

Dyslexia and Library Programmes for Motivation to Read in Croatia

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Abstract:

Dyslexia is being studied in Croatia systematically, according to the features of language for the last 20 years. Scientific knowledge of dyslexia gives a significant contribution to prevention of consequences of dyslexia among citizens of all ages, from preschool to working population. Considerable part of contribution for people with dyslexia accomplished in public libraries in the last 10 years, thanks to cooperation among librarians and speech and language therapists. Projects for motivation to read for people with reading and writing difficulties are developed by Croatian Library Association in cooperation with Croatian Dyslexia Association and Croatian Logopedics Association. This paper will describe projects for motivation to read for people with reading and writing difficulties in Croatian public libraries.

Keywords: dyslexia, projects for motivation to read, public libraries, easy-to-read materials, logo-bibliotherapy

Introduction

In terms of making transformation of Croatia as a full member of European Union into economically successful and democratic society, the need for systematic solving of the problems of national strategy for library services to persons with special needs and

disabilities has been perceived. Development of national strategy should promote library system and the main goal is improvement of the quality of library services for their users.

Being aware of the role of libraries and their responsibility to promote reading, with respect to the new social and economic trends, librarians are trying to modernize their work. They tend to incorporate digital content into all library initiatives, provide free and equal access to high quality information for all citizens and enable lifelong learning. That assumes the use of strategy for the public library system by providing access to networks and supporting all kinds of education, cultural and linguistic development, which implies responsibilities in relation to cultural heritage, literature and literacy.

Nowadays librarians have the challenge of reaching out to serve all people in their community and making libraries socially inclusive to those with difficulties in reading and understanding written text. Reading and writing difficulties are usually caused by insufficient education but also by handicap, intellectual disability, dyslexia or other factors such as unemployment, crime or family breakdown.

Dyslexia in Croatia

The phenomenon of dyslexia has been described in many papers and in many different ways. Definitions of dyslexia are directed to define the essence of the characteristics and problems that occur, taking into account the peculiarities of the language and script (Caravolas, 2005). One of the most cited definitions of dyslexia is a definition given by the British Dyslexia Association (BDA, 2009) and the European Dyslexia Association (EDA, 2007).

There is no official government definition of dyslexia in Croatia. The term dyslexia is not integrated as a part of any law – there is no legislative act where this term would be specifically used: dyslexia and literacy difficulties are treated like disabilities/other types of special needs or developmental disorders within different regulations in educational systems – kindergartens and schools (Lencek, Andel, 2012). Many children with reading and writing problems are not diagnosed, and even a greater number of children are not able to receive therapy. According to these facts and according to the definition stating that dyslexia is a difference in acquiring reading, spelling and writing skills (neurological in origin), there is an extremely important role of the society or environment regarding understanding these differences and regarding activities that can help and support people with dyslexia in situations that involving reading and writing.

Awareness about the necessity for creating better public recognition of dyslexia and the importance of providing assistance and support for people with dyslexia joined the efforts of librarians and speech and language pathologists. One of the common projects is translating and publishing the IFLA Guidelines for Library Services to Persons with Dyslexia (Nielsen, Irvall, 2001) and IFLA Guidelines for Easy-to-Read Materials (Nomura, Nielsen, Tronbacke, 2010) by the Croatian Library Association in cooperation with Croatian Dyslexia Association and Croatian Logopedics Association. Such material is exceptional aid to all those who are focused on reading and writing disabilities. Cooperation resulted in different understanding of persons with dyslexia which is evident in:

- the fact that librarians are familiar with the characteristics of dyslexia and creates new conditions and opportunities for access to library services for people with dyslexia,
- global changes in understanding the phenomenon of dyslexia not only through weaknesses, but also through strengths.

It is well known that mastering of reading begins in early preschool period (Ivsac Pavlisa 2009; Vancas 1999). When children are exposed to letters, words and picture books in everyday life, they individually accumulate their knowledge about literacy. It is clear that the level of their exposure to literacy artifacts is defined by family setting which leads to different levels of preliteracy knowledge in children of same age (Vancas, 1999.; Justice, Bowles, Skibbe, 2006). Because the first step in getting acquainted with literacy occurs in the family, it is reasonable to categorize families based on their level of awareness for literacy (Catts, Kamhi, 2005; Lencek, Ivsac Pavlisa, Smiljanic, 2011).

In order to encourage parents to understand the importance of early reading, especially when children are at risk of dyslexia, librarians and speech and language pathologists participate in a project sponsored by UNICEF "Read To Me". From the age aspect, the projects have accomplished results in the domain of early literacy. Project is focused to parents' competences for making a quality selection of reading materials and the importance of understanding the parameters of reading to a child, as well as those that enhance the parents' knowledge on early literacy (Lencek, Ivsac Pavlisa, Smiljanic, 2011). These activities are the basis of the activities for prevention of the adverse effects of dyslexia.

There is a number of benefits from the shared reading situation: exposure to print and conventional book positively influence naming letters, shapes and discovering the alphabetic principle (Catts, Kamhi, 2005). The data about interactions during shared reading show that the level of mother's education, nationality as well as the language are highly correlated with the time spent in shared reading. The amount of time the child spends in reading during preschool period explains 7-10% variance in reading and language knowledge in the first year of formal education (Senechal et al, 1998). All of these data show that instructions for parents regarding shared reading activities can provide good results in children's reading and writing many years after education.

Regarding the main idea in this paper that connects librarians and speech and language pathologists – to improve the environment, in terms of human resources, for better functioning of people with dyslexia, it is necessary to mention the role of kindergarten. There is no unique program or preschool curriculum in Croatia that would focus on literacy. It certainly has implications in terms of developing prereading skills in preschoolers. One study conducted in kindergartens (Lencek, Peretic, Ivsac Pavlisa, 2012) showed some characteristics of early literacy in children age 4 to 6, especially features of their print awareness, emergent literacy and letter knowledge:

- there is visible progress in mentioned variables that are highly correlated with the increase in chronological age;
- this progress can be achieved on the basis of incidental learning: it is reasonable to assume that organized learning and prereading programs could give much better results;
- comparing the achievements of Croatian children with other children (Whitehurst, Lonigan, 2003) it is evident that their emergent literacy is lacking, especially when it comes to visual vocabulary and writing letters and words.

According to these results, speech and language pathologists focused their activities on creating checklists for early literacy. Checklists can be the basis for a triage process by which speech and language pathologists could relatively quickly and easily determine if there is a discrepancy in early literacy skills. This could also be the start of intensive prereading programs for some children, especially for children at risk for dyslexia.

Projects for motivation to read in Croatia

Croatian libraries became assistants in literacy and they help special needs users with difficulties in reading and writing to cope with their problems. Since 2002 librarians in cooperation with speech and language pathologists participate in recognising persons with reading difficulties. They are learning how to make the library, books and reading more approachable.

Since 2004 and 2005 the Section of Library Services to People with Special Needs of the Croatian Library Association is organizing conferences, lectures and workshops, developing projects and Croatian translation of IFLA publications. In cooperation with Croatian Dyslexia Association, National and University Library in Zagreb and IFLA Section of Library Services to People with Special Needs, Croatian Library Association conducted a research as a part of a three years project «Library Services for the Persons with Special Needs – Determining the Problem of Reading and Writing Causing the Changes in the Behaviour of the Juvenile Attending the Young Offenders Institutions and Penal Institutions in Croatia» (2004-2007). This project verified the assumption of the connection between the problems of reading and writing and asocial behavior. After the research was conducted, special library programme for overcoming difficulties in learning has been created with the final goal to suppress violence among children and young adults (Celic-Tica, Gabriel, 2006).

Since 2007 workshops *The Right for Development of Literacy: Easy-to-Read Materials and Logo-bibliotherapy* are being held at the Croatian Training Center for Continuing Education for Librarians (Celic-Tica, Gabriel, Sabljak, 2010). The workshops train attendants to create easy-to-read materials according the IFLA Guidelines and to include special logo-bibliotherapy programme of guided and aloud reading (Koontz, Gubbin, 2010). The workshops are closely connected to the project *The Right Book to the Right Person at the Right Time*. It mobilizes personal creative capacities in order to establish mechanisms of help and self-help that will enable the readers to cope with their problems.

Two surveys have been conducted during 2013 in Croatian public libraries on projects for motivation to read for all the library users and particularly for children and young adults who cannot use conventional library services for any reason. The first survey was conducted by National Coordination Service for Public Libraries at the National and University Library in Zagreb in cooperation with the Section of Library Services to Persons with Special Needs and the Section on Reading (Croatian Library Association) in February and March 2013. The survey produced data on current projects in public libraries for children and young people with special needs and children from margined social groups (children from socially and economically deprived environment, immigrants etc.). The second survey was conducted by the Ministry of Culture in cooperation with National Coordination Service for Public Libraries at the National and University Library in Zagreb in May and June 2013. The survey produced data on current projects in public libraries for motivation to read for all the library users. Data on a total of 10 ongoing projects for motivation to read for children and young adults with dyslexia in 2013 were extracted from both surveys (5 projects from the first and 5 projects from the second survey). Information about projects for motivation to read contain the title of the institution, the title of project, time frame, information about financing, manner of implementation and the results.

Project *Workshop of the Stories* was created for the children with difficulties in reading speech and writing. It was being carried out in Public Library Petar Preradovic in Bjelovar since 2006. It was financed from the funds for the Library's regular activities. The Workshop

was conducted by librarians in cooperation with speech and language pathologist and consists of reading stories, practicing spelling and speech, advising parents. The results of the Workshop are 7 picture books and audio stories for children with dyslexia. In this manner social inclusion of children and young adults with dyslexia is being successfully managed.

Project *Reading by Playing* was designed for children with dyslexia and dysgraphia by the City Library in Pula – Children’s Library branch. This project for acquiring prereading skills through playtime had started in 2011 and it was financed by the Library’s own funds. It is held once a month for two hours and attended by dyslexic children and their parents who are becoming friends and partners in reading, creating and playing. Children are given a text and different creative tasks in order to overcome difficulties using various techniques like modelling, painting, making comic books, collage technique, sewing, tying knots and using recycled materials. This programme lets dyslexic children overcome their fear of books and reading. Parents find these gatherings useful because they are being educated about the means of enabling the children to more easily overcome their difficulties, exchange experiences, share advice.

Project *Children’s Playroom* exists for 37 years (1976-2013) and is being conducted in City Library Franjo Markovic in Krizevci. Interactive workshops are held 2 to 3 times a week in two groups – children aged 1-3, and 3-7. Workshop is managed by a librarian who is also licenced kindergarten educator, with the assistance of a speech and language pathologist and a children’s psychologist. The maximum number of participants is 10-20. This playroom is performed as reading stories, conversing, expressing creatively (drawing, modelling, making posters) based on the text they had read. Parents are educated on the importance of reading to children from their earliest age by lectures. The result of this project is creting a habbit of borrowing, reading and preserving books.

Project *Reading with You: How to Recognize Reading Dificulties – Dyslexia* is being held in the Public Library “Fran Galovic” in Koprivnica. The programme is being carried out continously since 2002 and is financed as the Library’s regular activity. The programme activities are lectures (attended by around 30 participants – children with parents and professionals), borrowing books and non-book materials, informative leaflets for children and adults, newsletters with a list of audio books for children, parents and schools, updates on dyslexia at the Library web site. As a result parents are well informed about the methods for practicing and motivating to read and eliminating a fear of visiting the Library among the dyslexic children.

Workshop project for children with reading and writing dificulties are being held since 2004 at the City Library in Pregrada in cooperation with Janko Leskovar Elementary School. The workshops are ran by a librarian in association with a school speech and language pathologist twice a month, attended by around 10 children who are also Library users. Creativity Workshops contribute to self-confidence, certainty and socialization of dyslexic children in everyday life.

Project of assistance with book reports is being carried out at the City and University Library in Osijek since 2009. It involves a joined effort of librarians and children in writing a book report, i.e. a short essay on a literary text they have read. The programme takes place once a week with a participation of 2-5 children, Library users. This kind of specific help in doing homework contributes to the reputation of the libraries among the children and young adults.

It creates a habit of visiting a library and encouraging the children and young adults to read and write – to learn.

Project *Shhhh, we're Reading!* is being held at the Rijeka City Library since 2011 and represents exercises of reading aloud for the 1st grade elementary students. The program is designed for children with reading difficulties. Reading aloud takes place once a week for a group of 12 children. The programme is financed by the City of Rijeka and the Library. The exercises include guided reading followed by oral and written language games, exercises for attention, memory and exercises of comprehending what they have read. There is a special book collection for beginners learning to read and professional materials for their parents on speech development, language and expression. Brochures are also available with tips for parents and a list of recommended literature for children and parents. Thanks to this programme children of early school age with difficulties in reading can practice in groups which results in increased interest for books.

Project *Quiz for Children with Dyslexia* is one of the programmes for reading and writing book reports. It takes place at the City Library Juraj Sizgoric in Sibenik since 2006. It is organized 3 to 4 times a year for 8 dyslexic children. The programme is financed by the Library and is accomplished in cooperation with speech and language pathologist from the Centre for Education Subicevac. Children are divided into 2 groups and compete in topics of school book reading assignments created by librarians. In the second part of the workshop children fill out a quiz on a computer individually and make a picture book. These segments contribute to the socialization of children and young adults with dyslexia and increase the number of Library users.

Project consists of *organized tours for dyslexic students of Industrial-Trade Secondary School* to the City Library in Slatina. Tours have been organized since 2011 as a part of regular activities. Once a year 2-5 students visit a Library and are introduced to the Library activities they can utilize in their spare time as well as the collection of audio books. As a result, dyslexic students visit the Library on daily basis and they borrow books.

The project *Library Doors Wide Open* is held in Zagreb City Libraries network continuously since 2007 in a total of 16 branches. It is financed by the City of Zagreb and the Zagreb City Libraries network. The project promotes reading, lifelong learning and social inclusion of children with developmental disabilities and physically handicapped young adults. The project includes Storytelling and Imaginative Session – programmes (with elements of bibliotherapy) for inclusion of children with hearing and speech impairment, reading and writing difficulties, into regular library programme. The project includes creativity workshops and cultural events, musical educational meetings, hand-making of tactile picture books (Cicko, 2010). In 3 of the branches (City Library of Zagreb, Sesvete Library, Vladimir Nazor Library network) part of this project is the programme - *Book Reports in a Different Way* which is held between twice a month and 2 or 3 times a year in groups of 10-25 children and young adults with reading and writing difficulties. The project *Library Doors Wide Open* includes a new programme Zita Reads „*I am Your Dog, Read to me Aloud!*“ in City Library of Zagreb. Reading is intended for the children up to 12 years of age and especially for those with speaking and emotional difficulties, reading and writing difficulties, attention and concentration difficulties, fear of public appearance, fear of dogs, a need to be with a dog. Read to Dog helps a child's love for reading by sharing books and facing dyslexia, because dogs do not criticize your reading, spelling and behavior. Dogs are our best friends.

Conclusion

Promotion of reading is a great challenge in an era of communication skills that are based on speed and therefore on following the speech as well as speech and images. Having these strains of everyday communication, encouraging to communicate by reading and writing is quite demanding in the context of dyslexic readers.

Dyslexia is being studied in Croatia (systematically, according to the features of language) for the last 20 years. Scientific knowledge of dyslexia gives a significant contribution to prevention of consequences of dyslexia among citizens of all ages, from preschool to working population.

Considerable part of contribution for dyslexic people is accomplished in public libraries in the last 10 years, thanks to cooperation among librarians and speech and language therapists. Projects for motivation to read for people with reading and writing difficulties are developed by Croatian Library Association in cooperation with Croatian Dyslexia Association.

This paper describes projects for motivation to read for people with reading and writing difficulties in Croatian public libraries as an important part in development of the national strategy for promotion of culture of reading among citizens of all ages. In Croatian public libraries in 2013 there were 317 projects for motivation to read conducted in all 20 counties and the City of Zagreb. The majority of projects (219) were intended for children and young people, which is 69% of a total number of projects for motivation to read in Croatia. Joined programmes (51) aimed to all the age groups are in second place and make 16 % of the projects. The smallest number of projects (47) is aimed to adults which is 15 % of the projects. Out of a total number (317) of projects only 10 of them (3,2 %), are aimed to dyslexic, but only for children and young adults with reading and writing difficulties, i.e. learning. They were carried out in 8 counties and the City of Zagreb which represent near 43 % of counties in Croatia. Out of a total number (219) of programmes for motivation to read for children and young adults in Croatian public libraries, programmes for children and young adults with dyslexia (10) represent less than 5 % of the programmes.

Most of the activities carried out by librarians and speech and language pathologists in Croatia focused on changes in understanding dyslexia. Projects that support these changes are still partial solutions, but they can help in providing certain forms of assistance and support for persons with dyslexia and at risk of dyslexia. These projects can initiate changes to the relevant legislation - the basis for the realization of the rights of people with dyslexia.

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