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[Intergenerational Reading

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Abstract: It is somehow traditional a grandma reads to small children and a grandpa tells stories, but in real life these are rare opportunities nowadays. There are some projects encouraging elder people to read to children in kindergartens and in public libraries. There are more and more examples that young people read to elder people in retirement homes. All intergenerational reading possibilities could deepen the enjoyment of loud interpersonal reading.

The paper presents one of the Slovene projects of the intergenerational reading that tends to bring together young people and grown-up, elder people reading the same young adults literature. There is a growing number of «intergenerational» novels, picture-books, poetry etc. dedicated to readers of all ages, and on the other hand aging population is increasing (as everywhere in the developed world). We need to know and understand each other, so maybe books, reading and exchanging thoughts and opinions can build one of the bridges among us.

Keywords: intergenerational reading, young people, adults, „cross-over” books

Introduction

The United Nations (UN) proclaimed 1999 to be the year of older persons, which took place under the slogan „Towards a society of all ages”. Same year, for the first time we planned a national project in Slovenia by which we wanted to link the young(est) and old(est) generations with reading and telling fairy tales, stories and poems. A number of different groups for intergenerational creative activities after reading were also created (art, music, dance, cooking etc.), in which there was an exchange of enthusiasm, knowledge and experience. All forms of intergenerational socialising were certainly also important, e.g. social games, walks and excursions. Experiences were exceptional and, in view of their intergenerational linkage for reading in various environments, they were more or less lively but always according to the wishes and needs of people in a particular environment. Those responsible for intergenerational reading are mentors in kindergartens, in the lowest years of primary school, in public libraries, pensioners’ societies and homes for the elderly etc. However, it seems that given two trends in modern times, the drop in interest in reading (mainly among the young) and increased aging of the population in developed societies, it is worth encouraging intergenerational reading more strongly.

Plan

Therefore, in the school or academic year 2014/2015, the Slovenian Reading Badge Society – ZPMS¹ in cooperation with the The Slovenian Book Agency² planned a project **Intergenerational reading** (=Intergenerational

¹ **The Reading Badge** was founded in the 1960/61 school year and has developed into a strong movement for the development of reading, book and literature culture throughout the Slovene cultural space (so not just in Slovenia but also among Slovenes across the border and those living abroad or emigrants). The Slovenian Reading Badge Society – ZPMS (www.bralnaznacka.si) organizes and directs the work of mentors of reading and young readers from the pre-school to secondary school period (we consider that each year about 140,000 readers read for the Reading Badge; in recent years more than 70% of all primary school pupils have taken part, guided by 6,500 mentors; we do not have exact data for other groups of readers); for more than fifteen years adults have also been reading for the Reading Badge and we also encourage intergenerational reading. Reading mentors prepare a reading list and throughout the (school) year discuss with readers the books read (they read 3–7 books each season, depending on age). The Reading Badge for children and young people starts each school year on September 19th (the birthday and day of death of the Slovenian writer France Bevek) and finishes after April 2nd (International Children's Book Day). The basic questions of the Reading Badge with all age levels and in all reading groups are: the choice of books for reading (recommended lists) and the forms, methods and ways of work suitable for various age groups of readers. After 56 years, the Reading Badge has become a way of reading for all generations and is a recognisable trademark, which in 2011 received the highest

linkage with literary works intended for teenagers and adults), with the desire of linking groups of young readers from secondary schools, the last three years of primary school and adult readers, in the same place, thus in the same general library, in the same school or students with older people in the place (or near vicinity) of their place of permanent residence. We invited mentors of reading circles of young readers, mentors of reading circles of adults/older readers, librarians and coordinators of reading (for the Reading Badge) to cooperate.

Central Aims

The main aims of the project were:

- to encourage intergenerational reading of literature,
- to promote high quality Slovene literature for the young from the collections „The Golden Reader” and „Growing Up with a Book”, above all so-called „cross-over” texts, which represent the corps of multi-title literary works,
- to sensitise both age groups of readers to themes and problems dealt with in these literary works, comparison of similar texts, exchange of

state honour, the Gold Order for Service and is a real history of multi-disciplinary activity in the wide sphere of the reading culture.

² **The Slovenian Book Agency** is a body governed by public law established by the Government of the Republic of Slovenia. In accordance with the Act Establishing the Public Agency of the Republic of Slovenia for Books, the field of work includes: the provision of conditions for the publication of books and magazines in the fields of literature and the humanities and conditions for the work of authors in the fields of literature and the humanities; translations of works by Slovenian authors; international cooperation in the field of books; literary festivals and events; the development of the bookshop network; the development of reading culture; book, author and reading promotion; the coordination of all the links in the book chain; additional professional training in the field of books; the public lending right and computerisation in the field of books.

The Agency carries out professional, development and executive tasks related to the implementation of strategic documents and directives in the field of books, as well as activities promoting development in the field of books and other tasks in the public interest provided by law. Their purpose is to provide lasting conditions for the development of the field of books and make professional and independent decisions on the selection of programmes and projects financed from the national budget. The Slovenian Book Agency was founded on the principles of providing conditions for high-quality creativity in the fields of literature and the humanities and conditions for an increased accessibility of Slovenian books, increased awareness of the importance of books and reading in the development of the individual and society, and greater international recognition of Slovenian authors in the fields of literature and the humanities (<http://www.jakrs.si/en/about-us>).

opinions on literature, comparison of personal experiences (also awakening memories), to weave inter-generational exchange and linkage.

Encouraging intergenerational reading in the widest sense is already planned in the *Recommendation of the European Parliament and Council* (Priporočilo..., 2006) in which among social and state competences (sixth competence) is stressed inter-culturalism as a means developing a cooperative society of all generations; the eighth competence defines cultural awareness and expression. We linked the recommended competences in our project through the intergenerational exchange of opinions on high quality texts read.

„Cross-over” literature on motif-thematic, structural and linguistic levels exceeds the boundaries of literature for the young as this is defined in Slovenia (i.e., to 15 years of age), since according to the age limit such literary work is intended for readers in the secondary school period and later. The trend of studying this particular type of literature is most often called *cross-over literature* or *young adult literature*, thus transitional literature or literature for young adults.

We offered for reading books for the young from the collection „The Golden Reader” of the Slovenian Reading Badge Society of Slovenia – ZPMS (12 titles) and from the project „Growing Up with a Book” of the Slovenian Book Agency (6 titles); both collections bring «intergenerational» books. All are original Slovene books; we present them briefly with some content keywords:

Fiction books:

- **novels for young people**

Bevc, Cvetka: *Desetka/Ten*. Ljubljana: Arsem, 2011, 157 p.
(youth, adult, friendship, school)

Dim, Dušan: *Distorzija/Distortion*. Ljubljana: Cankarjeva založba, 2005. (Najst), 319 p.
(music, adolescents, growing up, punk)

Golob, Tadej: *Zlati zob/Gold Tooth*. Ilustr. Ciril Horjak. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2011. (Knjižnica Sinjega galeba; 331), 314 p.
(alpinism, company, mountains, criminals, Slovenia, killing, treasures)

Karlovšek, Igor: *Gimnazijec/High School Student*. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2004. (Žamet), 368 p.
(boys, injustice, violence, offenders, correctional centres, killing)

Möderndorfer, Vinko: *Kot v filmu/Like in a Movie*. Ilustr. Damijan Stepančič. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2013, 236 p.
(family, boys, divorce, adolescents, fathers, growing up, pressures)

Pregl, Slavko: *Geniji brez hlač/Geniuses without Trousers*. Ilustr. Gašper Rus. Radovljica: Didakta, 2009, 240 p.
(boys, adolescents, journalism, growing up)

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- Štampe Žmavc, Bina: *Cesar in roža/The Emperor and the Flower*. Ilustr. Alenka Sottler. Dob pri Domžalah: Miš, 2009, 76 p.
(nine contemporary fairy tale texts, love)
- Velikonja, Irena: *Poletje na okenski polici/ Summer on a window shelf*. Ljubljana: DZS, 2006. (Dober dan, roman!; 32), 196 p.
(girls, family, love, divorce, mothers, adolescents, growing up, holidays, summer)
- Vidmar, Janja: *Otroci sveta/Children of the World*. Spr. beseda Vlasta Nussdorfer, Milena Zupančič. Fotogr. Benka Pulko. Ljubljana: Undara studio, 2013, 135 p.
(photographs, introductions, talking about books, diversity, children, childhood, multiculturalism)
- Vidmar, Janja: *Pink/Pink*. Ilustr. Urh Sobočan. Spr. beseda Dragica Haramija. Radovljica: Didakta, 2008, 139 p.
(girls, family, Yugoslavia, Maribor, adolescence, growing up, Slovenia, socialism, modernity, 2nd half of the 20th century, subculture, Tito – Josip Broz (1892–1980))
- Vojnović, Goran: *Jugoslavija, moja dežela/Yugoslavia, My Country*. Ljubljana: Študentska založba, 2012, 281 p.
(Knjižna zbirka Beletrina)

• poetry

- Pavček, Tone: *Pavček.doc/Pavček.doc: za domišljjsko potovanje in domače branje: izbor poezije*. Ilustr. Peter Ciuha. Spr. beseda Tone Pavček, Slavko Pregl, Jure Šink. Izbr. in ur. Tone Pavček. Ljubljana: Rokus Klett, 2007, 223 p.
(anthology, biography)
- Rozman, Andrej: *Izbrane Rozine v akciji: pesmi za odrasle od 13. leta naprej/Select Roža's Poems in Action: Poems for Adults from 13 Years of Age*. Ilustr. Svetlan Junaković. Ljubljana: Mladinska knjiga, 2010, (Sončnica), 103 p.
(parody, intertextuality, nonsense)
- Vegri, Saša: *Naročje kamenčkov: petinsedemdeset izbranih pesmi Saše Vegri/An Armful of Pebbles: Seventy-five Selected poems by Saša Vegri*. Ilustr. Damijan Stepančič. Spr. beseda Igor Saksida. Dob pri Domžalah: Miš, 2009, 132 p.
(anthology for children and adolescents and poems for adults)

Non-fiction books:

- Cerar, Miro: *Osnove demokracije/Basics of Democracy*. Ilustr. Izar T. Lunaček. Ljubljana: Društvo Bralna značka Slovenije – ZPMS, 2012. (Zlata bralka, zlati bralec), 165 p.
(democracy, responsibility, politics)
- Ilich, Iztok: *Pota knjige/ Paths of the book*. Ljubljana: Društvo Bralna značka Slovenije – ZPMS, 2012. (Zlata bralka, zlati bralec), 295 p.
- Noordung.doc: *Herman Potočnik, 1892–1929/Noordung.doc: Herman Potočnik, 1892–1929*. Avtorji: Miha Mohor, dr. Dušan Petrač, dr. Marko Bavdaž, dr. Sandi Sitar. Ljubljana: Društvo Bralna značka Slovenije – ZPMS (Zlata bralka, zlati bralec) and Rokus: Klett, 2009.
- Trubar, Primož: *Primož Trubar.doc/Primož Trubar.doc: for imaginative travelling and home reading: selection of extracts from works*. Ilustr. Peter Ciuha. Spr. beseda Kozma Ahačič, Milena Mileva Blažič. Ljubljana: Rokus Klett, 2008, 159 p.
(books, Primož Trubar (1508–1586), Protestantism, Slovenia)

We distributed books to readers for free; however, not all of them subsequently reported about them at the joint reading meetings. Group leaders could also enrich their own libraries with the donated books (two books). Group leaders wrote reports about each reading meeting. In the contribution they presented the results of the first (2014/2015) and second (2015/2016) school/academic years.

Course of IG Reading in Groups, Which Can Be Divided into Sets

Individual inter-generational groups (hereinafter IG) throughout Slovenia were formed on the initiative of the project. The groups were very varied (pupils of the last 3 years of primary school and teachers, including pensioners; pupils of the last 3 years of primary school and older readers from local clubs; pupils of the last 3 years of primary school, parents and teachers, students and professors). All groups were visited by the project coordinator, in almost all she also chaired the first meeting or she presented the project and selection of books. In two cases, the central library took over coordination between schools and library units, two IG groups agreed on a single joint meeting, some groups chose books for one or two meetings that were not from our selection. Some groups only evaluated their reading during the last meeting and agreed on how to continue cooperation in the project.

In the school year 2014/2015, 11 groups were formed, which met several times: they had 50 meetings in which young readers read 341 books and adult readers read 437 books. In the 2015/2016 school year there were 21 groups: they had 72 meetings, in which young readers read 604 books and adult readers read 652 books. There was therefore an increase in the second school year, but last year groups met on average 4–5 times, in 2016 year 3–4 times (groups meet but do not read books from our selection, they organise IG meetings only once or twice, on special occasions (Night of Books etc.)).

Table 1. Number of IG groups, their meetings and the books they read

School year	Groups	Meetings	Books Young readers	Books Adult readers
2014/2015	11	50	341	437
2015/2016	21 (91% increase)	72 (44% increase)	604 (77% increase)	652 (49% increase)

Source: author’s work

All groups were satisfied with the intergenerational exchange of opinions about the books read. Almost all groups wanted readers to keep the books; some IG groups proposed that certain books be donated to reading groups

(schools, libraries etc.) so that they can be used several times; some IG groups decided that they will add their own choice to the selection of books offered but they will read them in IG groups.

Intergenerational Reading in Kranj Municipal Library

In both school years, ten reading groups of adults and older readers took part in the project who have been meeting for reading for several years. In order for these groups to be included in the IG project, they only also involved young readers in one of their meetings and discussed with them the chosen books for the young. In both years there were meetings of eight groups (three groups of older readers combined, in order to discuss with a larger group of young people). In 2015 43 young and 69 adult readers took part; they chose 6 titles from the selection of books. Next year 39 young and 49 adult readers took part; they chose 4 titles from the selection of books (this year the mentor was absent during two months). Intergenerational reading in Kranj Municipal Library groups were involved in the project „To Read and Chat Wisely”, for which the library received the international award for innovative promotion of literacy (IDEC Award, 2015).

Adult and older readers in these reading groups were pleased that they had read books for the young and exchanged opinions about them with young people. The contemporary books for the young in the IG project seem to them to be high quality, and they also wish such meetings in the future.

Students of the Faculty of Pedagogy and Faculty of Philosophy of the University of Maribor Read in Homes For the Elderly

Within the context of lecturing on the Reading Badge, we presented the project and books for the young intended for intergenerational reading to students of primary school teaching, preschool education and Slovene studies. In 2015 25 students decided to take part, they read in 15 homes for the elderly, individual elderly people and small groups. They chose the books based on their own interests but taking into account the wishes and above all the capacities of the elderly people. The students quickly found that shorter prose texts and texts with which the elderly people could identify with their memories are more suitable for reading to such people. This was reading out loud to persons who can no longer read themselves or who simply enjoy being read to aloud and in chatting after the reading. The reading has to be adapted to the listener, which is often tiring for the reader. The majority of students read to the elderly people during the weekends, sometimes several times a week.

It appears from the collected reports that both the clients and readers were satisfied, talking about valuable experiences that they obtained; they wish to continue voluntary reading to such persons in the future. In 2016 45 students read in the same 15 homes (in the regions Štajerska and Prekmurje) and their experiences are similar; both the clients and readers were very satisfied.

Conclusion

IG groups in all three categories or their coordinators reported concurrently – on special forms – about the books read, on the exchange of opinions between young and adult readers, including their impressions and comments.

The main aims of the project were achieved. Almost all participants were very happy to cooperate in the project next year, too. Some of them were satisfied with the experience gained in intergenerational reading and wish to continue it but mainly with books of their own choice.

And one very fine statement of an older reader: „It was interesting to exchange opinions on the same story with a young reader, and it is also fine to know each other now and when we meet on the street or in a shop not only to say hello but also to chat a little”.

The results of IG reading in terms of gender are very similar to the findings on the cooperation of readers of the two sexes in the reading badge for adults. We observe more than ever adult or older readers at meetings of the IG groups. Among the aims of the project we did not especially stress increasing interest in reading among young readers, though of course we wished this. Similarly, although it was not particularly highlighted as an aim, we also wished a higher share of male readers, both young and adult or older; only around 10% are now included in the project. All coordinators of groups are women, also only female students voluntarily read in homes for the elderly. Perhaps we could strive for both in the next school year.

References

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Międzypokoleniowe czytanie

ABSTRAKT: Czytająca wnukom babcia i dziadek opowiadający historie wydają się tradycyjnym obrazkiem, ale we współczesnym świecie takie sytuacje zdarzają się coraz rzadziej. Istnieją pewne projekty zachęcające starsze osoby do czytania dzieciom w przedszkolach i w bibliotekach publicznych, jednocześnie możemy obserwować coraz więcej przykładów, kiedy młodzi ludzie czytają starszym w domach późnej starości. Wszystkie międzypokoleniowe możliwości czytania mogłyby pogłębić radość z interpersonalnego czytania na głos.

W artykule przedstawiono jeden ze słoweńskich projektów poświęcony międzypokoleniowemu czytaniu, którego celem jest zbliżenie młodych ludzi i dorosłych, starszych osób poprzez czytanie tej samej literatury młodzieżowej. Coraz większa liczba "międzypokoleniowych" powieści, książek obrazkowych, poezji itp. Poświęcana jest czytelnikom w każdym wieku, a z drugiej strony rośnie starzejąca się populacja obywateli (jak wszędzie w rozwiniętym świecie). Musimy poznać i zrozumieć siebie nawzajem, więc być może książki, czytanie oraz wymiana myśli i poglądów mogą wspierać budowę relacji między oboma grupami.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: międzypokoleniowe czytanie, młodzież, dorośli, międzypokoleniowe książki