

School Library: Nest for Talented Children

Danica Pelko

pelkodanica@gmail.com

The Elementary School of Donja Stubica

Keywords: *talented pupils, tradition, dialect, preservation of languages*

The main goal of every school and every teacher is how to fulfil all needs of students. It is not easy to deal with all kinds of pupils, from those with special needs to gifted and talented children at the same time. The other problem is with children who don't show any interest for learning or school activities. Very often for them the main interest is to spend time in front of the computer, playing games or being on social nets. There is no effect in explaining how useless these activities are and sometimes even harmful. The best way is to offer children many interesting free activities in schools so that they can choose what they want. In choosing the best activity for them, talented children in elementary school often need help. The best way is to cooperate with class teachers, subject teachers and children. Children can try different activities and choose the best for them. And when they choose, then we should allow them to be (co)creators of the programs. Only in this case children can fulfil their needs and interests and teachers can be successful.

Talented children are the biggest challenge for teachers and schools. When we can say for a child that he/she is talented it doesn't mean that he or she is the best pupil. Very often some children are talented in one field and have problems in others. Children are very seldom multi-talented and we usually think that they can find their way alone but those children need more help than any other. We have to bear in mind that these children probably will be the creators of our future. All the trouble and hard work which we put into talented children is not too much, we have to be sure that we have done our best.

For many years school system in ex-Yugoslavia and Croatia didn't take care about talented. The opinion that they will find their own way without help was prevailing. Only in some cases, some teachers have worked with the talented. All focus of interest was set on children with special needs - disabled. But in the last 10 years curriculums in Croatia have started to take care about the talented which has been great. This is the opportunity for school library and librarian to be part of those programs and usually librarians at schools are part of teams who work with the talented. It is good not only to be part of the team but to be the creator of new ideas and programs for talented too, to be a real leader and to put the library in the centre for education of talented children.

It is not a secret that talented pupils like to spend time in school libraries. They usually like to read, make researches and take place in projects which start in school libraries. Some of them adore the atmosphere of the library, like to sit in peace, read and think. They meet similar souls in libraries and the librarian is in a way responsible for them. Librarian has to have sensors for those children, speak to them to see their interests and needs. I have been working for over 30 years in school and over 25 years in the school library and I have seen different kinds of talented children. Some of them are very shy and won't start a

conversation, some are open, some confident, some not. I always remember a boy who would enter the library and stare at me, posters and books in the library. He would never say a word and I was not clever enough to encourage him to speak. It was many years ago and I remember him and my mistake every time when I see his book on my library shelves. Maybe because of this boy, maybe because of myself I have started to work with talented children 20 years ago and this part of my work has soon become my favourite part of work.

Elementary school of Donja Stubica (north-west part of Croatia) is well known because of taking care of the tradition of our county. There is a group of children who dance folk dances and play traditional games, another group make different objects based on traditional technique, one group makes ceramics, my group named Mala Kajkaviana take care of the local language. There were several different projects which took place in our school and one of them was a project which I as a librarian did together with a librarian in one elementary school in Portugal. It was the project about Easter tradition in Northern Croatia and Portugal. In the year 2008 this project got the first reward in competition of Delegation of EU Commission in Croatia and Croatian National Television.

Almost 20 years ago in the library of Elementary school Donja Stubica started a project about one of the Croatian dialects: kajkavian dialect which is spoken in north-west part of the country. A group of talented children (named Mala Kajkaviana) has started to work with me. They have read poems and essays of kajkavian writers and started to write their own poems. Many of the poems were sent to different competitions in Croatia and some of them got prizes. It is not that prizes are only important but the truth is that everybody likes to get a prize and most of all children. They like when I sent their poems on competitions because then they get proud, only then they are sure that their work is valuable. Only when they get a reward, then they become very happy. Sometimes it is not important what the prize is but that they are among the best. For some of them this is very important because it helps them to build their confidence. Last year one of the children got second reward on competition Goranovo proljeće which is the oldest and best known competition for poetry in Croatia. For this girl it was the opportunity to meet other talented children from the whole Croatia and to be present on high quality workshops. It could happen that this event will open her new way in her future life and help her in the choice of her occupation.

Children in this group of the talented have special abilities: they like to daydream, they are sentimental, they are sensible for beauty, they are creative, they like to write and like to perform. But most of all they like our local language: kajkavian dialect. Very important is that members of group of talented pupils Mala Kajkaviana feel big freedom in coming to meetings and working in the group. The atmosphere is relaxed, they were never told that they did something wrong even if they have written something stupid. I would always say only that they could do better. Those talented children have right to make mistakes, they can try and try, they are encouraged to be brave. I avoid comparing those children because every child is unique and gifted in another way. It is always amusing to see how they build their own style in writing because writing is our main activity. For a teacher who is leading such a team of children it is essential that he or she puts big effort in the activity. Important is to stimulate children to work because without work gift will be wasted. Talent is a sensible plant; you have to take care about it or it could die. Very important is the atmosphere in the group, the interaction between children and the teacher, in my case the librarian, has to be discreet and the group has to be lead very carefully. Last what talented children need is authority, but they need a talented mentor because if they realize that the mentor is not talented, they would lose the respect.

For a librarian who doesn't work regularly in a class it is very good to have regular meetings with a group of students, even better if they are talented. This is the opportunity to get closer to some children and to have touch with changes which bring change of generations. Such a group of children is a wonderful nest for new ideas, projects, experiments. They always have new fresh ideas, their imagination is endless. It is good to show confidence to those children, give them the responsibility for programming, planning and realization. Then they will do their best. We like to go to excursions together, so every year we go somewhere alone or with other groups for talented children. Children always have the opportunity to choose the destination. This year we went to Đurđevac and Barnagor where they met one of our well known writers who writes on kajkavian dialect and on standard Croatian language. Meeting with such a person is always very inspiring for them. Some of them dream to be writers in future and it is always good to put them in front of a real writer to see what kind of challenge it is to be a writer. We have to bear in our mind that not only education but bringing up is our responsibility too.

Children know that they can find all about their activities, poems, rewards, excursions and other news on the web site of our library: <http://knjiznicads.weebly.com/mala-kajkaviana.html>. It is necessary to have space on the net where to put all about such a group of children. There everybody can find information about activities and outcomes, there are many photos, that place is the mirror of the talented children. It is good to be present in the media too. From time to time children are active in programs out of the school, very often we are guests on the local radio or the articles about our activity are in the local newspapers. But we recognized that our activity is interesting for state media too so we were several times on the program of the Croatian radio and television. This kind of public presentation is very good for children because it strengthens their confidence and helps to build their personality. Then their friends, parents and whole families are happy to hear and see them on radio or television.

The main topic of my group of talented children is kajkavian dialect. This is not only dialect but real language because many books are written on this beautiful language. The first books for children in Croatia were written on kajkavian. But after in the 19-th century štokavian dialect became the official language in Croatia, kajkavian has been less and less spoken and less and less books have been printed on kajkavian. As time was passing by it was more and more obviously that this beautiful language – kajkavian dialect is threatened and in danger to go extinct. The group of talented pupils has started to work on the preservation of the language. They have started to collect words and to write the dictionary. Children drew pictures of old wooden carriage and tool storage and added old kajkavian names of parts of the carriage and tools. After that children made a poster with kajkavian alphabet. The Ministry of science and education helped and in 2016 kajkavian dictionary was printed for the first time. In the dictionary there are about 3200 kajkavian words, it looks nice and 300 pieces were sold out in 3 months. The dictionary was promoted on the Croatian National Television and got the 2-nd reward on competition for the Croatian national souvenirs. Many schools in kajkavian spoken part of Croatia now have the dictionary and can improve work on this dialect. This is a good example of how talented children from one school can help children in other schools in improving their knowledge.

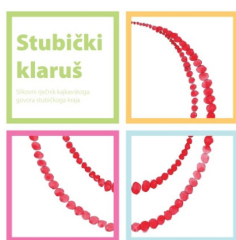


Then one problem was recognized: people are not sure how to pronounce every word. Then the librarian started to record words which were spoken by children. This recording was excellent exercise for children, they learned how to pronounce some words and expressions. The pronunciation of the whole dictionary was put on one web site, the new edition of the dictionary was printed and you can find the address and password of the web site in the printed dictionary. Now everybody can hear how a specific word is pronounced. This new edition of the dictionary was printed in 2018. The point is that this second edition of the dictionary is multimedia and everybody can read and hear words from the dictionary.

<http://www.kajkavskogovor.com>

code: Copernica

Talented children who worked on the dictionaries were aged from 10 to 15. But some of them have younger brothers and sisters and they recognized that this dictionary is too difficult for them. Then an idea about a picture dictionary came out. Children were delighted about the idea because they like to draw and paint. They have drawn about 200 pictures of different objects which exist around us. The pictures were selected and put into alphabetical order with titles written on kajkavian language. And the new picture dictionary was made. In this dictionary, you can see the picture of some word and written word. The whole time we cooperate with the Institute for Croatian language in our capital, Zagreb, so that we have had the help of an expert for kajkavian dialect. This expert helped us put pronunciation marks on words in picture dictionary.



Our project of preservation of the local dialect was recognized in local community. The city of Donja Stubica decided to finance the printing of the picture dictionary. The dictionary was printed in 2019 and together with the first and second edition of Mali rječnik builds a set of dictionaries made in Elementary school of Donja Stubica. Donja Stubica is a small town and there are not many institutions which can take care of our tradition. That's why the school plays an important role in preserving and presenting our rich cultural tradition. Dictionaries which were made at school are only dictionaries of traditional local

language in Donja Stubica and surroundings. Young talented explorers who made 3 dictionaries are proud of their work: they have made 3 books. They have the impression that they have their mission and they fulfil their ideas. All of 3 books were made in our school library. This is the special feeling when you have on shelves in your library 3 different books which were made in the same library. After all it isn't exaggeration when I say that school library in Donja Stubica is the nest for talented children and nest for books.

Participants will learn:

The participants of this presentation will learn how talented children in Elementary school Donja Stubica have helped to preserve their real mother tongue.

Biographical Note

Danica Pelko has been working at school for more than 30 years, more than 25 years of that time she has spent in the school library of The elementary school of Donja Stubica. She is very active in the Croatian library association and in the association for gathering, preserving and promotion of kajkavian cultural inheritance named Kajkaviana. For the last 20 years she has been working with a group of talented students Mala Kajkaviana creating on kajkavian language and preserving kajkavian language. Other very important topics for her are stories, fairy-tales and legends and storytelling. She is the organizer of Dan bajki (Fairy-tales Day) which traditionally takes place in Krapina (county capital) every March. She is the winner of Višnja Šeta reward (reward for best school librarian in Croatia) and Ivan Filipović reward (reward for best teachers in Croatia).

REFERENCES

- Cvetković-Lay, J. (2010). *Darovito je, što ću sa sobom?: priručnik za obitelj, vrtić i školu*. Zagreb: Alinea.
- Cvetković-Lay, J. & Pečjak, V. (2004). *Možeš i drukčije: priručnik za poticanje kreativnog mišljenja*. Zagreb: Alinea.
- Cvetković-Lay, J. & Sekulić Majurec A. (2008). *Darovito je, što ću s njim?* Zagreb: Alinea.
- Daroviti učenici: teorijski pristup i primjena u školi* (2005). Zagreb: Institut za društvena istraživanja.
- George, D. (2012). *Gifted education: Identification and Provision*. New York: Routledge.