

Developing key competences – a premise to social inclusion

Description of the work

- a. This project has been carried out since December 2010, and was completed in July 2012 with the official accreditation granted by the Romanian MoE for the training programme being described as the outcome of the work.
- b. The innovative dimensions of the work are:
 - The **integrated nature** of the project, including a diagnostic study of the manner of teaching reading and writing in the primary grades in Romanian schools, which also provides baseline data for impact studies, which is – in itself – innovative in terms of Romania, where research into the acquisition of reading skills in Romanian language is almost non-existent.
 - The **reading assessment instrument** is new in itself, as are the concepts of *(emergent) literacy* and *informal reading inventory* introduced to the public school sector in Romania.
 - The training programme for primary school teachers **Innovative reading-writing instruction** to equip them with the skills to assess their students' reading skills and tailor literacy instruction to the individual students' specific learning needs is a new element insofar as the Romanian education system is concerned, and it is the first training program of its kind in Romania.
 - The proposed **blended learning mode of delivery** (cca 2/3 face-to-face and 1/3 on-line) of the training programme for primary school teachers is a new element insofar as the Romanian RWCT Association is concerned.
- c. The nature of the work encompasses pedagogy (literacy instruction tailored to the specific needs of individual students, as assessed by the informal reading inventory), research (diagnostic study to investigate how literacy instruction is done in Romanian primary schools) and professional formation (training for primary school teachers in innovative approaches to literacy instruction).

- d. The involvement of the Romanian RWCT Association in the development of this project has been ensured by four members of the Romanian Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association (Ariana-Stanca Vacaretu, Maria Kovacs, Marinela Scripcariu and Iudit Sera). The Romanian Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking Association is a national affiliate of IRA, in good standing at this date.

Aim

The work was done within the project ***Developing key competences – a premise to social inclusion***, with support from the European Social Fund and the Government of Romania.

The general objective of the project is to improve primary school students' key competences through developing and testing an integrated education programme to increase the quality of education provision. The relevant specific objectives are:

- Identification of the factors that influence the development of key competences within the Romanian cultural context, with the aim of enhancing students' success in primary schools;
- Enhancing the development of students' literacy skills by developing and testing a set of organizational, curricular and evaluative measures;
- Improving primary school students' reading skills through the development and testing of reading materials and instruments.

The work was cited in *Teaching reading in Europe. Contexts, policies and practices* – Eurydice, EACEA, 2011 as one of the main programmes for promoting reading in society and one of the good practices identified by the national experts in 2009/10.

Scope

The work has been carried out in ten counties of Romania (out of the 42), in partnership with the County School Inspectorates, in 8 so-called pilot schools in each of the 10 counties.

National and cultural context

Romanian students' poor performance in reading literacy tests (both PIRLS and PISA) is well-known. Romania is one of the countries where the results in the more recent years have

indicated an overall decline in performance as compared to previous assessments. Cca 40% of Romanian students qualify as struggling readers, not having reached proficiency level 2 (PISA 2009, cited in Eurydice, 2011). The mean scores of Romanian students in PISA 2009 were about 60 points lower than the EU-27 average. At the EU-level, the highest percentage of very poor readers (those scoring below the low benchmark, PISA, 2009) was recorded in Romania, where 16 % of pupils were not able to recognise, locate, and reproduce explicitly stated details from the texts.

Though general curricular reforms have taken place in Romania, and as concerns teaching of literacy, an integrated approach was adopted in the primary grades (i.e. language and literature taught in an integrated manner as opposed to language being taught separately and literature separately), this has seemingly not yielded better results in students' reading literacy skills. Seemingly, neither has the national curriculum relatively recently introduced for pre-schools had a significant positive impact, as – like in the case of other levels of education – reforms are quite general and have not targeted the improvement of reading literacy specifically. Moreover, the recent chaotic and rushed introduction of the so-called „0” grade (a year of compulsory preparatory education prior to entering grade 1 – ISCED level 1), a reform measure which is already rumored to be discontinued next year, is not highly likely to be helpful for the better focus on specifically developing students' literacy skills.

For reasons of systemic chaos and policies lacking in specificity as concerns focus on reading literacy, the Romanian RWCT Association finds that its efforts should target the improvement of teachers' competences to develop students' literacy skills.

Outcomes

- a diagnostic study of how literacy instruction is done in Romanian primary schools;
- a set of refined reading assessment instruments for primary school students (the first draft had been developed in a small scale international project in which RWCT Romania was a partner);
- a training programme for primary school teachers introducing the concepts of emergent literacy, and an informal reading inventory as a means of assessing students' reading skills, accredited by the Romanian MoE's relevant agency;

- 25 primary school teachers (2-3 in each of the 10 pilot counties) trained to deliver the training programme;
- A draft project to develop a readability formula for Romanian language.