

Title: Teaching Literary-cultural Content and Multiliteracies through an Azbuka Approach in the Collegiate Russian-I Classroom

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The paper presents a project-oriented explorative Azbuka approach implemented within a Russian-I curriculum (Robin et al. 2007) in order to support-enrich communicative language learning with basic literary-cultural content and skills (Byrnes 2006). Developed within an ecological social semiotic perspective on FL-literacy pedagogy (van Lier 2002, Walther 2007) and aligned with an heuristic principle of “understanding by design” and theories of redesigning available designs and multimodal representation of meaning-&-text (Kern 2000), the Azbuka approach is viewed as a mini-immersion solution to the ceiling effect problem (Rifkin 2006). It engages beginner learners in multiliteracy practices with literary mini-texts which inform a cultural context of Russian in use (Boyle & Gerhart 2002). Catchy, playfully-malleable and discourse-adjusted, these texts of diverse genres and origins function as readily-available symbolic resources of communication that foster automaticity of language processing and production (Jackson & Kaplan 2001; Leaver et al. 2004), “useful plagiarism” (Robin 2006), and transfer. To address some problems in mastering the alphabet and basic reading-writing mechanics (e.g., Comer & Murphy-Lee 2004, Bown 2007), this complimentary approach teaches a range of alphabet, language, metacognitive and intercultural skills based on heuristics of the letters’ names, alphabet order, the list-text structure, and mini-texts which feature vocabulary-images of the multimodal Azbuka genre. Syllabic division skills and orthographic reading are emphasized as tools reducing negative transfer from English reading mechanics and promoting orthoepic reading-pronunciation and correct spelling.

The paper outlines Azbuka-related mini-genres employed; introduces some texts used to reinforce/assess learning; presents textual practices-tasks and explorative multiliteracy projects that promote mini-texts’ communicative use in class and beyond; two videoclips included: a mini-text reading-discussion and a reading game-project presentation.

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