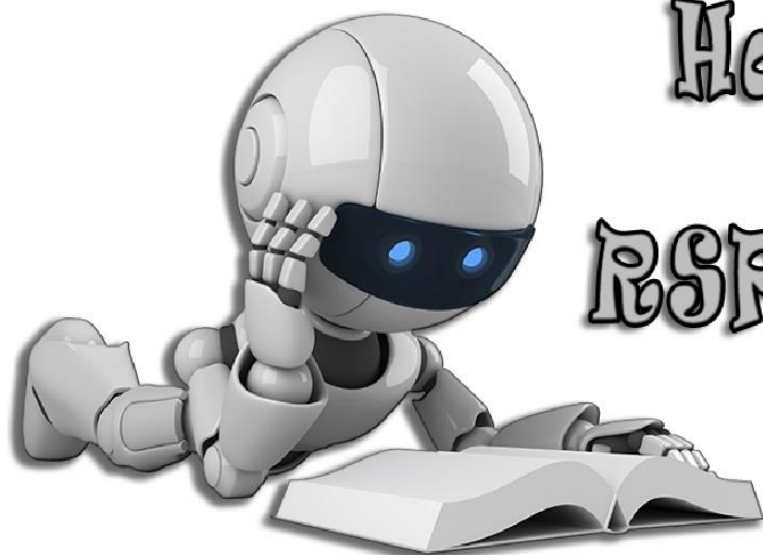


Czech Republic - Project curriculum



Handbook 4 RSP readers

Střední škola designu a umění,
knižní kultury a ekonomiky
Náhorní, Praha



Funded by the
Erasmus+ Programme
of the European Union

X. GIMNAZIJA „IVAN SUPEK“

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Handbook for reluctant, struggling and poor readers

(project no. - 2016-1-HR01-KA201-022159)

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NEEDS ANALYSES

We have been hearing about *reading issues* for quite a long time. Again and again kids and teenagers are blamed for not reading enough. However, the question is what it actually means *enough*. Is it a book a month? Is it a book a week? Is the book thin or thick? The quantity is what matters. We usually ask: How much do you read? On the other hand, not many people are interested in *what* we actually read. Although there is at least one more important question: How do you understand what you are reading? That should really be the most important information we need to find out.

Reading literacy could be understood as one's all-life developing skill consisting of different elements influencing one another: relationship to reading, literal understanding, apprehension and evaluation, metacognition, sharing, and application.¹

The fact is that pupils with low reading literacy have problems to participate in society and they struggle with finding jobs when they become adults. That is the reason why reading literacy has become a crucial key competence within curricula in all developed countries.

The Czech Republic has participated in different international reading literacy surveys since the mid 90's. At the beginning there were surveys like RLS, IALS, PIRLS organized by IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement); later PISA organized by OECD – a survey with the highest credit nowadays. According to the definition of PISA, reading literacy is understanding, using, and reflecting on written texts, in order to achieve one's goals, to develop one's knowledge and potential, and to participate in society.

In PISA 2009 the Czech Republic gained 478 points; three years later, the same test showed the score of 492 points with the average score of 500 points and Shanghai winning reaching 570 points. In other words, our country ended up approximately in the middle of all tested countries. All the details are available on the websites of the Czech School Inspection.²

There was also a survey carried out within the project *Handbook for RSP readers* among 15 to 18 year-old students. This survey has confirmed some of the generally known premises. There is quite a big gender gap; girls generally enjoy reading more than boys. The older the students become the more they read as well which we presume is mostly caused by approaching the school final exam. The motivation in this case is therefore rather negative than positive which definitely is not good news. Regarding the main motivation for reading in general more than 40% respondents answered they enjoy reading and it helps them relax. Over 20% then are motivated mainly by school assignments. The good news is that all the gender and age categories have agreed that reading is important. We believe that is because today all teenagers spend a lot of time on the Internet where they search for the vast majority of the information they are interested in.

¹ in *Vyukove strategie v praxi pilotnich skol*: p. 48; available from http://www.nuov.cz/uploads/KURIKULUM/vyukove_strategie_na_web.pdf

² <http://www.csicr.cz/Prave-menu/Mezinarodni-setreni>

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On the other hand, the respondents also admit they kind of struggle with reading itself at the same time. The male as well as the female respondents do not feel very confident about their skills to read they find it hard to keep their concentration or sink into what they are reading at the moment. The problem here might be the selection of the books. As for the school-assigned books, those seem to be quite difficult for students or far away from their interests. Teachers should definitely work harder to motivate them to read the books positively, not only ordering them they just *have to* do it. Students should be familiar with the historical and social context of the literature and authors they are supposed to read as well – that could help them to understand what they are reading and why it is important.

In 2004, the Czech Ministry of Education approved a new programme for educating children and teenagers from 3 to 19 years. This new framework gives schools and teachers a chance to build up their own school educational programmes and approaches towards individual subjects. Reading literacy is mentioned as one of so called key competencies and its development is understood as a task to be completed by all teachers, not only the teachers of Czech language and literature who naturally feel the biggest responsibility.³

Another thing is that since 2011 all secondary-school students in the Czech Republic have to take the state-controlled final exam (maturita) from Czech language and literature. There are several requirements which students have to fulfil to pass the exam. A lot of teachers complain that the structure of the exam goes against the freedom given by the framework and they have no chance to change much because there is simply no space and time for anything else than memorising again.

On the other hand, most teachers still follow the old chronological model of teaching literature – they start from the very beginning, spend a long time with the ancient literature, slowly move through every single century. This systematic approach might make sense, however, the problem is that students feel like learning about far history – usually there is no time to talk about contemporary authors and topics involving somehow the lives of the students. That just supports the feeling that literature is a kind of theoretical science and not a part of their everyday lives.

The experts actually agree on the basic and simple approach which should be followed to make literature more attractive to pupils. We should stop ordering them to read books hundred years old far away from their interest and everyday life. It would be much easier to begin with books or stories they really like and, in the first place, make some space for analysing and discussing the texts. It is not necessary to work with books only; especially at the beginning with struggling or poor readers, we could use films, internet articles or even PC games as sources for analyses and discussions in the class. As we can read opinions of some teachers – it is possible to go this way and there are visible fruits of this work. The most important thing the teacher needs to start with is to find the will to change something and to work hard especially at the beginning when stepping into new areas and creating something new.

³ in *Vyukove strategie v praxi pilotnich skol*: p. 49

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PLANNING GOALS AND LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Czech curriculum refers to six key competencies every high-school graduate should be able to gain within the whole studies. These competencies are supposed to be included in all subjects.

a. studying individually

- creating own lesson plan and planning other activities
- using various studying strategies
- critical approach towards information sources
- being critical towards themselves
- accepting opinions, appreciation and criticism from the others
- learning from own achievements and mistakes

b. solving problems

- recognizing and analyzing a problem
- suggesting suitable methods to find the solutions
- using knowledge and creativity
- interpreting the findings and supporting them with the evidence
- considering different solutions with their pros and cons and the results with consequences

c. communication

- using various means of communication depending on the situation
- using modern technologies effectively
- communicating clearly and relevantly
- considerate towards the partner's knowledge, experience and feelings
- able to present their work in public

d. social and personal understanding

- capable of self-evaluation
- setting own goals according to the personal skills
- estimating the effects of their own behaviour
- helping to create and maintain proper interpersonal relationships
- making decisions based on their own judgement
- resisting social and media pressures

e. interpersonal understanding

- evaluating own interests in context of the interests of larger groups of people
- dealing in harmony with nature, environment and culture
- respecting the variety of values, opinions and skills of other people
- able to see the links between their rights, duties and responsibilities

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- interested in public affairs

f. active approach

- developing their own personal and professional potential
- applying own initiative and creativity
- judging the risks connected with making life decisions

When talking about reading itself, the general goals may be defined quite simply: make reading attractive for students, develop student's fantasy and imagination, and show them where and how to find suitable reading resources.

When working with texts, the students should be able to understand, apprehend, analyse and evaluate what they read. They should also be able to compare different texts and share their experience with the others. The students are supposed to think of the author of the text, his/her intentions and the historical and social context of the text origin.

Every text, apart from its literary quality, should bring some additional value – questions that it evokes in the readers' minds. The right text should provoke thinking and asking questions; correct answers are not always necessary, in some cases we look for them for the rest of our lives.

The text should provide the reader with unusual experience, bring new situations and make them feel with the heroes. This way the readers may learn something new (even about themselves) and develop their understanding of people's and their own behaviour in different situations. Reading is supposed to develop the reader's personality.

To complete all the above mentioned goals, it is essential to provide students with the right feedback.

FEEDBACK AND EVALUATION/SELF-EVALUATION

Providing students with feedback and evaluation is an essential part of the learning process that should never be omitted. However, the teachers should be very careful about that. At this moment, most students are very vulnerable (especially the RSP readers who probably have not experienced much success so far) as they have probably worked hard and now they are not expecting to hear something positive rather than negative which could demotivate them from participating in the future activities. The teachers should not just criticize, it is necessary to find some positives too. On the other hand, the teachers need to be honest with the students otherwise the feedback and evaluation lose their purpose.

In any case, the feedback has to be constructive including suggestions and advice for the further work or completing similar tasks in the future. The students expect the teachers to give them tips how to be more precise and effective in their effort as well as to share their experience with them.

This process should be carried out throughout the whole lesson with the teacher observing the work of the students during all activities, assisting, asking questions and discussing with individuals or working groups.

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A discussion of the whole class should take place at the end of every project as a part of the final feedback and evaluation. This is an opportunity for the students and the teacher to express their opinions of the project and particular activities.

The students should be able to summarize what and why they have been doing, what they have learnt from the project, what they liked or disliked and why. They should also reflect on their collaboration in the groups and their performance in general.

Before the teachers provide their feedback and evaluation, they should always encourage the students to come with their own self-evaluation which forces the students to think critically about their performance, analyze the problems and be aware of their available skills and abilities for the future.

If it is necessary to evaluate the students' performance with grades, when it comes to reading and RSP readers it is recommended to focus on their enthusiasm rather than the results which we even cannot expect to be at the highest level. The process in this case is more important. The main goal is to encourage the students to carry on and work even harder. The only way to reach this goal is via the positive approach.

It is also necessary for the teachers themselves to undergo the process of self-evaluation. It is very important to analyze why some activities do not work and to conclude from that some relevant implications for the consequent projects. The problem may also be hidden in the teacher's approach. The teachers should also be able to reflect on their own performance, analyze it and learn from their mistakes. This process is very difficult and sometimes the teachers cannot reveal the problem that is obviously present. In that case, we may also ask our colleagues to help, observe our lesson and provide us with their own opinions.