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***Integrated Didactics of Slovak Language and Literature
for Primary Education***

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**Education and Department of Research into Children's
Language and Culture, 2011, 580 pages**

Complexity allied to integrity is one of the key principles of primary education. In the teaching of the Slovak language and literature in Slovakia, the need to combine language, literature and communication/compositional elements in order to create one working unit has proven to be productive. Our university textbook *Integrated Didactics of the Slovak Language and Literature for Primary Education* successfully presents, elucidates and justifies this unitary approach. It is a book which has emerged as an output from a similarly named research project involving collaboration between the Department of Communication and Literary Education and the Department of Research into Children's Language and Culture, both within the Faculty of Education of Prešov University in Prešov. The group of authors, led by Ľudmila Liptáková, have created a conception of teaching at primary school, the mother tongue and literature in a way which sensitively unifies the development of communicational and literary competence.

The textbook is divided into fifteen chapters. The introductory chapter presents the conception and theoretical basis for the integrated teaching of the Slovak language and literature at primary school. In so doing, it respects current tendencies and viewpoints on a range of educational aspects and draws from many Slovak and international academic sources.

The next chapter reflects the specifics of didactic and classroom communication in the teaching of the Slovak language and literature, while the third chapter addresses the natural laws governing the cognitive and verbal development of a child and the correlation between the projected cognitive and verbal abilities of young pupils, and development of their communication competence. The next chapter outlines the analytical and interpretational features of a young pupil in relation to a literary text. It looks at such issues as children's reception of art and their aesthetic-psychological potential (for instance by looking at the compatibility of a genre and the age of a child). The chapter entitled *The Process of Developing the Pupil's Cognitive, Communicational and Literary Competence*, deals primarily with the psychological and didactic aspects of teaching and the methodology of teaching in the mother tongue and literature (applying the cognitive and communication framework: Evocation – Realisation of the Meaning – Reflection). The next chapter focuses on the receptive textual competence of young pupils, the complex development of their literacy and the processes of text reception at primary school. Productive textual competence and the processes of developing productive communication skills (speaking and writing) are the focus of the seventh chapter, while the eighth chapter looks at development of pupils' phonetic/phonological knowledge, orthoepy and spelling competence, as well as their writing and speaking skills. The cognitive-communicational approach to the development of the primary school pupil's morphological competence is demonstrated in the following chapter through the topic of proper nouns in children's communication and the educational process at primary schools. In terms of linguistic logic the next chapter naturally follows the previous ones by focussing on the development of lexical, syntactic and pragmatic competence as a means of developing the child's textual competence. The eleventh chapter deals with determining the functions of artistic literature for young school-children and focuses on the use of a reader (specifically a textbook with an illustrated anthology of texts), other sources of reading, and possible approaches to literary texts in terms of didactic communication. The twelfth chapter looks at the formation of a cultured and sensitive young

reader, revealing the role of literature in the child's world, the process of interiorization, the phases of reception of a literary text, and the cognitive and non-cognitive bases for the formation of a literary culture. Attention is focussed on verbalizing the reading experience and choosing texts for children to interpret, as well as on current research into children's reading habits and the search for an answer to what it is that leads children to read literature. Dramatic art and children's theatre (drama as a learning tool and the dramatization of literary texts) are the subject of the university textbook's thirteenth chapter. Specific learning difficulties and therapeutic and formative approaches towards dealing with them, as well as the multicultural and emotional education of pupils are the main themes of the fourteenth chapter. The final chapter proposes a curriculum of subjects for the Slovak language and literature at primary schools, with content aimed at developing the pupil's communicative and literary competence, and looking at the selected pupils' ability levels at the end of primary education.

The print version of the textbook intertextually and hypertextually combines with the textbook webpage at <<http://indi.pf.unipo.sk>>. The webpage contains various sources as examples of integrated educational projects and their implementation in school, other publications about the teaching of in the mother tongue and literature, which are also the result of research projects, a public discussion forum, addenda to the textbook, other useful references, links, information about the authors, and video samples of educational units.

The texts for integrated didactics of the mother tongue and literature are also unified in their outward form: the book is organized clearly and coherently, its structure giving readers easy guidance and logical progress through the individual language issues and principles described, as well as displaying a high-level of expertise. The above mentioned integration prevents inappropriate preference of interconnecting elements at the expense of discrete ones, so neither the Slovak language nor its literature lose their central role; on the contrary, integration enables them to come closer together. The layout of the individual texts respects the logic of didactic communication, which moves from the

existing knowledge we have (given at the start of each chapter) to new knowledge which is reinforced in the process of reading. Explanatory texts overlap with interactive and illustrative materials, graphic and visual aids, diagrams and a wide range of methods, such as working with exercises. The textbook also poses a number of questions, giving space for discussion about the value of teaching in the mother tongue and literature at the primary school level. For example, in the first chapter we meet with the need for self-evaluation of all the benefits and shortcomings of hitherto existing conceptions of teaching, the search for answers as to how and why the taught themes are integrated etc. The textbook also offers a wide range of sources from the areas of linguo-didactic and litero-didactic research.

That the team of authors (Ľ. Liptáková, Z. Stanislavová, Ľ. Sičáková, B. Hlebová, J. Kesselová, M. Klimovič, R. Rusňák, K. Vužňáková, M. Andričíková, A. Mitrová, E. Pršová, M. Tkáčová, A. Sochovičová, D. Cibáková, A. Matušíková) realize the difficulties of an integrated approach in teaching the mother tongue, and this is demonstrated by the sensitive methodological approach of the individual authors towards integration, and by their belief in the value of this approach. The reader discovers that apparently discrete elements in the teaching of the mother tongue and literature are in fact much closer to each other than they seem.