

Croatia–Research report in the field of motivational activities



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<p align="center"><i>Handbook for reluctant, struggling and poor readers</i> (project no. - 2016-1-HR01-KA201-022159) Co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union</p>	

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For the implementation of activity 02.A2, five secondary schools were selected in Varaždin and Međimurje County: Prva gimnazija Varaždin, Gimnazija Josipa Slavenskog in Čakovec, Srednja škola Čakovec, Gospodarska škola Čakovec and Srednja škola Prelog. Schools and teachers were emailed to cooperate and were sent information about what is expected. The first field work was held on April 12, 2017 in Prva gimnazija Varaždin, and afterwards in agreement with the teachers, a meeting was held at the Gimnazija Josipa Slavenskog in Čakovec. Croatian language teachers Vedrana Močnik, Tatjana Ruža, Željka Ivančok Varga, Vesna Prepelić Đuričković, Monika Perčić and Zlatka Grahovec Soldat attended the meeting which was led by Mirela Barbaroša-Šikić (AZOO).

Tatjana Ruža and Mirela Barbaroša-Šikić presented their experiences and impressions after interviews about reading and talking with two groups of students of the Prva gimnazija Varaždin. They also scheduled days of going to other schools and interviews with students, plan of activities in schools and the choice of students to participate in the interview.



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Project activities in Gimnazija Varaždin on 12 April, 2017

Croatian language teacher Tatjana Ruža and two groups of her students took part in the interviews held in school library.



The first group consisted of six first-graders, the second group of seven second-graders. The selection of students was made in agreement with their teachers. Groups needed to be heterogenous regarding their reading skills and reading motivation. In all schools included in the projects, students showed great interest in taking part in conversation about their reading habits and interests, both students who would be considered as successful and good readers, as well as those who were willing to talk openly about why they don't like to read and difficulties they have with it.

In conversation, the teacher pointed out that existing curriculum doesn't describe/prescribe activities and procedures with students who have difficulties with reading, neither in the sense of methodology nor in content, as well as adjustment of prescribed content to their needs. In addition to the list of literary titles, there are no instructions on how to handle and there are no guidelines that would allow a teacher to tailor more demanding content to NPL students. The teacher found the solution, based on her practice and professional training on the topics of encouraging reading

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skills of high school students, in the introduction of short literary forms - short stories of contemporary themes - which provide the ability to read the full text on the lesson and encourage students to discuss the problems of the world they live in. Special attention is devoted to the conversation with students, who seek and select texts they together read and evaluate, which encourages the students' interest in further reading, either texts of the same author or other authors who write about the same or similar topics. Activities the teacher is involved on the school and local community level are primarily those that bring together students with high motivation to read. She emphasizes the extraordinary importance of talking to students about their reading habits, interests, and motivation. The data collected in agreement with pupils, the teacher tries to embed in their curriculum for the following four years, first of all by introducing reading texts according to the students' choice. In everyday work with students, she uses the notion of so-called clever reader who, together with students, she defines as one who is interested in "hidden" in the text, and within that, the students are continually encouraged to "discover" the meaning. The reading itself of the text prescribed by the curriculum, is not graded, the teacher takes into account the timing of reading a text and pre-sets the problem issue with which the text conversation starts. She grades students after longer period of time and based on the notes she makes on their activities during conversations about texts (formative assessment). Often with a curriculum text, the teacher delivers a contemporary text or parts of the text and updates the topic, relationships, problems and possible solutions. The knowledge and reading experience of a student on a particular text provides space during the teaching process by putting it in the forefront of her teaching. She often allows students to read aloud. The selection of texts and genres proved to be extremely important for the motivation and will of her students to read. Her students are more satisfied when they read the texts they themselves proposed at the beginning of the school year as electoral texts. These texts are read by almost all the students in the classroom and they all want to comment and give their personal views and impressions about the read. It's mostly about contemporary texts. She often participates in the online Writer's web program (Pisci na mreži). The students of Prva gimnazija in Varaždin were happy to share their experiences and reading thoughts during the conversation and were very openly describing their reading experiences and reading attitudes. They all stressed the importance of reading and clearly stated what encourages the reading (dictionary, imagination, new knowledge, social sensitivity, understanding of the world and problems ...). To some of them reading out of school is part of the free time, while others point out their weaker concentration, laziness or

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dealing with some other things (playing instruments, sports). They all agreed that most of the books in the curriculum they do not like reading, but they prefer electoral books and that everything they have done so far was very interesting. They placed the beginning of their reading problems in the 5th grade of elementary school and emphasized that the approach of teachers to their reading was the most important for their motivation and willingness to read. They very much like the concept of "clever readers" introduced by their professor in the first grade (their understanding: it is not enough to think literally about the text they are talking about, but it is necessary to think about the context, about what is not in the text itself). Those who do not like reading emphasize that the length of the material is related to understanding - if they do not understand what they read, they give up or skip it or they simply read summaries. Interesting books may be "long", students will read them (for example, The book thief, To kill a mockingbird). They pointed out that it is important for them to choose what to read, some of them have not yet found their genre, but many of them like crime stories and science fiction. They prefer to read printed books.

In Gospodarska škola in Čakovec, project activities were carried out on 25 April 2017. The hosts were teachers Monika Perčić and Vedrana Močnik.



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The first group of students (first, second and fourth grade) was suggested by the Croatian language teacher Monika Perčić. The students emphasized the importance of exposure to reading in pre-school age - the role of parents and grandparents. Some of them did not have that experience. The scope of reading material for most of them has become a problem already in the 4th and 5th grade of elementary school. They often read without understanding (because they had to read it) and quickly adopted the strategy for downloading content from the internet. This group of students pointed out that interesting plot of what they read diminishes the importance of the number of pages. They estimate that the role of teachers is important for encouragement of their reading and self-confidence, and they stress that now they are reading more at school and talking about reading. They believe that a greater number of reading texts should be chosen by students. They highlighted the usefulness of working on the school list and the role of photos and illustrations with the text they read. They have noticed the greater impact of digital tools on their reading motivation or understanding of content (you either love or do not like reading), but have stressed that they have no experience with digital reading tools. They prefer to read the printed books because, unlike the e-books, they are more focused on the text and the reading process itself.



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During the conversation on NPL readers, the teacher described the existing curriculum as a document that implies that all students have good reading skills and abilities. She thinks she works too little with NPL readers, with whom she dealt the most during the implementation of the two-year project Misfits by reading (Muke po čitanju), which she designed in the framework of civic education and education. 30 students participated in the project, 10 were rated as NPL readers. She thinks that it is necessary to create special activities with NPL readers to make the results better, both during regular classes and in extracurricular activities. The solution is in greater individualization of work with NPL readers, but also in the more time it takes to separate the conversation about reading and their reading practices (possible problems) and the import of texts they read into the regular teaching process. She emphasizes the lack of confidence she has noticed with NPL readers, often as a result of poorer school achievement, partly due to their reading skills. One of the possible incentive factors is seen in a better interaction between "developed" readers and NPL readers (peer influence). The choice of topics and genres is extremely important in terms of motivation and willingness to read and often allows students to present topics within their interests in order to encourage other students to explore the topics they are interested in.

What followed was an interview with Croatian language teacher Vedrana Močnik and a group of seven students. Most of them described themselves as readers reading when they must, and during the conversation openness and readiness for all the questions asked could be seen. The teacher described most texts of the current curriculum mostly inappropriate for most of her students, especially NPL readers. Difficulties are noticed at both the content and the language level and in the length of certain texts. She is trying to overcome it by keeping her students in mind, and by complete and partial autonomy in the selection of texts. She pointed out that by doing this she exposed herself to various students' choices which she accepted as a challenge to talk about the types of texts and their appropriateness, further encouraged by professional development seminars about encouraging reading skills with students. She individualizes approach to students and by appropriate activities and methods enables them to overcome various reading-related difficulties. In addition to that, she believes that NPL readers should also work in smaller groups. With regard to the students with whom she works every day, she pays particular attention to the selection of texts, following criteria of: clarity and understanding of the text to the students, shorter texts that contain a message that pupils can associate with, and she emphasizes the importance of reading aloud thus encouraging mutual trust with

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students. Sincerity and trust contribute to building greater confidence of NPL readers and their more self-motivated involvement in all the activities she creates for reading and understanding. She finds extremely important to consider teaching and accepting pupils' reading interests as a starting point for encouraging and developing their reading skills and abilities.



Based on the feedback gathered in conversation with students it can be concluded that no matter how they describe themselves as readers, they understand the purpose of reading and the factors that affect their motivation and willingness to read. They particularly emphasized the understanding of what they read, the usefulness of the topic they read about in their everyday life, and the attitude of the teacher towards their reading - gaining opportunities for progress.

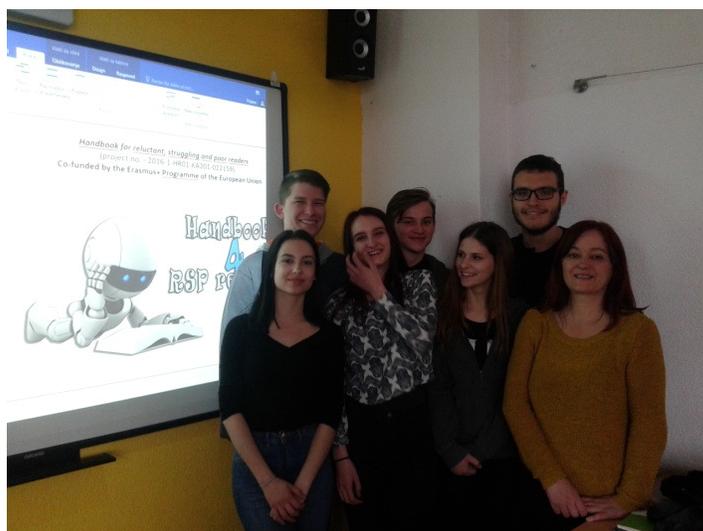
On 27 April 2017, project activities were carried out in Srednja škola Čakovec in cooperation with Croatian language teacher Vesna Prepelić Đuričković and six second and third grade students.

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The existing curriculum requires teachers and students to study literature with too much content, expected (often final) interpretations of literary texts, and learners' independent reading of compulsory texts, which is in disagreement with the reception and cognitive capabilities of a large number of students. At the same time, teachers are expected to appreciate students' specific needs, focus on outcomes, student activities, and the teaching process itself, in which student production, and expression of attitudes should be encouraged. Taking into account the described situation, this teacher tries to adapt to her students by introducing contemporary literary and non-literary texts, student selection of individual texts (without intervention) and collaboration in the local community (Center for Culture - Cinema for Youth). But most of the activities of extracurricular reading activities involve students who like to read and are willing to do so. The narrower and wider environment often implies that (not) reading is the problem of the students themselves, the skill they should have mastered in elementary school, and that reading activity is related solely to the teaching of the Croatian language. To read mandatory works from the curriculum, the number of pages significantly influences the motivation of the students to read. Students will read the shorter works, longer novels only a few of them, some will give up immediately, and some will read only a part. When it comes to literary texts chosen by students to read outside the classroom, the number of pages is not as important as reading motivation, novels are their favorite literary form and they read extensive novels and romanesque cycles.

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Students have shown remarkable openness in conversation and expressing their answers and comments. They were unanimous in describing commonly-used elements of reading purpose and factors that affect motivation and willingness to read, but very different in the description of their reading practices. Some of them pointed out the critical thinking during reading, especially contemporary media. They emphasized that reading changed their worldview and individual themes, as well as other perspectives on what they already had as a built-in attitude. Outlining factors that influence their motivation for reading, they also mentioned taboo themes. Describing the length of reading material, they emphasized the organization of text - more smaller and shorter fragments, chapters that allow them better orientation and concentration on the text itself.

Gimnazija Josip Slavenski in Čakovec hosted on 28 April, 2017 project activities involving six students and their teacher Zlatka Grahovec Soldat.



Teacher Grahovec Soldat has been involved in the topic of high school reading for a long time. She pointed out that the valid curriculum was not focused on NPL readers at all. Deep interpretation of a large number of canonical texts is required, which implies a high level of adoption of literary terms and concepts and remarkable student's interest in reading. Insufficient attention is paid not only to students' interests but also to their needs and opportunities. With today's students, it takes a lot of time to talk about the language and the metaphorical meaning, and it is necessary to take into account the time they need to read. Apart from changing the list of texts, she emphasizes the importance of teacher autonomy and their responsibility for developing student readers. She thinks it is necessary to nurture reading for pleasure. She offers her students contemporary literary texts as an incentive and motivation to read

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compulsory texts, often using texts from the Writers on the Web, non-literary texts and photographs. In 2010 she conducted research on reading with the students of the school. She finds the most important honest and open relationship between the teacher and the student and teacher's interest in what the students are interested in. She remarks that all this changes her as well and that today she understands the diversity of students and their reading practices. It always starts with the students, their attitudes, interests, and thoughts, and encourages them to suggest activities that will encourage them to read. Every student once a year presents a text of choice. She often creates games and quizzes and encourages them to do it themselves. The students were very open in the conversation and in expressing their thoughts about the purpose of reading and the factors influencing it. They emphasized that in the selection of texts, it is important to ensure that children and young people understand what they are reading. They also stressed that besides reading there are many other useful things that they enjoy in leisure time and that there are people who naturally like to read, but that their reading is greatly influenced by the teacher's approach. Everyone agreed that the availability of topics and genres affects their willingness to read and that the teacher offers different texts and allows them to choose what they will read. The function of digital tools is more visible in reading motivation and less in understanding of content.

Croatian language teacher Željka Ivančok Varga and six students participated in the project activities in Srednja škola Prelog on May 2, 2017.



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Teacher Ivančok Varga pointed out that the valid curriculum did not in any way give teachers guidelines for working with NPL readers. She participates in many activities and actions that promote reading. She finds extremely important, at the first meetings with her students, to find out their reading habits, attitudes and interests. She emphasizes the importance of talking to students and accepting their responses as a starting point for an agreement on reading texts beyond a compulsory curriculum. The activities that she has been doing with her pupils until now she describes as motivational - project With the domino effect to the epidemic of reading - the aim was to make a small group of readers become big (to encourage each other to read and socialize) and later this project was transformed into collaboration with Primary School Donja Dubrava. She thinks more of peer-effect can be used - "good" readers who could motivate NPL readers, as well as additional titles in the school library to keep up with students' interests.

The purpose of reading and the factors affecting (or influencing) their reading, students, during the conversation, primarily related to school and grades and emphasized that you should be reading when alone, and they like to hang around and be surrounded by other people. They contrasted the length of the reading material to the interest in reading content, when the length is no longer important. They described in detail the impact of the teacher's attitude on willingness to read. The film and comics have been identified as the sources that most encourage their willingness to read. They are the only group of students who think that an e-book has advantages with high school students compared to a printed book.

Based on the conversation with teachers, the following activities can be summarized as highly motivating:

1. Conversations with students about their reading practices and difficulties, continually and systematically.
2. Activities with texts independently chosen by students.
3. Work on shorter contemporary texts that are close to students (topic and language).

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To work with NPL readers, the following options were provided by the teachers:

Within the teaching of the Croatian language:

1. at the beginning of the first grade of secondary school determine reading skills, motivation and willingness to read (interview, questionnaire etc.)
2. collect information about what students are interested in, what they like and want to read
3. offer a larger selection of texts outside the curriculum and provide assistance in the selection
1. 4. talk to students about the difficulties they encounter while reading and individualize approach as much as possible
4. use shorter texts of different genres and contemporary themes
5. in the teaching process, make a greater correlation of additional materials with what is being read (video, film etc.).
6. introduce more activities aimed at raising awareness of reading and its importance in education and life
7. record the activities and difficulties that hinder students when reading
8. give students feedback on progress according to the plan of activities that are individualized.

The school level:

1. to update the topic of NPL readers at school level and create specific activities
2. to increase the involvement of NPL readers in school-based activities (extracurricular activities – e.g. journalists' group, public cultural events at school)
3. to develop co-operation with other teachers to better support NPL readers.
 1. In cooperation with the school library and the local community:
 2. plan activities for NPL readers in collaboration with the school and local (public) library
 3. Teachers' professional development:
 4. The project activities described included highly motivated teachers who are ready to participate in the following project activities and work with other teachers with the aim of working on reading skills of NPL readers in other

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secondary schools. In cooperation with the Education and Teacher Training Agency during the year 2018, seminars for teachers will be organized and examples of good practice in working with students, in particular NPL readers, will be demonstrated and discussed.