative, then all information about the author's person, life and literary historical role must be consciously placed outside the limits of perceptibility in the reading situation, i.e. at a "distance" where they can no longer function as direct regulators

It is recommended to support the understanding and productive use of poetic concepts describing the meaning creation and multiplying performance of language (such as words, shapes, prosody etc.).

Within the framework of our concept, we consider it expressly avoidable to anticipate the theme of the work, the "problem" it raises, to fix it before reading.

Direct regulators that consciously take into account the linguistic mediation of learners' prior knowledge fit our theoretical model. In our view, there is a serious misunderstanding behind tasks that seek to explore learners' prior knowledge in preparation for interpreting a literary text by asking directly about lived experiences, rather than how these are encoded in the language or how the words of the text evoke them.

It is recommended that direct regulators of interpretation do not "require" consideration of specific intertextual references (e.g. by presenting the works in question in each other's context), but allow students to discover them for themselves if possible intertextual relationships are part of their prior knowledge.

The students' own interpretation cannot be preceded by the communication of a finished interpretation. We must also consider the illustration and (interpretative) speech of the text as a finished interpretation. However, once they have developed their own reading, it is highly recommended that pupils are able to contrast their interpretation with other interpretations that they perceive as equal to their own.

A theory of meaning is consistent with our model of learning theory, which constructs meaning through the richest possible realization of possible links between the student's prior knowledge of the language, understood as language skills in a broad sense, and the work as a linguistic phenomenon. Meaning can never be conveyed by a paraphrase, a list of thematic statements, a " saying " or a " message ". In contrast to the approaches experienced in empirical research, set for thematic readings, our concept is that meaning cannot be separated from the text itself. The meaning of the work is seen as a previously non-existent, new, adaptive and personal knowledge that is always temporary: both a "delusion" and a conceptual shift. Interpretation should therefore be supported by tasks aimed at conceptual change.

The exclusivity of summative evaluation that maintains the adaptivity of anti-learning solution routines is advised to be broken by regularly applying the modalities of developmental evaluation supporting learning.

A learning environment designed to optimise knowledge construction processes is difficult to reconcile with a prescriptive curriculum that is limited to an itemised list of explicit knowledge, a clustered canon of works, and a prescriptive curriculum focused on literary history and authors. Before the desirable curricular reform, however, there are several tools available to the teacher to dampen the indirect regulatory role of the curriculum: for example, avoiding the use of direct regulators accompanying text interpretation and activating the curriculum's indirect regulatory role, rethinking the layout of the curriculum at the level of the thematic plan and lesson plan so that it extinguishes or at least mitigates the inductive logic of

the curriculum. the impact of factors that burden the interpretation of the text. Lesson situations that are independent of the narrative of literary history (introductory and summary lessons, tasks developing comprehension, writing skills, grammar lessons, etc.) also offer rich opportunities for interpreting literary works. The use of developmental evaluation can also be recommended at this point, as it does not relate to the curriculum requirement, but relates to the student's own development.

From our theoretical thinking follows the rehabilitation need for the truly learned material. The consciously chosen linguistic and literary knowledge and the terminology expressing it correctly can not be conceived in any way merely as a set of knowledge for its own sake, but as a condition of progress made by becoming an expert by which students will be able to fill the texts they read with meaning. This also marks the place of knowledge in a novel way in the context of the primary goal of educating readers. If we accept the statements of the above line of thought, we can see that although explicit knowledge learned in school is increasingly difficult to develop over time, its existence also determines the way a student relates to a literary text in his adult life in terms far beyond this explicit presentability.

The pedagogical experiment presented in the thesis convincingly supported the benefits of using direct regulators that fit our concept in terms of the individuality of the students' interpretation and the attitudes developed in relation to the read text. Therefore, it is desirable to use the tasks compiled according to the presented model and to develop learning materials containing such direct regulators (as well).

In addition to answering our research questions, we consider some of the additional results of our dissertation worth of attention. Although these new insights may seem secondary, instrumental or even minor evasive from the point of view of the main direction of the argument of the thesis, in our opinion, they can claim scientific interest independently.

We point to the incompleteness of constructivism's epistemological and psychological relations and the considerable scientific potential of remedying this incompleteness (Chapter 3).

We conceptualize the concept of prior knowledge as an interdisciplinary node: the concepts of prior knowledge, perception, interpretation and "personal knowledge" are closely interrelated and bring together philosophy, experimental psychology, pedagogy and hermeneutics in a specific way. Recognition creates the conditions for the utilization of the knowledge generated by the co-sciences in educational sciences (Chapter 7).

We define the term *solution routine* as a term, and we point out the anti-learning of (marked) well-practice algorithmic steps that result in a mechanical solution of a problem or

task that is considered acceptable and successful in the school world. We outline a system of factors that maintain the adaptivity of solution routines and the contact of the problem with the areas of motivation and evaluation (Chapter 7).

We consider the results of the latest international research in terminological distinctions in the field of developmental evaluation, misconceptions and conceptual shift, thus facilitating a more nuanced approach to the relevant topics for domestic research (chapters 2, 7 and 10).

The factors of the learning environment affecting text interpretation were divided into direct and indirect regulators. The distinction, which extends far beyond our narrower questioning, enables model creation that fits well with constructivist learning theory (Chapter 7).

The thesis offers new aspects of the current problem of classroom processing of popular literary works. This canonising gesture of 'curricularisation' of popular literature can risk giving an external meaning to works that students might otherwise enjoy reading, which can overshadow the very personal meaning that made the text chosen for classroom use. Part of the basic task of educating readers is to establish and develop motives essential to the experience of adaptivity. The performance of popularity from this point of view is that the texts involved are adaptive "by definition" for learners. Therefore, in the developmental process of educating readers, the processing of popular literary works is, of course, only the first step (chapters 7, 8).

By emphasizing the importance of knowledge, our work also puts the aspirations of "experiential pedagogy" into a novel context. From constructivist learning theory it follows that the saturation of knowledge, of the corresponding areas of knowledge, also plays a decisive role in the experiential reception of art. In this light, the essay may also encourage a rethinking of the often misleading contrast between the categories of modern and classical literacy.

7. Publications related to theses

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Urbán, P. (2023). A szerelmi líra tanítása és az autonóm szövegértelmezés. *Magyaróra, 5*(2).