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## □ Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

In earlier issues of RPI we have repeatedly paid attention to current trends of teaching to read. We are pleased to offer now two more relevant articles, written by two German scholars and leading representatives of the Language Experience Approach.

We wish to thank our colleagues in Estonia, Germany, Italy, Poland, Spain and the United Kingdom who have contributed to this issue.

July 2021

*Ekaterina Romashina and Wendelin Sroka*

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▢ Articles

## Independent Writing and Reading Right from the Start: The Language Experience Approach in German Classrooms\*

*Erika Brinkmann*

As in most countries, children in Germany for centuries learned to read and write with the help of a primer: letters and words were introduced in a predetermined manner, and all children had to do the same exercises at the same time – independent of the experiences with print and literacy that they had had before school: small-step learning via “one size fits all” courses. Not before the 1980s it became recognized more and more that at the beginning of grade 1 there are children who already can read – and others who cannot write their own names and do not know the sounds of any letters. As studies of Mason (1981) and Largo (2009) have shown, this difference corresponds to three years of regular development. In other words: with regard to their literacy competence there are five to eight-year-olds sitting side by side in every first grade classroom. The *Spracherfahrungsansatz* [language experience approach] takes the different experiences of children before school seriously and motivates them through personally important encounters with print and literacy to expand these experiences and their competence. Free writing and invented spelling are key activities in this process.

Learning to read and write is a very personal activity. Long before school, children encounter print in their environment. Based on their individual experiences, they develop ideas of what role literacy plays in everyday life and associate positive or negative feelings with the activities of reading and writing. For some children, writing is so interesting at an early age that they already get to grips with it very intensively and begin to understand in principle how reading and writing work technically, other children are more interested in other things and only casually perceive print in their environment.

The language experience approach is a concept of teaching reading and writing that takes the different experiences of children seriously – based on the following key ideas (see Brügelmann & Brinkmann 2012; 2013):

- Writing is a medium with its own logic, but due to its underlying alphabetical principle its **structure** has a close relationship to spoken language. The promotion of reading and writing should therefore first of all be linked to the spoken language, both in content and form, and make clear the mutual translatability of its spoken and written forms, but also their respective peculiarities (for example, that in writing different phonetic variants are represented by one and the same grapheme).
- Without insight into the **functions** of reading and writing, many children lack the motivation to engage in the cognitive and motor efforts required for the complex acquisition of the technical aspects of written language. In the classroom reading and writing therefore should be staged as a cultural practice that makes individually significant experiences possible.
- Learning to read and write is a process of active **reconstruction** of the writing system by the children. These therefore need scope and time for individual approaches and for experimenting with intermediate forms while gradually acquiring the conventions.
- However, progress in this development is possible only through the encounter with alternatives to one's own experiments. Therefore, adults with writing experience are important as **models** for reading and writing, but also for giving specific feedback, for example by confronting the singular of the respective children's writing attempts with the norms of adult writing. Equally important is the cooperation and exchange with other children whose divergent reading and writing activities can also stimulate or challenge (“learning with and from one another”).

\* An earlier version of this paper was published in German under the title „Der Spracherfahrungsansatz im Anfangsunterricht“. In: *Grundschule*, Vol.50 (2018), No. 6, 28-32.

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The implementation of these basic ideas is conceivable in various forms. We have systematised them in a "4-pillar model" as an organisational framework for teaching, which focusses on the following activities (cf. Brügelmann 1986):

- (I) Reading rich and interesting stories to the group – and allowing for individual reading and viewing of books of one's own choice;
- (II) stimulating children's free writing of texts on personally important topics in their own language and their publication in books, on posters, through reading them to the group;
- (III) explaining and modelling basic ways of dealing with print in order to make its technical structure comprehensible and to further develop the individually available strategies of reading and writing;
- (IV) preparing space for individual exercises with a limited vocabulary of particularly frequent and personally important words to automatize basic reading and spelling patterns.

We have presented concrete didactic formats for structuring such an "open teaching" in the "Ideenkiste Schriftsprache", a flexible file for teachers (Brinkmann/Brügelmann 1993/2010). The tasks and activities are assigned to eight learning fields within the framework of a didactic map (see Brügelmann 1986), in which all children should gain experience during their initial lessons - albeit at different levels. Secondly, as an alternative to the small-step primer course, we have developed the "ABC Learning Landscape" with materials for independent work for pupils in years 1 to 6 (see Brinkmann et al. 2008ff).

### **Learning to read by reading**

A crucial aim of primary schooling, to develop the reading ability of all children as far as possible, can only be achieved through activities that respond to the great differences in previous experience with writing. Children must have the chance to experience reading (and writing) as meaningful activities in a stimulating literacy culture. That means specifically:

- From the very beginning, the classroom offers a wide range of picture and children's books to suit the different skills and interests of the children.
- Regular "free reading times" with individually selected reading materials encourage access to books as a matter of course.
- The - often dialogical - reading aloud of challenging children's literature creates rich occasions for discussion and writing through joint reading experiences.
- The presentation of individually read texts in the classroom and their evaluation (by ticking smileys, first across the board, then increasingly differentiated according to various criteria, even later in the form of freely formulated reviews) serve to reflect what has been read and can arouse the interest of other children.
- Children have the opportunity to read their own texts and those of others in public after they have been able to prepare themselves specifically for the presentation.
  - „Reading passports“ and later „reading diaries“ can document the development of the individual reading biography comprehensibly for outsiders.
  - Digital media can meaningfully support and supplement the handling of print media if their special audiovisual possibilities are utilized properly (e. g. by highlighting printed words that are read aloud by the computer voice).

Parallel to establishing such a „reading culture“, the technical structure of written language and reading strategies are repeatedly made the common theme of work in the classroom. Even the independent writing of the children's „own words“ (see below) supports the development when the word to be spelled has to be read over and over again from the beginning while searching for the next letter. In order to link this reading with the content-oriented expectation

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of meaning, tasks such as the "word bag" or the "reading crocodile" are recommended, in which written words are made visible grapheme-wise step-by-step, the corresponding sound is named and the children then think about the meaning: "*which word can this (still) become*". In order for children to take on the effort of meaningful reading, a broad range of interesting and at the same time easy-to-read texts have to be accessible.

### **Criteria for books for beginning readers**

- many pictures, so that the children can already guess what the text is about - then the even more arduous reading is easier;
- limited amount of text - at first single words or a short sentence per page, a clear, sans-serif font (at least 18 points, initially CAPITAL letters) that facilitates the recognition of the individual letters;
- short words that contain as few consonant clusters and complex orthographic patterns as possible (so that the texts do not become too boring by exclusively simple words, the meaning of essential content-bearing complex words can be made accessible over a (picture – word) legend in the book (see the article about BRELIX, in this issue).

### **Developing orthographic competence through invented spelling**

From the beginning, the children are encouraged and supported to write about what is important to them: first single words, then simple sentences and finally small texts. This free writing has three important advantages:

- The children can experience and use written language as a powerful instrument to record and share their personal ideas and experiences and thus gain a high motivation to face up to the efforts of learning to read and write.
- Through the continuous analysis and synthesis of sounds and letters, they understand the alphabetical structure as an essential principle of our written language and consolidate the individual phonetic-letter relationships (implicit phonics training).
- Spelling the words at the respective level of ability enables independent and precise individualisation „from below“ despite the developmental differences of up to three years at the beginning of school.

As they write, the children speak the words to themselves and increasingly spell the phonetic sequence so precisely that a third person can read them again. Central help is a picture-sound-table on which the letters are assigned to images with the corresponding initials. At first, the children only note particularly noticeable sounds (for example TMT for „tomato“). With an increasingly complete representation of the sounds, correct spellings often succeed: MOM, DAD, CAT. More complex words remain incomplete at first, because they are only written in phonetic format, e.g. FITE for „fight“ or DIFRINT for „different“. But this phonetic writing is the basis necessary for the acquisition of orthographic patterns.

### **Empirical evidence on the effects of invented spelling**

In the meantime, there are solid empirical findings from German and international research which prove the particular advantages of phonetic transcription as an approach to spelling development (see Brügelmann 1989; 1993; 1999; Hecker et al. 2018).

- Pre-school children who start writing without instruction write words first according to their pronunciation, as has been found in different countries – regardless of their mother tongue.
- In the development of spelling, children of all ability groups first perfect the phonetic writing of words before increasingly using spelling patterns. This also applies outside of the vocabulary practiced at school and even when

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they have undergone intensive, orthographically focused spelling lessons right from the start.

- Studies on pupils with weak spelling show that they often – as is normal for beginners – do not even manage the auditory rough structuring of words, at least they still have difficulties with consistent transcription of sounds. The same problem can be seen in adolescent and adult illiterates.
- Orthographically oriented spelling support is of real benefit to children with spelling difficulties only if they have mastered the alphabetic transcription stage.
- In the alphabetical phase false spellings are not „engraved“ in memory, because the children construct even frequently used words afresh again and again; and also the strategies of the children do not solidify, as:
  - Already in first class there is a very close correlation between the phonetic transcription of non- or pseudo-words and the correct spelling of real words (.80).
  - Moreover, German and Anglo-Saxon longitudinal studies find a high correlation (around .60) between the level of early phonetic transcription of words and later correct spelling.

### "Book writing" as the goal

Although we respect the invented spellings writing of the children as a way of writing according to their stage of development, the standard of "adult writing" is made clear to them from the beginning and it is exemplified to the children through concrete models for spelling peculiarities.

The following didactic formats have proved their worth in practice (see the contributions in Brinkmann 2015, pp. 44ff. and pp. 227ff. for more detailed explanations and specific methods):

- Already the first words written by children are „translated“ into orthographically correct "book writing" by the teacher or another experienced writer and placed next to or under the children's writing attempts "*because this makes your text easier to read for others*".
- As soon as the children spell words in a (phonetically) readable form, their attention can increasingly be drawn to the correct spelling. To do this, they are asked to put dots in the "book-writing translation" under the letters which they have written already correctly in their own spelling of these words.
- When children start writing small texts on topics of their choice, they need certain words over and over again. From each text they then select two to four such (for them personally) "important words" and transfer them in book-writing form onto index cards or into their personal ABC booklet. In addition, the most common two hundred (functional) words - provided they contain spelling peculiarities - are gradually added for all children. This - partly individual, partly common - basic vocabulary then is the subject of repeated self- or partner dictations, with the individual child practicing only those words with which he or she really has difficulties. When practicing, the child follows the following five steps:
  - *Take a good look at the word and pay attention to its special features.*
  - *Cover the word or turn it around.*
  - *Write it down from memory.*
  - *Compare it to the original.*
  - *If there are mistakes: Correct your spelling.*

Increasingly, the children themselves are given responsibility for the revision of their texts – with assignments that are oriented to their respective stage of development:

- Basic jobs such as: "*pay attention to spaces between words*", "*set closing signs at the end of sentences*", "*check capitalization at the beginning of senten-*



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ces", and (in German) "*capitalize all nouns*" are already suitable for children's first own texts.

- Critical orthographical features are marked by the teacher in two to three selected words that the child should think about and correct him/herself, with the help of others or a dictionary.
- Later on the teacher will mark three to five incorrect words (not the concrete mistakes) that the child should correct.
- Finally, she or he marks only the lines, or gives just a general reference to the number of errors in the text.

Only after the children have tried to correct the text on their own, the teacher checks and corrects it, initially as a complete translation into „book spelling“.

At the same time, spelling conversations are held two to three times a week in class about the "hard word of the day", where the procedure is always the same (cf. a similar proposal in Treiman 2018):

- The teacher names a word with increasingly demanding spelling peculiarities.
- First individually, then in a partner or table conversation and finally together with the teacher the children consider reasons for the respective spelling and copy the correctly written word.
- Strategies and rules of thumb are worked out together and – with a view to a summarizing poster – repeatedly addressed anew in the discussions, for example: *Do you know any other words „from the same family“? Do you know a rule of thumb that usually helps* (e.g. how to mark a short vowel in spelling).
- Exceptions to rules of thumb - for example concerning the marking of words with a long vowel - the children gradually collect on the corresponding page of their booklet for "memorable words" as clusters.

### **Spelling discussions in primary school**

Spelling conversations are a format of work in which students regularly reflect together on the spelling of complex words. In these conversations it should be clarified step by step why the word in question has to be written like this and not differently in orthography.

In the course of the current evaluation of these spelling conversations in our project in Bremen (see Brinkmann/Brügelmann 2018), almost 600 children in 34 third grades took part in one to three such conversations per week over half a school year. A poster with (thumb) rules for spelling was used to clarify and explain common spellings. Before and after the project phase, the children's spelling performance was measured with the Hamburg Writing Test for Third Grades (HSP3), whose standard sample served as a virtual comparison group. A summary of the most important results:

- With a jump from an average of 160 to 171 of 191 correct graphemes between autumn 2017 and spring 2018, the classes improved far above average compared to the HSP3 standard sample.
- The average increase in correct graphemic of + 6 percentage points and an effect size of 1.1 means a twice as high learning gain of the experimental group compared to a group of the HSP3 standardization sample comparable in orthographic competence at the beginning.
- Especially children in the lower performance ranges profited from the spelling conversations: Within six months, this group made progress that would normally only have been expected after more than one school year, given this low starting level.

Other more complex support programmes, which (a) were used in addition to class lessons, (b) with more time and (c) in smaller groups, generally do not achieve a higher increase.

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### Final remark

Teaching according to the language experience approach does not mean letting children write "as they like" - but *how they can*. Above all the children are not left "alone", but experience reading and writing in a stimulating literacy environment with diverse challenges and concrete support where needed.

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▢ Articles (cont.)

**The “Bremen Early Literacy Index (BRELIX)” of Text Difficulty\***

*Hans Brügelmann & Erika Brinkmann*

First graders and slow learners often have difficulties in reading texts. Causes can be sought in two quite different areas: insufficient reading competencies and (unnecessarily) difficult texts. The contribution of text difficulty, however, often is overlooked.<sup>1</sup> Usually it is assessed by reading formulas such as the FLESCHE-Reading-Ease score or the LIX index.<sup>2</sup> Both formulas calculate summary indices by adding measures of sentence length and of word length. They have proven to adequately classify the difficulty of texts for advanced readers.<sup>3</sup> Thus as a starting point we have taken the LIX as a rough yardstick for evaluating the difficulty of texts designed to meet the needs of beginning readers.

In Germany many publishers offer series of „easy to read“ booklets explicitly targeted to „beginning readers“. Some even promise that the texts are designed for „learning to read“. To test these claims, we have selected more than 400 titles from different book series and evaluated their difficulty.<sup>4</sup> Even when according to the simple LIX formula many of them put high demands on the reading ability of beginners. Though some German authors accept a LIX up to 19 for grade 1<sup>5</sup>, observations of real novices show that initially sentences on average should not contain more than three up to five words and at best no words would have more than six letters. Thus a LIX of 5 would be the optimal value and the threshold of 10 should not be exceeded. However, of the children’s books published for the free market (N = 111 in our sample) only 1,8% meet a LIX requirement of less than 10, and for 79,3% the LIX is even 20 or more. Looking at materials especially published for use in schools, i. e. accompanying reading schemes for first grade (N = 255), the situation does look somewhat better, but still is not satisfying: only 22,7 achieve a LIX of 10 or below, and 34,9% still have a LIX of 20 or more.

Moreover, the LIX does not capture many other features that are important for determining whether beginners are confident in starting to read a text and whether they actually can master it successfully. These requirements include, for example:

- word structure
- sentence complexity
- amount of text
- font size.

\* We would like to thank Gerheid Scheerer-Neumann for helpful comments on a first draft of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> Conrady, P. (1998): Einfach ist nicht trivial. Anmerkungen zur Qualität von Texten für Leseanfänger. In: Dahrendorf, M. (Hrsg.) (1998): Literatur für Einsteiger. Leseförderung durch Erstleseliteratur. Beiträge Jugendliteratur und Medien. 9. Beiheft. Beltz: Weinheim, 5 – 12. Download: <https://docplayer.org/68723669-In-beitraege-jugendliteratur-und-medien-9-beiheft-hg-malte-dahrendorf-s-peter-conrady.html>;

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<sup>3</sup> Anderson, J. (1983): Lix and Rix: Variations on a little-known readability index. In: Journal of Reading, Vol. 26, No. 6, 490-496. Download: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/40031755>.

<sup>4</sup> Brinkmann, E./ Brügelmann, H. (2021a): Text-Reihen für Erstleser:innen im Vergleich. Analysen der Leseschwierigkeit und ihre Ergebnisse. Work in progress, pre-print available from: [hans.bruegelmann@uni-siegen.de](mailto:hans.bruegelmann@uni-siegen.de).

<sup>5</sup> Burghardt, M. (n.d.): Leseförderung. Fachbereich Lernbehindertenpädagogik. Studienseminar Freiburg. Download: [https://www.km-bw.de/site/pbs-bw/get/documents/KULTUS.Dachmandant/KULTUS/Seminare/seminar-freiburg-sos/pdf/Lesekompetenz\\_erwerben.pdf](https://www.km-bw.de/site/pbs-bw/get/documents/KULTUS.Dachmandant/KULTUS/Seminare/seminar-freiburg-sos/pdf/Lesekompetenz_erwerben.pdf) Others, however, set 20 as the threshold for poor readers at stage 6, cf. Scheerer-Neumann, G./ Kretschmann, R. (2009): Interessante Texte – leicht zu lesen. Wissenswertes zu den Regenbogen-Büchern. Verlag für pädagogische Medien (vpm)/ Erhard Friedrich Verlag: Seelze. Download: [https://asset.klett.de/assets/88fc8de7/010533\\_Kommentar.pdf](https://asset.klett.de/assets/88fc8de7/010533_Kommentar.pdf)

## □ BRELIX

First we have looked at the components of the LIX and their interrelation. In a subsample of 273 titles we found low correlation coefficients between the length of sentences and two different measures of word length: the number of letters ( $r = .20^{***}$ ) and the proportion of words with more than two syllables ( $r = .15^{***}$ ). Thus, it makes sense to combine both – word and sentence length – in one more comprehensive index as the LIX does.

There are two further results revealing that the situation is more complicated than may appear at first glance: the number of letters and the proportion of multisyllable words share less than 50% of variance ( $r = .69^{***}$ ). Thus, using either one or the other indicator may lead to different results in estimating text difficulty.

The reason for this difference can partly be explained by looking more closely at word complexity: words such as <Tomaten> or <Bananen> each are built of seven letters and three syllables, respectively; <Schweiß> also ist a seven-letter word, but consists of one syllable only, because it contains two multiple-unit graphemes (<sch> and <ei>) as well as the consonant cluster <sch>+<w> (and further the special letter <ß>...). Thus, in spite of being a one-syllable word <Schweiß> is much more difficult to read than <Tomaten> or <Bananen>. Such aspects of word structure often cause difficulties for beginning readers. In German these include rare letters (such as <q>, <y>, and <ä>), multiple-unit graphemes (such as <sch>, <ie>, and <ck>), and consonant clusters, especially at the beginning of syllables (as in <spritzen> or <Blick>).

To grasp this aspect we suggest to construct an independent measure of word complexity. For this we added (weighed) values (per word) of consonant clusters at syllable onset, rare letters, and polygraphemes. This compound indicator of word difficulty shares only little variance (between 4% and 21%) with the measures of word length ( $r = .46^{***}$  with number of letters and only  $.20^{**}$  with the proportion of multisyllabic words). Thus we have combined these three measures for a new index, called „Bremen Early Literacy Index“ (BRELI<sub>X\_0</sub>).<sup>6</sup>

To account for other linguistic aspects of text difficulty we have constructed additional options of the BRELIX including the proportion of subordinate clauses or the proportion of different words, respectively. In other variants of the BRELIX we have also incorporated surface characteristics such as text volume and font size as we often find them undervalued in the discussion about text difficulty. Our assumption was confirmed when we looked more closely at these text properties in our sample of booklets.

First we reviewed the booklets accompanying reading schemes for first grade. At least 20,8% have no more than 8 pages and almost none more than 16 pages. Also, on average they contain only 6 words per page. However, of the children's books available on the free market only 3.6 % keep within the rather liberal limit of 24 pages and 59,5% even have more than 40 pages. Moreover, on average they contain 25 words per page – hardly manageable for beginning readers. Also only 3,6% of the children's books are printed in 24 p font (the great majority, i. e. 62,1 % even smaller than 16 p ~4 mm), and also only 6,7% of the booklets published explicitly as reading material for first grade meet the 24 p requirement, 24,3% still having fonts smaller than 16 p.

A brief summary of the results of our extensive evaluation of text difficulty: In our sample of children's literature that is explicitly offered or recommended by publishers for "first readers" there are hardly any books that really meet this requirement: none reaches the BRELI<sub>X\_0</sub> target of less than 5-10 points and two thirds even exceed the less strict threshold of 30. However, to simplify them

<sup>6</sup> Brügelmann, H./ Brinkmann, E. (2020b): Wie kann man erfassen, was Texte für echte Leseanfänger\*innen leicht oder schwierig macht? Zur Begründung des "Bremer Erstlese-Index" (BRELI<sub>X</sub>). Download: <https://t1p.de/brelix>

□ BRELIX

in terms of reading would often deprive them of essential aesthetic qualities. Their linguistic and content-related richness can better be made accessible to children when read to them by adults. However, these books should no longer be advertised with misleading labels such as "for beginning readers" or „easy to read“.

The situation is reversed in the case of booklets and books written especially for beginning readers in an educational context. Many of them are indeed easy to read, but often at the price of linguistic poverty and/or lack of content gain. Yet, despite limited vocabulary and repetitive sentence patterns, some manage to create appealing punchlines or convey new information to children through the content and structure of the stories.

These successful examples should be an incentive for authors and publishers to create series of small books that are interesting in terms of content and linguistically appealing, but that also meet the needs of reading beginners: limited text in large print, using short and simple sentences as well as frequent and simply constructed words, whose meaning children can extract without help through independent reading.

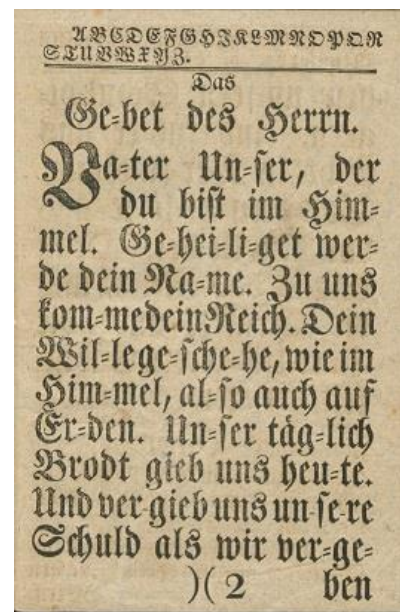
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Editor's note

*Taking some steps backwards in time: Differences in layout, notation, fonts, font sizes, wording and even language of the Lord's Prayer, offered as a reading exercise in German-language octavo format catechism primers, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries*



A A a b c ... Salzwedel: gedruckt mit Hellen-schen Schriften n. d. (around 1735), p. [6]



Lutherisches ABC-Buch. Bremen: Schünemannsche Buchdruckerei 1820, p. [3]



Namenbüchlein zur Unterweisung der jungen Kinder ... Bern: Hoch-Obrigkeithliche Druckerei 1787, p. 17, cutout



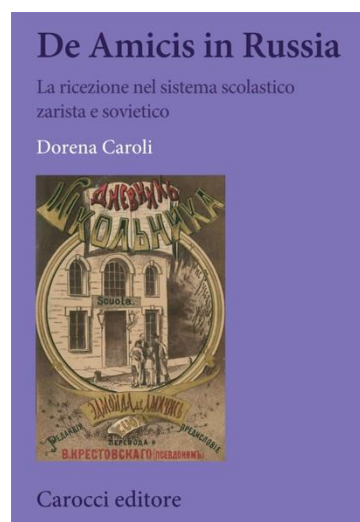
Buchstabir- und Lese-Büchlein, nebst dem Kleinen Catechismo Lutheri und Schul-Gebeten .... Görlitz: Verlag des Waisenhauses, 15., im-proved ed. 1823, p. 36, cutout



□ New Book

**Dorena Caroli: De Amicis in Russia. La ricezione nel sistema scolastico zarista e sovietico [De Amicis in Russia. His reception in the tsarist and Soviet school system]. Roma: Carrocci editore 2020, 223 p.**

Pietra De Blasi



This volume offers a reconstruction of the circulation and impact of works of the Italian writer and educator Edmondo De Amicis in Russia mainly between 1889 and 1918, although translations of *Cuore. Libro per ragazzi* [*Heart. Book for boys*] up to the era after the Second World War and more recently are observed. De Amicis was the most translated of the Italian authors in this country during the period in question, and his influence was immediate, surprising and long lasting.

The success of his works in Russia is explained by the fact that they offered educational models for the advent of "a new school", also constituting a source of inspiration for adult literacy and, more generally, for political and patriotic education of the new generations. Among those who found a

particular affinity with the work of the Italian writer were the translator and revolutionary Anna Uljanova-Elizarov, a sister of Lenin, the writer and editor Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov, the poet Vladimir Mayakovsky and the writer and journalist Valentin Kataev, interpreter of the aesthetics of socialist realism. On the basis of an accurate bibliographic reconstruction, of original sources and of updated historiographical results - which makes use of a plurality of research methodologies - the author presents a real phenomenon of *cultural transfer* between Italy and Russia over a century, which intertwines the reception of De Amicis' works with the narration of the history of the Tsarist school.

If we want to know why De Amicis' works in Russia had so much success, as is the case of his book *Cuore*, the ideal model of school to aspire to, this volume offers an unprecedented reconstruction of the circulation of the Italian author's writings, before and after the October revolution, up to the period after the Second World War. It is a work of accurate and documented research that covers various fields, from critical studies to the discovery of original sources, capturing the peculiarities of the phenomenon of *cultural transfer* between Italy and Russia, of the dissemination of children's books in a moment of a particular boom of publishing in Russia, addressing especially those readers who are defined as less educated and experienced in reading.

To grasp the dynamics and factors that led in the direction of the success of the book *Cuore*, the first part of the volume examines the aspects of the evolution of the Tsarist school from the reform of the elementary school of 1864 to the beginning of the twentieth century.

The second part deals with the transnational circulation of educational models, with the so called "free education movement" that arose in Russia in the early twentieth century, thanks to the activities of the publishing house *Posrednik* (1884-1925), founded by Lev Tolstoy, with the changes that occurred in this field in the last decades of the Tsarist monarchy. In this context, *Posrednik* has made an important contribution to the cultural renewal and acculturation of the peasant population thanks also to the dissemination of illustrated primers, reading books with illustrations and the circulation in schools of the textbooks, translated or adapted for Russian schoolchildren, making of *Heart* a real novelty, an icon of the school novel.

The third part of the book is dedicated to the translation and adaptation of De Amicis's writings on socialism for the education of young people. Several authors, writers and pedagogues have been involved in this field of cultural trans-

▣ **Caroli: De Amicis**

fer, among them Anna Ul'janova Elizarova who translated the third version of *Cuore* for Gorbunov-Posadov's publishing House *Posrednik*. Ivan Gorbunov-Posadov was the main actor of the Tolstoian movement of free education. Editor-in-chief of the *Posrednik* publishing house, he was also author of school textbooks inspired by Tolstoian philosophy such as *Azbuka-kartinka* [The illustrated ABC-book], *Krasnoe solnyshko* [The Little red sun], *Jasnaja zvezdochka* [The little clair stair] and *Zolotye kolos'ja* [The gold ears], which are described in this volume in order to analyze the Tolstoian values of their readings.

Among other authors who transferred De Amicis' works in Russia one can notice also Vladimir Mayakovsky who worked on the adaptation of De Amicis' novel *The Teacher of workers* and did a cinematographic transposition entitled *The young lady and the hooligan*, a metaphor for a Bolshevik political project for the dissemination of education among the illiterate masses, with a scenography intended for an audience of young workers, different however in its political and ideological vision from the Italian original.

The volume also offers a reconstruction of a path of pedagogical thought, and it can be understood as a tacit invitation to dust off *Cuore* in order to understand (*intus legere*) in its pages current elements and didactic ideas: the school depicted by De Amicis as a "microcosm of social relationships", of behaviors inspired by ethical and moral values still has much to teach us.

If we think that today returning illiteracy leads young people to make choices without using their heads, if a good percentage of young people find it difficult to understand a correctly written text, if negative examples of behavior and bullying spread, one realizes that these are indicators of a lack of literacy, indicators of a particular school situation. Little is done about improving the culture of educating feelings, but more attention is paid to the functioning of the school and to the development of programs. The changes pass through the channel of culture that educates feelings, there is no doubt. To do this we have to make our kids feel good at school. This should not be forgotten and, in the book, it is clear, strong and evident.

Finally, this volume offers a tool to reflect, orient ourselves in the choice of models and didactic-educational paths that are in harmony with a school, a physical place in which to prepare to be citizens free to think and equipped with tools to understand life.

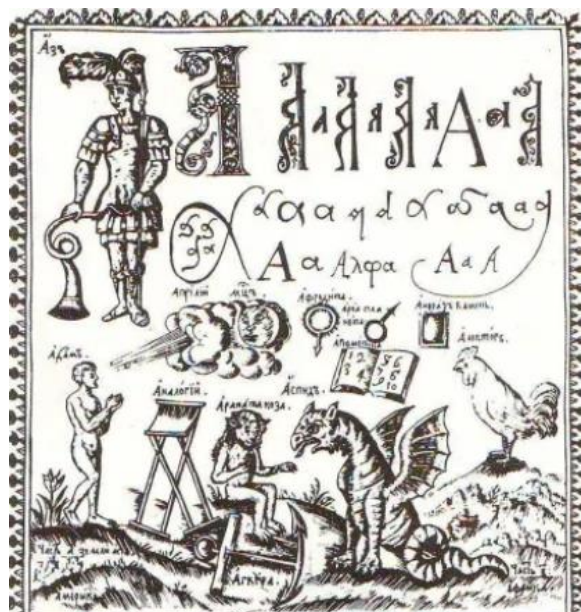
One can conclude by addressing the students, the educators, the parents with the words extrapolated from the first translation of *Cuore*, adapted following censorship and self-censorship choices, by Nadezhda Khvoschinskaja, who signed herself with a male pseudonym to remain anonymous in a world of writers, reluctant to the presence of female literates. As all translators, she liked the universal message about education and school, described by the father to his son, Enrico, the main actor of this book: "Think of the countless kids who... go to school in all countries; [...] alone, in pairs, in groups, in long lines, all with books under their arms, dressed in a thousand ways, speaking in a thousand languages, from the last Russian schools almost lost in the ice to the last schools of Arabia shaded by palm trees, millions and millions, all learning the same things in a hundred different forms; this vast swarm of children from a hundred peoples, this immense movement of which you are part and think: If this movement ceases, the humanity would fall back into barbarism; this movement is the progress, the hope, the glory of the world".



*Krasnoe solnyshko. Moskva 1907, front cover*

□ Conference Report **Online Conference "The Textbook as a Model of the World and Society"**

Ekaterina Romashina



The international online conference *Učebnik kak model' mira i obščestva* [The textbook as a model of the world and society] was held on January 30-31 and February 6-7, 2021; it was organized by the Herzen State Pedagogical University of Russia (St. Petersburg) in collaboration with the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the Alexander Pushkin Memorial Museum and the St. Petersburg Center for the History of Ideas.

In the Call of Papers outlining the conceptual framework of the conference, Dr. Tatiana Artyemyeva and Dr. Mikhail Mikeshin noted: "The textbook creates

those axiomatic foundations on the basis of which the further intellectual and creative work of the individual takes place. Very often it is the textbook that becomes one of the first manifestations of written culture that a child has to deal with, and therefore it defines and directs the attitude towards the printed word and oral teaching. Referring to textbooks makes it possible to better understand the process of personality formation, the philosophical and religious beliefs of the era and the system of spiritual values."

Over the course of four days, more than 100 papers were presented in Russian and English. The conference included the following sections: "Pictures in my primer", "Textbooks of different social groups: the study of languages in Modern Eastern Europe", "The textbook as a mirror of culture", "The educational text in the educational space of the city", "History textbooks and times of change", "The textbook and problems of cultural identity", "The textbook and the teacher", "Literature, art and culture", "Textbooks in their history" and "National images of the world".

Papers with a focus on primers were presented mainly in the sections "Pictures in my primer" and "The educational text in the educational space of the city". I would like to draw the reader's attention to some of them. The study by Olga Ilyukha (Petrozavodsk, Russia) and Yuri Shikalov (Joensuu, Finland) "Family models in Karelian and Finnish readers in the late 20th - early 21st centuries: visualization of images and meanings" offered a deep comparative analysis. The presentation by Yulia Shustova (Moscow, Russia) was devoted to the image of the city in Karion Istomin's Primer (1694), one of the first illustrated textbooks in Russia. Kalin Konstantinov (Bulgaria) presented *Буквар с различни поучения* [The Primer with various teachings] or *Fish Primer* (1824) as the basis of national secular education. Evgenia Desnitskaya (St. Petersburg, Russia) considered a source rare for the European context – the ancient Indian treatise "Mahabhashya" by Patanjali. Zinaida Lurie (St. Petersburg, Russia) analyzed illustrations in Martin Luther's didactic works.

All in all, the conference turned out to be intense and interesting. In my opinion its main advantage was in drawing attention to the study of the history of the textbook by specialists in various fields of science – philosophy, psychology, art history, cultural studies, history, etc. Based on the results of the conference a collection of articles is being prepared for publication. Video recordings of all presentations are available on the YouTube channel *Philosophical Age*:

<https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCVt45wMOzeFIPvnUSe6KGpQ>

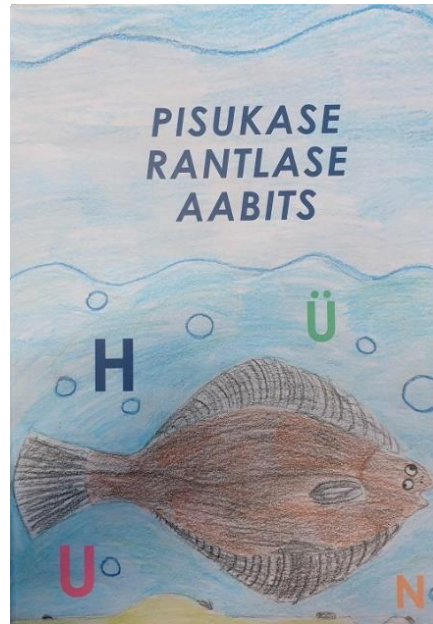


□ Notes: Estonia

**PISUKASE RANTLASE AABITS: A New Primer in a Coastal Dialect**

Mare Mürsepp

During the last decades the publishing of primers in different dialects has developed into a special cultural phenomenon in Estonia. Some of these booklets have already been introduced in previous publications of the Reading Primers SIG (see Mürsepp 2009 for the *Kihnu aabets*; Mürsepp 2016 and Niitra 2017 for the *Kodavere uavits*). Usually the production of such primers is supported by foundations operating for the development of local culture, and the compilers are activists of the local community – teachers, artists, researchers. Recently a new product of a local initiative has appeared:



*Pisukase rantlase aabits* [The primer of the small coastal resident]. Loksa: Rannakiele Keskus & Loksa Linnavalitsus 2021, 40 p.

The booklet is a primer in a dialect spoken on the north coast of Estonia, in the Kuusalu parish, around 40 kilometres east of Tallinn. Generally known is the fact that the official written Estonian language is based on the language variety often referred to as North Estonian, but the coastal dialect differs a lot from modern standard Estonian. There are remarkable similarities with the Finnish language: vowel harmony, two lengths of syllable (not three lengths like in Estonian generally), also the vocabulary in the coastal dialect has many common words with Finnish.

During the Soviet occupation the villages on Estonia's north coast were economically and culturally disturbed, while the traditional activities like fishing and seafaring were forbidden or limited by the rules of the border area of the Soviet Union; thus traditions and communication in these villages were harmed. Moved to work and live in other areas, the people often felt ashamed of their local dialect, and they kept from speaking the dialect with their children in an effort to help them better assimilate in other areas. Hence the primer written in the coastal dialect is meant to give the language and the mentality of the home place back not only to the children today, but also to their parents and grandparents.

The primer makes use of dialogues with primary school pupils in Loksa, a village in the Kuusalu parish, where Ene Velström and Riina Laanetu discussed the vocabulary and themes connected with each letter in their work with children. Then the themes were presented to the native speakers of the coastal dialect, and the short stories told by these persons were adapted for the primer. The pictures are drawn by the same children. Whereas usually primers in dialects have a short dictionary included, this new book offers links to the web version of the Kuusalu dialect dictionary.

**References**

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Mürsepp, Mare (2016). Kodavere uavits. The first primer in the Kodavere dialect. In: Reading Primers International 12 (May 2016), 29-30.

Niitra, Mari (2017). Kodavere uavits. An author's perspective. In: Reading Primers International 13 (January 2017), 16-37.

## □ Spain

### Online Exhibition on the History of Textbooks in Catalonia

"How we have learned and how we have been taught. A journey through textbooks" is the title of a new online exhibition, prepared on the occasion of the 2021 World Book Day by the Learning and Research Resources Centre (CRAI) of the University of Barcelona. The exhibition offers, among others, an overview of Catalan- and Spanish-language primers and reading books published in Catalonia in the eighteenth and twentieth centuries.



<https://view.genial.ly/606c207be690fa0d67fcf73d/presentation-exposicio-llibre-de-text>

## □ United Kingdom

### PhD Thesis: "Educating England: Religious Education Network Theory" *Harriet Anne Palin*

Religious education in England has long been considered fractious, an accessory to the education pursued in institutions where much attention has been given to grammar schools and higher education. This is perhaps the result of our perception of religious education as lacking efficient systematisation and cohesion. My PhD thesis challenges this perception. In order to understand how people learned and grew not only in their faith but in their literacy capabilities, we have to see the media of religious education as united, for people do not learn in a vacuum with one resource, they come to truly understand a concept through reading, writing, conversations, touching, thinking and so much more.

Religious education network theory considers the relationship between four central components of early modern life, catechism, prayer, hymn and preaching. Here I propose that a network of different media interacted with each other to precipitate religious learning; topics include how catechisms were sung as hymns or how sermons followed on from catechetical lessons. The links between each are stated at three levels. 1) Acknowledged links – Those which authors purposefully expressed, such as catechising as a pathway to prayer. 2) Theological links – Ideas such as the visible and invisible Church meaning outward acts of piety and inward forms of introspection are considered. Lastly, 3) Pedagogical links – How methods to identify those with weaker capabilities were treated through this network. Whilst building on this theory, I also consider adjacent materials which supported comprehension, such as advice manuals, expositions, treatises and primers.

□ RP-SIG

□ Members' News



Dr **Carsten Heinze**, until September 2020 professor of general education and managing director of the Institute of Education of the University of Education in Schwäbisch Gmünd (Germany), has in October 2020 been appointed professor of general education at Technische Universität Dresden. In March 2021 his book *Lesenlernen im Nationalsozialismus. Theoriekonzepte – Kindheitsbilder – Bildungspolitik* [Learning to read in the period of National Socialism. Theoretical concepts – images of childhood – educational policies], written with Kristin Straube-Heinze, was released by transcript publishers, Bielefeld. It offers the theoretical and methodological approach as well as the findings of a research project carried out by the authors, funded between 2014 and 2017 by the *Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft* [German Research Council]. Employing the theoretical frame-

work of a "grammar of schooling" (Tyack/Tobin), the authors argue that reading primers, constituting an element of this grammar, allow to draw conclusions regarding intended and possibly performed acquisition processes. Aimed at locating educational processes which transform socio-cultural knowledge the study combines qualitative content analysis of reading primers published in Germany between 1933 and 1944 with a detailed investigation of contextual factors, including those represented by the "governance" of learning to read through educational and publishing policies.

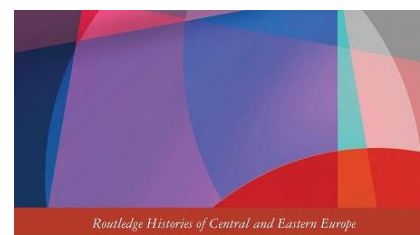
<https://www.transcript-verlag.de/978-3-8376-5255-0/lesen-lernen-im-nationalsozialismus/>

Effective February 1, 2021, Dr **Kira Mahamud Angulo**, Madrid (Spain), a member of the MANES research group and a long-standing co-editor of this newsletter, has been appointed *Vicerrectora Adjunta de Calidad y Prácticas* [Deputy Vice-Rector of Quality and Internships] of her university, the Universidad Nacional de Educación a Distancia (UNED) [Spanish National University of Distance Education]. Moreover, as from September 1, 2021, she will be the leading researcher of a three-year national I + D + i research project titled *Individuo, naturaleza y sociedad: estudio de sus relaciones y representaciones en la manualística escolar de España y Portugal en el último tercio del siglo XX* [The individual, nature and society: study of their interrelations and representations in school textbooks in Spain and Portugal in the last third of the 20th century]. The project aims to contextualise, describe, understand and explain the knowledge about society and nature that was transmitted through various educational and cultural instruments in Spain and Portugal from the end of the Franco and Salazar dictatorships to the 1990s, with a focus on the legislative and curricular provisions, on the textbooks that collect and specify the former guidelines and on complementary educational sources. It is a joint project of MANES, several other Spanish universities and the University of Lisbon, planned to operate for three years, and financed by the *Ministerio de Ciencia e Innovación* [Ministry of Science and Innovation].



## ▣ Members' News

A study of textbooks for novice readers from nine Eastern European countries, published after the Second World War, is provided in a new book by **Joanna Wojdon**, Wrocław (Poland), released by Routledge as part of the series "Routledge Histories of Central and Eastern Europe". *Communist Propaganda at School. The World of Reading Primers from the Soviet Bloc, 1949-1989* is based on a content analysis of more than sixty primers from Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, the German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia. The book recreates the world as presented to the youngest schoolchildren who started their education in the period in question; it argues that those first textbooks, from their first to last pages, are heavily laden with communist propaganda, and that they share similar concepts, techniques and even contents, even if some national specificities can be observed.



### COMMUNIST PROPAGANDA AT SCHOOL

THE WORLD OF THE READING PRIMERS  
FROM THE SOVIET BLOC, 1949-1989

Joanna Wojdon



<https://www.routledge.com/Communist-Propaganda-at-School-The-World-of-the-Reading-Primers-from-the/Wojdon/p/book/9780367740634>

## ▣ New Members

We are pleased to introduce in this issue colleagues from Chile, Estonia, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom who have recently joined the Reading Primers SIG. We also welcome the *Museo de la Educación Gabriela Mistral*, Santiago de Chile, as a new institutional member.

**Nicole Araya Oñate**, MA, Santiago de Chile, is in charge of the Heritage Library and Research at the *Museo de la Educación Gabriela Mistral* (MEGM). She has a History degree, with a major in sociocultural management and a diploma in Museology, Heritage, Culture and Local Community, both from the University of Santiago of Chile, and a Master of Arts Degree in American Aesthetics from the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. In 2016 she published, with Dr María Isabel Orellana Rivera, the book *Educación de las infancias: entre el hogar y la escuela* (1850-1915) [Education of childhoods: between home and school (1880-1915)]. With Dr Orellana she has also undertaken research into the history of initial education, pedagogical museums and the image of Gabriela Mistral in school. Email: nicolearayaonate(at)gmail.com

Dr **John Exalto**, Amsterdam (The Netherlands), works as an assistant professor in the history of education at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam. He is also the director of the Comenius Museum and Mausoleum, Naarden. He is interested in the history of reading and textbooks, the relation between education and religion, especially in the early modern period, and in the influence of Comenius as educational thinker and innovator of schooling. E-Mail: j.exalto(at)vu.nl

Dr **Matthew Grenby**, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK) is professor and Dean of Research at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Newcastle University. His interest is in the early history of children's books, and other media for children (whether domestically- or commercially-produced), before c. 1850, and this includes primers, catechisms and other similar educational and devotional materials. He is pleased to have joined the editorial team (with Britta Juska-Bacher, Wendelin Sroka and Tuija Laine) for a new book on Catechism Primers. He is interested in the extent to which these instructional texts can be considered as a kind of "children's literature", and relatedly, how a separate and thriving market for print designed specifically for children developed. Much



## □ New Members

of his existing expertise is in the British context, but he is very keen to learn more about transnational connections, across Europe but also to the wider world through missionary, commercial and colonial networks. Web: [www.ncl.ac.uk/elll/staff/profile/matthewgrenby](http://www.ncl.ac.uk/elll/staff/profile/matthewgrenby)

**Harriet Anne Palin**, Newcastle upon Tyne (UK) has recently completed a Master of Arts Degree in History at Durham University on English Catechisms and has previously completed her teaching degree at Northumbria University. For her current PhD project at Newcastle University she looks at the relationship between catechisms, prayerbooks, sermons and hymns from around 1520-1640 (see pp. 16 of this newsletter). E-mail: h.palin(at)ncl.ac.uk

Dr **Aivar Põldvee**, Tallinn (Estonia) is researcher at the Institute of History, Archaeology and Art History, School of Humanities, Tallinn University. His main research interests are history of (Estonian) education, language and literature in Early Modern Times. Previously he has worked at the Estonian History Museum as deputy director on research and at the Institute of the Estonian language. E-mail: aivar.poldvee(at)tlu.ee

The **Museo de la Educación Gabriela Mistral** (MEGM) is an institution located in Santiago, Chile, pertaining to the National Service of Cultural Heritage. It was founded in 1941 as the Pedagogical Museum of Chile, subsequent to the Retrospective Exposition of Teaching, realized for the fourth centennial commemoration of the city of Santiago, in which the history of primary, secondary, technical and university education from the colonial period up to then was reviewed. On closure of the exposition, in consideration of the importance of the material gathered, on the 13th of September 1941 the creation of the museum was decreed.



*MEGM, Santiago the Chile*

Since its foundation, the museum has worked in different buildings, in 1981 moving to its current premises: the ex Normal School number 1 for girls of Santiago. On this date the histories of these two educative institutions were united. However, in 1985 the central zone of the country was hit by an earthquake that caused considerable damage to the building, and the museum found itself obliged to suspend activities. It took until the beginning of 2000 for a process of renovation to begin which enabled the old Pedagogical Museum of Chile to open its doors again in 2006, now with the name Gabriela Mistral Museum of Education, owing to the poet and Nobel prize winner who sat her examinations for the qualification of primary school teacher here in 1910.

At the present time, this institution has the mission to make a critical contribution to the discussion, questioning and knowledge with regard to the multiple dimensions and tensions of the socio-educative processes in Chile by way of the collection, valuation, conservation, enrichment, investigation and diffusion of pedagogical heritage, thereby marking both the cultural and political scenarios of the nation, and the diversity of actors who form part of the debate. Working from its collections of school material and furniture, photographic archive and bibliographic and documentary material, it seeks to be a space for the construction, de-construction and reconstruction of diverse identities, recovering at the same time the non-official memory by which social processes may be comprehended in depth.

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*Museum research:* Among the work carried out by the museum there is the construction of knowledge, principally by way of historical investigation related with themes of our educational development, that is: female scientific education, education of women and education of children.

## ▣ New Members

*Patrimonial library*: The MEGM has a library comprising more than 40 000 works, consisting in books (including primers and other school textbooks), periodicals, pamphlets and a collection of documents and conferences of Chilean educators. It is defined as a library specialized in educational science, given its concurrence of various disciplines with interest in the phenomenon of education, these being: anthropology, sociology, law, psychology, political science, history, economy and philosophy, among others. Most of the bibliographical heritage is concentrated between the middle of the nineteenth century and the 1960s; notwithstanding, in the last few years, the library has been supplied with new publications allowing discussions regarding these materials to be updated. – [www.museodelaeducacion.gob.cl](http://www.museodelaeducacion.gob.cl).

The MEGM is represented by its director, Dr **María Isabel Orellana Rivera**, professor of museology at the University of Santiago, Chile, and associated researcher of the Mixed Research Unit "Local heritage, environment and globalization" (MNHN/IRD) of France. A state teacher of history, geography and civic education of the Universidad de la Frontera, with a Master degree in political science from the University of Chile and a doctoral degree in museology and sciences from the National Museum of Natural History, Paris, she heads the museum since September 2003. Her research focuses on the history of education (childhood, women and science) and museology (history of museums, participative museology and critical museology). As a museologist and university professor she has carried out investigations, classes, conferences and workshops in Chile, Spain, France, Germany, Italy, Mexico, Canada, Argentina, Brasil, Uruguay, Ecuador and Peru, and she has authored and co-authored numerous publications in Chile and abroad, among which figure 26 articles, four educational manuals for museum use and twelve books. Email: [isabel.orellana\(at\)museoschile.gob.cl](mailto:isabel.orellana(at)museoschile.gob.cl)

## ▣ RP-SIG: Developments and Plans

### **RP-SIG is on ResearchGate**

*Joanna Wojdon*

Information about the Reading Primers SIG is now also available on ResearchGate, a leading social networking site for researchers:

<https://www.researchgate.net/project/Reading-Primers-Special-Interest-Group-of-the-International-Society-for-Research-on-Textbooks-and-Educational-Media>

The "References" section of the project page offers all issues of *Reading Primers International* as well as the *International Bibliography of Studies on Reading Primers and Basal Readers (IBSP)*. You can access these documents even if you do not have a ResearchGate account. But if you do, please follow the project, recommend or share it and let us know if you have any ideas or comments on the contents.

### **RP-SIG Panel "Adults as a Target Group of Primers"**

*Ekaterina Romashina, Wendelin Sroka*

The Russian State University for the Humanities and the Tula State Lev Tolstoy Pedagogical University will on December 3-4, 2021, host the conference "Children and childhood in the history of culture: modern interdisciplinary research. A conference in memory of Vitaly Bezrogov (1959-2019)". The event will take place in a mixed format, on-site at the Russian State University for the Humanities in Moscow and also virtual, with Russian and English as working languages. As part of the conference the Reading Primers SIG will hold, in collaboration with the organisers of the conference, a panel "Adults as a Target Group of Primers". Deadline for the submission of proposals is September 1, 2021. For more details please consult the conference webpage and the Call for Papers.

[https://tsput.ru/faculties\\_and\\_departments/departments/faculty\\_of\\_arts\\_social\\_sciences\\_and\\_humanities/deti-i-detstvo-v-istorii-kultury.php](https://tsput.ru/faculties_and_departments/departments/faculty_of_arts_social_sciences_and_humanities/deti-i-detstvo-v-istorii-kultury.php)