**Grundtvig workshop**

“Spelling needn't be hard work”

**THE DEVELOPMENT OF A LITERACY MODEL**

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# Introduction

Do you believe spelling words is difficult? Well, it shouldn't be.

Nowadays, coursebooks focus too much on grammar and vocabulary, but they neglect the teaching of spelling. Yet, it is exactly the spelling skill which separates good writers from the poorly literate.

In this workshop we set the new starting points in literacy and developed an innovative model for adult literacy, having spelling as its main focus. In achieving this we started by finding the possible reasons for poor literacy and studying the theoretical background, which was presented by the Slovenian university professors who specialise in teaching methodology. It was exactly Slovenian researchers who were among the first to point out the importance of including the teaching of spelling into the literacy process and thus created a specialised coursebook, which was also presented in the workshop.

The main elements of the new model originate from the above mentioned research, as well as from our own study of the differences in literacy acquisition between children and adults. In this process, we also included the factor of discrepancy between sounds and letters. The newly created model takes into account the features of the mother tongue, and the second language perspective. In addition to the general guidelines for a successful literacy programme, we prepared a set of specific methods for individual languages. Namely, each language has its own specialities, therefore, the methodology used in teaching it should reflect that.

Furthermore, we prepared guidelines on methodological approaches for the literacy course adaptation, as one of the main obstacles in the process of literacy may be found in the inappropriateness of the available literature and coursebooks, which are not based on modern approaches.

The workshop was, therefore, intended for the experts in the field of literacy, be it the researchers or the teachers involved in adult education.

The workshop lasted for 5 days, starting on Monday, 31st March 2014 and ending on Friday, 4th April 2014. The arrival of the participants was scheduled for 30th March 2014 and the departure planned on 5th April 2014. The accommodation during the workshop was provided in the nearby Hotel Evropa\*\*\*\* in Celje.

# About Grundtvig workshops

Grundtvig Workshops enable adults to participate in learning events taking place in another European country participating in the Lifelong Learning Programme (LLP). Workshops are funded with support from the European Commission, therefore they are free of charge for the participants (all the costs are covered by the workshop organizers).

Since 2013, the Workshop Action provides training to Adult Education staff working on literacy issues exclusively. The objectives are to give present and future teachers and staff the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the European dimension in teaching adults with literacy problems, to enhance their knowledge of other European countries' education systems and their provision of adult literacy and to improve the specific skills they require to teach literacy skills to adults.

# Target group of the literacy model

The experts and experienced teachers have identified the following target groups as the group of people in the population in the society which is most likely to have problems with poor literacy skills:

* **Poor people:**

They are likely to originate from background which does not offer enough support for literacy skills development. Compared to many other factors, these people may lack the finances to visit museums, theatres, read newspapers daily or have access to modern means of technology, which may lead to poorer functional literacy skills and the lack of opportunities for their development.

* **Young adults:**

Lacking experience and practice, these people, when faced with other problems in society, may have poor literacy skills. Among other factors are the constantly evolving technological advances which make them use language in a less productive way and for more informal instances. That often leads youngsters to paying less attention to correct grammar and spelling mistakes.

* **Uneducated people:**

Be it people with low education or people with poor computer literacy skills, they are a group of people who need special attention and an approach designed to meet their individual needs in order to make the literacy and language learning and acquisition a pleasant and effective experience.

Special attention should be brought to people living in the rural areas, as they have less opportunities for learning due to the obstacles their geographical location presents.

The teachers also pointed out that not only poorly educated adults present a threat in this respect; also their children may be prone to having poor literacy skills.

* **Minorities:**

Social attitudes to minorities are often not favourable and the disadvantages this group of people is faces with are usually so big that they simple cannot be tackled by an individual alone. Therefore systematic help must be provided to them in order to improve the literacy of this target group. By minorities, experts have immigrants, young mothers, special ethnic groups and prisoners, as well as disabled people, refugees and asylum seekers in mind.

* **The elderly people:**

The average educational level an individual reaches is increasing each year, consequently literacy is getting higher and higher in general. However, it is the elderly people that are left behind in this respect as in the time of their schooling, educational requirements were lower, curriculum was more loosely set and the level of literacy was lower. In the modern age functional and computer literacy are of crucial importance for basic everyday communication, therefore some programs for this target group need to be introduced to tackle this issue.

* **Victims of bad education experience:**

The teachers also emphasised that school itself as an institution may not provide a fruitful environment for everyone. Nowadays we are faced with an increase in conditions involving the lack of concentration, sensory abilities, as well as special emotional problems which may be found with many students, which makes the school an inappropriate place for acquiring literacy if no adaptations to the programme are made in order to help them overcome problems they are facing.

The listed target groups should therefore be taken into consideration when planning new educational schemes for improving literacy and education curriculum in this field.

# Research questions of the literacy model

## Which are the main reasons for poor adult functional literacy?

Following are the main reasons for poor results adults achieve on tests measuring functional literacy, based on the experience of the teachers:

* Too much information
* Too many working hours
* Getting literacy programmes only in school
* Lack of motivation or purpose for studying
* Immediate need
* Soft skills
* Poor or discouraging social background
* Not reading books
* Low number of study years
* Cultural differences background
* Disabilities (dyslexia)
* Administrative reasons (inaccessibility of schools)
* Age limit for adult students
* Shame, embarrassment
* Inappropriate (narrow) definition of teaching methods, old fashioned teaching methods that don’t encourage students to study
* Focusing only on some aspects of literacy when in fact literacy is a complex notion – visual, verbal, numerical…
* Irrelevance, needs may change
* Poverty (poor opportunity of education)
* Mentality (wrong models, wrong priorities)
* Different cultural background (ethnic minorities)
* Having the idea that being literate is irrelevant nowadays since there are different ways of transmitting the message without being well spoken or able to write well

The above listed possibilities may be transformed into a **questioner** for discovering the reasons of poor literacy abilities when working with individuals. This is of critical importance as getting individuals literate may be an approach which has an effect only on a single person, however to be able to apply systematic teaching of literacy the origin of the problem of poor literacy must be eliminated in order to introduce a change.

## How to motivate people for gaining further education?

The teachers brainstormed some ideas on how to motivate potential candidates of educational programmes and to persuade them literacy is an important factor contributing to their success or failure. Below are the ideas which were discussed in the workshop:

* Provide real life opportunities
  + Job makers
  + Virtual firm
  + Real firms get involved
* Practice in relation to education
* Elderly fearing to lose jobs may be motivated by employees or a guarantee of permanent work
* Possibility of participating in individual projects
* Multy-sensory approach (MI, NLP)
* Personalize the needs
* Economic motivation
* Upgrading, updating material
* Phonics + Gestalt + whole language possible = 3 methods to combine
* Allowing, encouraging students to select their own reading texts and targets
* Selecting engaging texts, choosing texts dealing with real life events
* Reading to them
* Exposing the diverse forms of literacy
* Getting them interested in the content
* Explain to them how their language skills will help them in the future
* It will help them get a better social status
* Giving learners to choose what they want to read
* Helping students become aware of the fact that each and every one of them is literate in some way
* Safe education environments
* Access to resources
* Giving positive examples
* Using creative, interactive methods

# Aspects of different language issues represented in the literacy model

## Romanian language learners:

### Issues of the Romanian language:

Identified problems in the acquisition of literacy in this language are focused around the following letters or sounds with which students tend to have the most problems with according to the experienced teachers:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| ă | ə |
| â, î | ? |
| ș | ʃ |
| ț | tz |

Examples of difficult words:

* bri**dg**e
* ju**dg**e

Another problematic area may be found in the following groups of letters:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Ce | Ci |
| Che | Chi |
| Ge | Gi |
| Ghe | Ghi |

### Suggested activity:

Look at the following words and tell if they have an <s> or <ș> included:

* soare, sare, șină, sincer, soarce, sine, șal, șuncă
* ușor, așa, preș, golaș, gulaș, mosor

### Issues of Romanians learning English:

Students tend to have problems pronouncing the English sound /θ/ and do not put the tongue in the right position when pronouncing it.

### Suggested activity:

Teachers suggest doing an exercise in which students put their hand on the mouth and start pronouncing words that include this sound in an exaggerated way so that they try to put their tongue in the right position and they feel that with their palm on their face.

Another example is the pronunciation of /ð/ sound in the case of which students touch their throat with their hand to feel the vibrations this sound produces.

Example of the words for pronunciation: than, that, though, think…

## Latvian language learners:

### Issues of the Latvian language

There are some different letters in this language that are not present in the English alphabet, which may cause problems when learning this language. These are:

* ǧ, □, č, š, ž
* double letters: dz, dž
* ā, ē, ī, ū

Some sounds may have more versions of pronunciation, such as <o>, which may be [oƱ] or [o].

### Issues of Latvians learning English:

Similarly to other languages, for Latvians one of the most difficult English sounds to learn are /θ/ and /ð/ for the <th> spelling. Students usually pronounce it as [s, ɪ, d].

### Suggested activity:

For this issue the following activity was suggested:

* Divide students into pairs, ask them to put their palms next to their faces, touching their noses and chins
* Tell them to move their tongues so that it touches their palms with the tip of the tongue.
* Ask them to pronounce a list of words with these two sounds.
* Ask them to show their palms to each other to see how wet they are.
* The best student (with the wettest palm) is announced to be an expert in pronunciation of these two sounds.

## Bulgarian language learners:

### Issues of the Bulgarian language:

This language has many letters in the alphabet which do not exist in English and students have problems with.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English letters | Bulgarian letters |
| b [b] | [v] |
| c [s], [k] | [s] |
| g [dz], [g] | [d] |
| m [m] | [t] |
| n [n] | [p] |
| y [j] | [u] |

### Issues of Bulgarians learning English:

Therefore non-existent letters are <f, h, I, j, e, q, r, s, t, w, x, z> and non-existent sounds are /θ, ð, æ/ and diphthongs, short versus long vowels. Teachers find it difficult to teach these 12 letters for which there are no graphemes or symbols in the Bulgarian language.

The contrast between the two languages also presents some difficulties when it comes to the mirror effect:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| [r] R | [ja] ᴙ |
| [b] b | [d] d |

### Suggested activity:

Teachers suggest raising awareness of the differences between the two languages and point out similarities which may ease the process of language learning.

## Lithuanian language learners:

### Issues of the Lithuanian language:

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Translation | Correct slepping | Wrong spelling |
| chair | kėdė ✓ | kede 🗶 |
| mouse | pelė ✓ | pėle 🗶 |
| brother | broils ✓ | bruolis 🗶 |
| Black | juodas ✓ | jodas 🗶 |

Example sentence:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English | Lithuanian |
| I am a mother. | Aš esu mama. ✓ |
| I love mother. | Aš myliu mamą. ✓  Aš myliu mama. 🗶 |
| I love … | Aš myliu … ✓  Aš miliu … 🗶 |

Old words spelling:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Correct spelling | Wrong spelling |
| Ačiū ✓ | Ačių 🗶 |
| Ąžuolas | Ažuolas |
| Ąsotis | Asotis |
| grᶖžti | Grižti |
| Šąla | šala |

### Issues of Lithuanians learning English:

Students tend to mix letters of the two languages. Since it is easier for them to hear sounds and associate them with English letters they misspell certain words by using English orthography, as the following instances exemplify:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| English letters | Correct Lithuanian letters |
| W | V |
| a | □ |

## Hungarian language learners:

### Issues of the Hungarian language:

There are some letters in the Hungarian language which differ from the alphabet in English. These are: <gy, ty, ny, u, ú, ü, ȕ, ö, ȍ, sz, s, zs, ly>.

### Issues of Hungarians learning English:

There are some sounds which are missing in the Hungarian language, but are present in the English language, such as:

* /θ/ for <th> spelling
* /ð/ for <th> spelling
* /η/
* /w/

### Suggested activity:

Students often make fun of people having difficulties pronouncing certain words, therefore we use this as an opportunity to joke with our own language, by instructing students to pronounce words in their own language by using /s/ sound for the <sz> spelling. In this manner they would more easily remember that this sound requires special attention when pronouncing it.

Examples of such words:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Hungarian words | English words |
| Szic | Chair |
| Szoba | Room |
| Szalag | Ribbon |
| Szombat | Saturday |

## Czech language learners:

### Issues of the Czech language:

The language has specific letters which cannot be found in English. These are:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Czech letter | English sound |
| <š> | [ʃ] |
| <č> | [tʃ] |
| <ž> | [ȝ] |
| <ř> |  |
| <á> | [a:] |
| <í> | [i:] |
| <ú> | [u:] |

### Suggested activity:

* Display a picture of a horse and a bird.
* Groups of words: words are on cards instead of a list. Words focus on two sounds, for example, [Ɔ:] and [з:]. Students must put words in two columns according to the sound they hear.
* Check the two groups and go through the list again and let students guess the right pronunciation.
* Give students time to think of similar examples with the two sounds.
* You can also ask them to write a story with those words, they might even write some rhymes.

### Issues of Czechs learning English:

Students have a problem distinguishing between the forms of the verb *win*.

### Suggested activity:

In order to differentiate between <win> and <won> a story might help them memorise the spelling:

* The one who wins the competition is number 1, which is spelled as <one>, so also the verb <won> is spelled with the same letter <o>.

## Croatian language learners:

### Issues of the Croatian language:

Certain sounds in Croatian usually cause problems: /č, ć, nj, lj, dž, đ, ž/. Here are some examples to illustrate the issue:

* Sound /ć/: ćup, već, ćelav, moć, voće, povrće
* Sound /č/: čekati, čaroban, čarapa, čist, čuvati, čovjek

### Suggested activity:

Usually people do not distinguish between these two sounds, which are also represented by different letters. An exercise with gaps which students must fill with the diacritical symbol representing letters <č> or <ć> are useful. The teacher reads the words and students put diacritic signs as heard to practice listening and spelling at the same time.

Examples:

* Cup, cuk, vec, cekati
* Moc, voce, povrce, sveca, cist, cuvati, covjek
* Srecko (Croatian version of the name) / Srecko (Slovenian version of the name)

# Possible methodological approaches in the literacy model

## Study circles

As one example of good practice, **study circles** proved to be a very effective, yet still fairly unknown method for informal ways of studying.

Therefore, participants suggested and formed ideas for study circles which would help increase the literacy level in a variety of ways.

### Study circle example: Using songs in ELT