

School libraries in national minority schools

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Abstract: The world of education is changing, and changes affect all its components. Libraries operating in the education system see their role through a support of the education process they are tied to. By transforming their services, modern libraries meet the growing educational requirements while simultaneously taking on an increasingly significant place in the field of education. In the past, libraries have focused on their funds and their size as a measure of their own quality and importance. Today, given the needs and requirements of the contemporary environment, educational orientation is necessary for all libraries, especially libraries operating in the education system. This paper deals with the importance and impact of school libraries providing support to the education of pupils of national minorities' schools. The paper deals specifically with the school libraries of the Italian national minority operating within the educational system of the Republic of Croatia.

The aim of this paper is to show the activity of school libraries in Italian national minority schools and their importance for the creation of a sound intercultural cooperation and life in the majority community.

Keywords: school library, education, national minority libraries, role of libraries

1. Introduction

Contemporary society in terms of democratic and every other development, as well as technological progress, has been going through rapid and dynamic changes. First and foremost, these changes are reflected in approaches and methods of teaching, new sources of information and knowledge and, ultimately, new literacies. Due to such changes, education is subject to constant review and scrutiny. We can see how numerous problems of contemporary society are also reflected in education. In this respect we have environmental education, market education, education for peace and democracy, education for a multicultural society, etc. In such circumstances it is needless to point out the importance of education and the significance of the influence that can be derived from an average educated population that is at the same time the subject and the object of all these big and crucial changes.

It is of utmost importance to be aware that we should invest in education and that this investment will be returned through sufficient knowledge and skills in

using information and technology, even when other resources are substantially or very limited. Today we always emphasize, without exception, that the young generation (who have learned how to learn, how to use sources of information and knowledge, and who are both informationally and computer literate) after completing school or studies with a specific structure and quality of knowledge, actively take part in the social and production system in the following 40 years or more.

The indispensable social function of education is to enable democracy and, consequently, better cooperation among people and between nations. True democracy is not possible without educated citizens. Since the modern world is globally integrated, the problems have a global character. The issue of education of national minorities within the education system of the domicile country and then also the school libraries of national minorities operating within the education system is subject to changes related to two professions: educators/teachers and librarians.

As the education system changes, the libraries operating within the system adjust to these changes. This new concept has opened up libraries, whose task today, beside their core activity to provide educational, cultural and information needs to their users through organized services, is to promote new literacies through active inclusion in education.

The consequences of the above on the role of librarians have been significant. Librarians owe their authority to their status of members of the school staff, and the emphasis was usually on managing the library materials and programmes to enable other participants in the curriculum to have the freedom and autonomy to efficiently devote themselves to their own subjects.

2. Models of education of national minorities in the Republic of Croatia

The secondary education system in the Republic of Croatia is organized as a three-year and four-year education system. Programmes within the system are prescribed according to the professions for which the education is provided.

Depending on the type of educational programme, there are three types of secondary schools:

- gymnasiums/grammar schools (general, language, classical, natural science and mathematics, natural sciences, experimental vocational grammar school: gymnasium of sustainable development, technical, agriculture, health, tourism and economics)
- vocational schools
- art schools (music, dance, visual arts).

Members of national minorities exercise their right to education in their language and script under the Constitution of the Republic of Croatia, the

Constitutional Law on the Rights of National Minorities and the Act on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities.

The education of national minorities is based on three models of class organization and implementation:

- **Model A** according to which all the classes are conducted in the language and script of the national minority, with the compulsory learning of the Croatian language in the same number of lessons in which the language of the minority is taught. Students have the right and obligation to learn additional content relevant to the minority community. This model of teaching is implemented in a special institution, but it can be implemented in institutions where classes are taught in the Croatian language in special departments with classes in the minority language and script.
- **Model B** according to which classes are conducted bilingually. Natural sciences are taught in Croatian, and social sciences in the language of the national minority. Classes are conducted in an institution where classes are taught in Croatian, but in special departments.
- **Model C** according to which classes are conducted in Croatian with an additional two to five school lessons devoted to teaching (nourishing) the language and culture of the national minority. Additional classes in the duration of five school lessons per week include classes of language and literature of the national minority, geography, history, music and art.

The curriculum for regular classes according to Models A, B and C is adopted by the relevant Ministry of Science, Education and Sports after obtaining the opinion of the minority associations in accordance with the Act on Education in the Language and Script of National Minorities.

The right to education extends to the right to use the script¹ (1996) and language of the minority, which in our case also means literature in the original language and script.

The right to preserve one's own national identity is guaranteed by many international documents, and the task of schools of the contemporary society is to strive to achieve this. School subjects with national characteristics are the mother tongue or Native Language and Literature, History, Geography and subjects devoted to cultural creativity of a particular national community. For our analysis we have chosen the work of school libraries of the Italian national minority, combining the contents of language and literature as well as all other subjects through correlation in classes. The library programme includes the

¹ Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities & Explanatory Note. Hague: Foundation on Inter-Ethnic Relations, 1996.

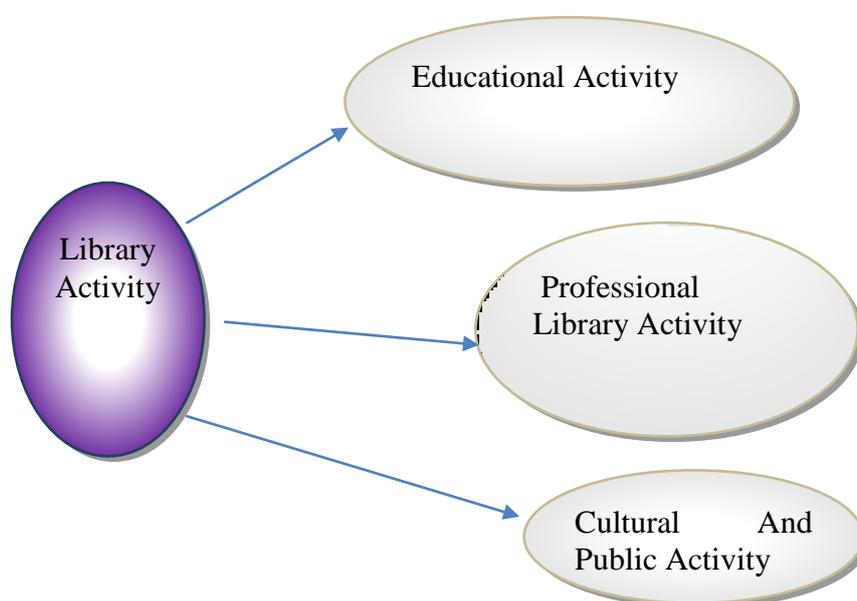
contents that provide students with knowledge of the culture of the nation they belong to, its history and geographical features of the territory they live in, and through public activity of the school and the library these contents are available and serve to promote the national minority in the community they live in. In addition to getting acquainted with the cultural particularities of their own national community, these subjects should guide students in understanding and respecting other nations and peoples, accepting differences arising from the influence of different communities and adopting basic human rights.

<i>Italian Elementary Schools/ SCUOLA ELEMENTARE ITALIANA</i>	<i>I</i>	<i>II</i>	<i>III</i>	<i>IV</i>	<i>Lower</i>	<i>V</i>	<i>VI</i>	<i>VII</i>	<i>Higher</i>	Σ	
"E. De Amicis" Buie /Buje Momiano/Momjan Verteneglio/Brtonigla	1533	1363	1222	932	491610	16	16	18	13	63	1121610
Cittanova/Novigrad	5	12	5	10	32	6	8	4	8	26	58
Dignano/Vodnjan	10	7	10	13	40	9	16	12	10	47	87
"Belvedere" Rijeka	16	15	17	14	62	11	11	6	10	38	100
"Dolac" Rijeka	22	18	20	21	81	21	16	23	16	76	157
"Gelsi" Rijeka	22	22	17	10	71	14	18	16	17	65	
"San Nicolo" Rijeka	21	19	22	21	83	18	22	18	16	74	157
"B. Parentin" Parenzo/Poreč	23	13	17	15	68	13	10	16	15	54	122
"G. Martinuzzi" Pola/Pula Gallesano/Galižana Sissano/Šišan	5032	6765	4773	506	2142210	45	41	46	31	163	409
"B. Benussi" Rovigno/Rovinj Valle/Bale	215	72	134	161	5712	21	10	16	22	69	138
"G. Galilei" Umago/Umag Bassania/Bašanija	264	223	142	152	7711	24	24	16	20	84	16111

for democracy and raising awareness of the values of national culture, especially language, art and science, and the values of multiculturalism.

The content of the library holdings depends on the school's curriculum and includes required reading in the Croatian language, and in the schools where classes are conducted in the language and script of the national minority the required reading in that language as well.

We can roughly determine the activity of the library in the following way:



Each of these activities is achieved through the tasks prescribed by the Standard. Thus, the task is defined as a programme of promoting and advancing all forms of educational work, creating learning conditions by using all sources of information and knowledge. A special part refers to encouraging reading and education programmes of information literacy for all its members, both teachers and students. In this segment, as one of the new literacies for the 21st century, libraries have been especially engaged in paving the way to lifelong learning.

The work of the library is focused on helping students how to learn, encouraging the exploratory and creative spirit as well as critical thinking, as we already mentioned in previous chapters. There is also work with all types of users on exercising their right to information and knowledge, regardless of obstacles.

The Standard also refers to the part related to working with students of national minorities, but is not prescribed in detail, rather by the phrase "the library's task is to meet the needs of the user". As a library is also a place of upbringing, it is important to encourage education for democracy by providing knowledge of the culture and art of other and different nations, and fostering and improving communication within the community.

Raising awareness of the values of native and national culture, especially languages, arts and science, by creating the conditions for interdisciplinary approach to classes through participation in school projects and stimulating the spirited atmosphere of the school, are the foundations for creating a library's work programme.

Article 7 of the Standard refers to the collaboration of librarians with teachers, associates, educators, principals and parent. This work and collaboration includes the following:

- team work on the preparation and implementation of classes and workshops
- team work on the preparation and implementation of school projects
- mentoring trainees
- taking part in the work of the Quality Team and the work on creating the school's development plan when the plan includes the school library activity, collaboration with the school councils within the school, collaboration with parents in order to improve the work of the school library.

Library programmes are within the scope of work of librarians. The structure of the programme, the management of the programme, its content and level of innovativeness depend on the knowledge, competences, skills, motivation and creativity of librarians. Thus, the expected cooperation of librarians with the school's teaching team in all subjects according to the school's curriculum will be reflected in the work of librarians and the library's holdings.

Contemporary models and strategies of learning thus become a framework for supporting the library and its programme. With meaningful and careful interaction with information sources, learning becomes a process that combines creativity, thinking, critical awareness and interpretation, thus aligning with modern educational guidelines, where the library with its programme is a new place of learning.

The school librarian should thus have a certain number of lessons within the curriculum for the realization of the library education programme. These standards still need work, but a good school librarian, as a teaching associate,

implements this programme in most schools in collaboration with primary school teachers and subject teachers.

A special programme implemented in the libraries of schools of national minorities is also a programme for adopting the values of multiculturalism. This is a programme of the national minority library that the library is especially focused on.

It is necessary to begin with informing students and teaching them to recognize the values of other nations and cultures as early as possible, and to encourage the view that diversity is a community's wealth.

There are also exhibitions, concerts and literary evenings, learning languages and scripts, and learning about customs, languages and cultures through literature and history.

Cultural and public activities of the school library also include:

- organization, preparation and implementation of cultural contents (literary and film forums, knowledge competitions, literary encounters, book presentations, art and other theme exhibitions, film and video screenings, theatre performances, music and dance performances, etc.).
- collaboration with cultural and other institutions that organize work with children and youth in leisure time (public and other libraries, archives, museums, theatres, etc.).
- encouraging integration of cultural and public activities with classes of various educational areas
- promoting cultural and historical values and specificities of both their own and other nationalities
- promoting general values and aligning social and humanist values with the goals of educational programme
- collaboration with professional associations and related institutions
- public advocacy and promotion of the school library's activities

Clearly, the role of the school library should be assessed within the framework and the vision of a contemporary school, which is most often determined by the goals it seeks to achieve.

New school library services are thus taken into account in the new concept of education, and the librarian is considered to be a stakeholder in the information society, which requires wide knowledge of the most diverse sources of information and the increasing technical and computer knowledge. The partner relationship between librarians and students and teachers, improves the learning process, and puts the librarian, as the head of the library activity, at the centre of the process of education. Through team work, the librarian realizes the school's curriculum and meets educational needs.

4. Conclusions

We can say that the school library is inseparable from the school and its mission. It follows the development of education and assists the process by using new technologies, promoting language and intellectual competences and launching innovation projects. Since education is constantly changing in terms of goals, content and evaluation, the main task of educators is to prepare students to be able to choose information, approach it critically and evaluate it. As mentioned above, the school library is part of the educational process and is essential for the development of literacy, learning and culture, and by encouraging students to acquire the skills of evaluating and using information and knowledge it provides the possibility of lifelong learning.

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