

# SCHOOL STRATEGY GUIDE FOR ENCOURAGING A READING AND WRITING CULTURE BASED ON INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY VALUES



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## Why is this important?: Towards an inclusive curriculum

Impact of low literacy on wider achievement and ability to participate fully in society.

Compounded by a system which still ignores the minority experience and excludes many from power.

*“It is impossible to talk about the single story without talking about power. Like our economic and political worlds, stories too are defined by the principle of nkali (to be greater than another): How they are told, who tells them, when they're told, how many stories are told, are really dependent on power.”* **Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**

[https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda\\_ngozi\\_adichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story/transcript?language=en](https://www.ted.com/talks/chimamanda_ngozi_adichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story/transcript?language=en)

### The challenge

Learning to unlearn stereotypes – in a context of austerity and financial pressure on schools, and restrictive curriculums.

*“Through no fault of their own, our curriculum leaves one group of children feeling inferior and another group with a sense of superiority. Black children don’t see themselves reflected back, and end up feeling they can’t be the person they see in the inspiring story.”*

[www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/08/calls-mount-for-black-history-to-be-taught-to-all-uk-school-pupils](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/08/calls-mount-for-black-history-to-be-taught-to-all-uk-school-pupils)

### Non-formal learning as the key

Tried and tested approach for boosting achievement for target groups – disadvantaged pupils, those suffering discrimination, those at risk of disengagement from learning and early school leaving, perpetuating disadvantage.

Free from the constraints of prescribed national curriculums

### A creative approach

Our programmes, based on that well-evidenced approach, designed specifically, and for the first time, to work with target groups to develop literacy and self-confidence through creativity

Key factors for successful implementation:

- A clear policy agreed and understood across the whole school community
- Appointed person in charge of the strategy
- Effective targeting of pupils at risk of under-achievement

- Easy to follow supporting materials so that teachers, non-teaching staff, governors and volunteers can take the strategy forward.
- Building partnerships for change
- Challenging the curriculum so that young people have the tools to challenge stereotypes and prejudice.
- Bringing young people up without prejudice and discriminatory attitudes
- Working with others and taking the campaign to decision-makers.

“Decolonising the curriculum gives voice to those who have previously been marginalised. Viewed in the context of anti-racist struggles such as BLM in the time of Covid-19, it highlights hierarchy and inequality. It is a move towards a more inclusive society.”

[www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/08/calls-mount-for-black-history-to-be-taught-to-all-uk-school-pupils](http://www.theguardian.com/education/2020/jun/08/calls-mount-for-black-history-to-be-taught-to-all-uk-school-pupils)

## Why is it beneficial for schools and why is it important to have a STORYWEB strategy at school.

The STORYWEB STRATEGY **improves young people’s literacy skills** and also develops a broader understanding of inclusion and equality, and enhances children’s creativity, self-confidence and motivation to learn and become lifelong readers. The STORYWEB strategy enables young people to have the space to let their imagination run wild and become creative through creative thinking, storyboarding, storytelling, art or poetry.

The STORYWEB STRATEGY **enables teachers** to gain skills in storytelling and teaching creative writing with a view to improving children’s literacy skills, stimulating their motivation to study and boosting their pride and self-confidence.

**Schools gain** both an understanding of strategic approaches to improving literacy and fostering positive attitudes to inclusion and equality, and the expertise to sustain activities and positive outcomes.

The STORYWEB STRATEGY at school is a powerful tool to **challenge stereotype and discrimination**, develop empathy and celebrate difference and equality.

### Instilling the love of reading

**Many young people are functionally illiterate:** although they know how to read, write, and make basic calculations, their ability to understand what they read or to solve simple math and science exercises is limited; this makes it more difficult for them to function in society.

And children from disadvantaged backgrounds are falling behind too. And normally the older children get, the wider this gap becomes.

Reading books, writing stories, encouraging creativity and providing a space where children of different ages, backgrounds and levels of literacy can communicate in a safe environment is a task that schools of today have managed to somehow neglect. Focus being set on academic areas and encouraging children to strive for a better performance in them, the educational systems are setting high expectations for all children. In general, reading and to a greater extent writing, have fallen behind maths, analytical essays, standard testing and simply reproducing facts and figures that have been memorised.

The fifth edition of the International Congress on Early Childhood and Primary Reading Comprehension (CICLIP) in Madrid in 2021, showed in its barometer on reading comprehension in Early Childhood and Primary, that 60% of teachers consider that their training is not sufficient to develop strategies that improve the current level of reading comprehension of his students. The majority of teachers (80%) are in favor of receiving more training to adapt to the needs of each student. Both the number of books read, and the number of hours dedicated to promoting reading is reduced in schools throughout Europe. At the same time teachers express the need to reinforce reading comprehension outside the hours of conventional subjects, considering it transversal and key to student performance. There exists evidence that dedicating a greater number of hours to reading in schools is associated with better behaviour in all the indicators associated with it.

### Boosting literacy

**Literacy lies at the basis of human development:** it is not only a sine qua non for learning but also it enables people to enjoy a decent and active life in their communities and society. Literacy impacts all aspects of life. Literacy difficulties lead to inequalities in society by increasing the risk of poverty and social exclusion. However, given the right support, everyone can develop adequate literacy skills to participate in society.

Through the STORYWEB Strategy we shift the focus to reading and creative writing. We now know that competence and confidence in literacy, including competence in grammar, spelling and the spoken word, are essential for progress in all areas of the curriculum; Students are less able to learn other curricula if they do not develop sufficient reading skills by the middle of primary school.

Research shows that students who write more frequently perform better not only in essay exams or other tests that require writing but also on multiple-choice tests in many other subjects. By engaging children in activities that inspire them to write or create stories and poetry, they will start building their reasoning and thinking skills. So, other academic areas which are not falling into the scope of this project might also be a subject of improvement. By all means, a better performance in social studies, science and mathematics will be a positive side effect of developing writing skills in children. Children with reading disabilities show much poorer progress in maths, for instance, because most of the tasks require a profound understanding of the question and slow reading or writing comprehension would impede the solving of the respective drill.

Reading builds skills related to critical thinking and innovativeness. Students who embrace reading are able to solve more questions and carry out tasks quicker and in a more versatile

manner. When reading is started at an early age and students have a firmly installed reading culture by the time they reach secondary and upper secondary education, they will easily conduct research, which is otherwise often feared and avoided. Reading generally makes it easier to make meaning out of the information collected or presented.

Storytelling not only develops literacy and language skills, vocabulary and writing, it also improves imagination, creative thinking and confidence in telling and creating your own stories, as well as social connections. Several teachers highlight the fact that reading competence has a very important "pragmatic utility: being able to use it in our day-to-day life to understand the world in which we move".

### Challenging stereotype

**A focus on literacy is therefore a key element in addressing increasing disadvantage.** This is not only about academic achievement, but also because without the foundation of literacy, full participation in society is impossible – all the more important in the context of continuing discrimination on the grounds of race, gender, disability and sexuality, as well as refugee/asylum-seeker status.

Our approach is therefore also about challenging discriminatory stereotypes and celebrating difference, using literacy work to improve confidence and expand creativity and empathy – benefiting all students whatever their background or personal circumstances. In this way our STORYWEB STRATEGY can also be an important component of schools' policies and practices encouraging equalities and inclusivity.

By encouraging children to read, act out and create stories we are to give children a space where they can feel safe to think, read, make mistakes, learn important lessons about empathy and equality. Although there are many ways to cultivate empathy, they largely involve practising positive social behaviours, like getting to know others, putting yourself in their shoes and challenging one's own biases. Through fiction, we can experience the world as another gender, ethnicity, culture, sexuality, profession or age. And taken together, this can influence how we relate to others in the real world.

Storytelling workshops dealing with diversity and cultural inclusion in a practical, playful and fun way is an excellent method and resource for schools, where they can include students from different backgrounds without them having to necessarily be on the same level of literacy or language skills.

"Fiction and stories do a lot of things for us. They expose us to uncomfortable ideas ... and provide us with the opportunity to take other peoples' perspectives in a safe, distanced way. In that way, fiction serves as a playground for exercising empathic skills.", says William Chopik, a psychologist at the University of Michigan.

### Addressing the gap created by the Pandemic

**Covid pandemic has seen the gap in literacy levels get worse, affecting achievement overall.**

According to a study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), more than 100 million children will have fallen below the minimum proficiency level in reading as a result of school closures due to the pandemic of COVID-19. The number of students with this lack was decreasing before the emergency, but the figure shot up to 20% and canceled the advances of twenty years.

According to the Education Policy Institute think tank, this lengthy disruption to education in England “swept away a decade of progress in closing the attainment gap between disadvantaged pupils and their peers”. According to an analysis conducted by Save the Children Romania, the functional illiteracy has deepened since the COVID-19 crisis, while the dropout has increased. Many students cannot adapt to the new learning methods or they do not have the possibility of attending online classes.

The UN has referred to the effect of the pandemic on education as a "generational catastrophe" that would last decades, with a negative impact. This problem is, without a doubt, much more pronounced in disadvantaged groups. The pandemic, which saw schools closed for long periods both in 2020 and in early 2021, has made these attainment gaps worse. The STORYWEB STRATEGY aims precisely to counteract this reality.

**Values to be promoted: lifelong reading and young people's active engagement in standing up for equality, inclusion, and diversity.**

**At the heart of our STORYWEB STRATEGY are the values of equality, inclusion and diversity** without which our education systems will continue to fail large numbers of children. This is based on the understanding that equality, inclusion and diversity have to be taught as an ongoing activity throughout the school year, and that improving literacy is central to this, along with addressing shortfalls in the content of the wider curriculum.

We want to promote literacy - reading for pleasure particularly; and, at the same time, enable young people to challenge stereotypes and intolerance and become advocates for inclusion, equality and diversity.

**Weaving Webs of Stories has demonstrated the importance of this through our pilots in our countries.**

**Equality, diversity, and inclusion** are interconnected pillars of a more cohesive society, which is a key element of successful countries.

**‘Equality’** relies on the recognition, respect and acceptance of the diversity of individuals and group needs. Equality is about creating a fairer society based on access, participation and benefits for all citizens, where everyone can participate and contribute to the welfare of the society and where everyone has the opportunity to achieve their potential.

Equality means that people have equal liberties, status and rights, among which civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights, and equal access to certain social goods and social services. **Social equality** is a fundamental right that promotes equal opportunities and before any personal condition for all individuals. Social equality pursues the concept of social justice that holds that all people should have the same political and civil rights and access to social welfare (education, health, and work).

To guarantee social equality is vital to promote **social inclusion**. **Inclusion** is the practice of making equality work – allowing equal access to those liberties, status and rights, which can help you flourish, regardless of background, skin colour, ethnos, religion, disability, etc. ‘Inclusion’ promotes an educational environment where each child is welcomed and included so that they feel a deep sense of belonging and can progress to their full potential.

**Diversity** is the ultimate manifestation of what happens when equality and inclusion are working. Diversity feeds society with what is necessary in order to be progressive, to widen perspectives, to imagine solutions and to prevent problems that would need to be solved. Diversity defines the very diverse nature of our society. It is about recognising and valuing difference, where everyone is respected for who they are regardless of their social class, gender, disability or ability, family status, etc.

**Respect for diversity** is a deeply interpersonal skill and can be defined as the understanding that people participate equally in a common ethical world, while recognizing the uniqueness and differences of each individual. Respect for diversity goes beyond tolerance and understanding as it implies recognizing and actively promoting the equal value of all people.

The core values of equality, inclusion, and diversity required for a more cohesive society are also imperative for creating a positive classroom climate where children can unleash their talents and are empowered to be the future game-changers for a better world.

In relation to questions about **racism and racial equality**, for example, the focus in the UK has often been on activity related to Black History Month, as research by the Runnymede Trust research institute and think tank has found. Work to mark Black History Month and celebrate the contribution of Black people was often dependent on individual teachers, rather than being institutionalised in school practice, according to Runnymede. “While Black History Month (BHM) offers a useful catalyst for the centring of race, and specifically blackness, it is telling that BHM was often the totality of what teachers were able to say about race, diversity and anti-racism in the curriculum,” their research found.

Our approach therefore is about telling everyone’s story, not the “single story” that encourages consideration of difference, and discrimination in the interests of the powerful. It also builds on the growing body of evidence about the importance of “deep reading”, of the kind that occurs in effective English classrooms as students engage with texts that tackle complex themes such as racism, otherness, and colonialism.

As New Zealand's Education Hub network has pointed out: "Deep reading enables people to not only encounter but also to inhabit, through their immersive engagement with a written text, different lives, different perspectives and different worlds. Reading books and longer articles also is one of the best ways to learn how to think critically, understand complex issues and separate fact from fiction."

The participation of the children and their cooperation are helpful in building group cohesion and breaking down prejudices between group members. Children are curious about other cultures, other regions and other people. In many of our workshops, stories and situations from many regions with different cultural backgrounds are used. As the British educator Reva Klein explains, children don't just acquire knowledge about the lives of other children, they empathize, show solidarity and understand their role as actors on a more global scale.

It is important to promote empathy, understanding and cooperation from an early age, to make students understand that everyone comes from a different background and to respect them despite the differences. In our workshops, creating close connections and sharing stories means getting to know each other as individuals and thereby breaking any stereotypes and developing empathy and respect towards other students coming from varied backgrounds.

The STORYWEB STRATEGY, fundamentally, is about **literacy as a human right; the right to tell our own stories, and the right of all of us to hear those stories.**

The WWS Project advocates for the implementation of these values in the learning environments organically by fostering reading and writing skills in a multidimensional manner. On one hand, we introduce and clarify concepts and theories simply and attractively. We also deliberately choose book and story resources related to these three specific core values.

Reading should be used as an instrument promoting active engagement and the development of an open mind, recognizing inequality, stereotypes and discrimination. In order to achieve the desired mind-set, we need to lead our young readers through books delivering quality content. Books can be used for promoting values and morals. The teacher or reading workshop facilitator should be equipped with a variety of reading materials for the different levels of maturity and/or literacy. Every child, regardless of its specific status at a current point of its development or regardless of its special needs, should be acquainted with adequate content, passing on the desired message.

Through well organised workshops by experienced tutors, we gave to the children all the necessary tools in order to go deep into a story, connect with the heroes, use their fantasy to reach a win-win solution and express themselves, by writing their own stories. This initiative made the children feel that they have some power over the situation, they can influence their future for the better.

We believe that literature is an invaluable tool which can be used to enable teachers to develop practices and approaches that embrace diversity, equality and inclusion and, through this, to create an inclusive culture. Literature is also an invaluable tool which can be used to enable children to explore and understand the richness of diversity of our world; to develop

lifelong inclusive practices. Stories embracing diversity, equality and inclusion topics are a rich vital learning source, promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards equality and diversity. Stories can help educators to raise awareness about diversity, equality and inclusion, generate discussion about bias and discrimination, challenge our thinking and make us reflect on our attitudes and values.

**Avoid to “learn” and learn to “unlearn” stereotypes: tools for schools through literacy curriculum, books, documentaries, and activities. Techniques to “undo” ingrained stereotypes or inbuilt discrimination attitudes.**

This has been an issue in every country in the world. Although our focus is on “unlearning stereotypes”, a number of psychological studies have raised doubts whether it can be achieved. According to many psychologists, stereotypes are something which cannot be avoided as they are a function of the brain, which cannot be shaken off. We are all brought up with stereotypes and they do creep in even though we are against them.

In the work "The Nature of Prejudice", published in 1954 and still considered relevant in the study of stereotypes and prejudice, the American psychologist Gordon Allport focuses on the cognitive processes present in the formation of stereotypes and prejudices. From social psychology comes to this day the concept, established in the 1980s, of prejudice as the inevitable result of normal mental processes. In recent years, research has been carried out focused on understanding the neural mechanisms of stereotypes and prejudice.

The Implicit Project, an international network of researchers studying implicit social cognition, is seeking new ways to understand attitudes, stereotypes, and other hidden biases that influence perception, judgment, and action. Its tests measure the time it takes for the participant to associate images or words. For example, associate the words “feminine” and “masculine” with other words. Or associate images of black and white faces with positive and negative words.

Evolutionary theories stress the fact that human beings can be genetically influenced by mechanisms learned over millions of years that would lead to prejudice. Thus, the implicit prejudices would be activated automatically, without the person realizing it. There is also research that indicates that implicit prejudices or stereotypes are not only due to internal cognitive processes but that culture plays a very relevant role.

Although we are exposed to this type of automatism, we can rationalize, modify and, ultimately, make a conscious decision different from these automatisms and follow our principles and values.

Many studies show that it is possible to reduce these implicit biases and limit their impact through what is known as bias self-regulation. The first step is that there is a motivation for it.

When a person becomes aware of the reactions that are produced by the unwanted activation of prejudice, they will tend to make a "compensatory effort". All disciplines can contribute in different ways to a more peaceful and egalitarian society.

Therefore, as we have done, by starting with enabling young people to gain a solid understanding of stereotyping and the harmful effects they can have on individuals and groups, we believe that the beneficiaries will have gained a positive and inclusive attitude towards "difference" and the skills and diplomacy to question and challenge (in a calm and positive manner) discrimination and prejudice.

We consider that another way to fight against stereotypes and prejudices is to be in favor of diversity, inclusion, equality. That is why we consider that our work through the STORYWEB STRATEGY lies in helping children and young people to be aware, speak, discuss, explain these two aspects: against stereotypes and in favour of diversity.

We believe in the power of literature, writing, of language itself, to make the participants in our workshops aware of the importance of valuing and appreciating themselves and others equally. In this way, "unlearning" would be achieved by more "new" learning.

Éamonn Dunne (2016) understands "unlearning" not as an antonym of "learning", but instead as a disruptive process, breakages, and surprise of learning. Dunne (2016, 20) writes that „learning begins when knowledge gets suspended". The philosophy of this approach is that learning has neither an end-goal nor any abstract aim such as creating "lifelong-learners". This approach can be particularly fruitful with younger students, whose views of the world have not solidified and who still have both the capacity and the freedom to imagine. This is why activities that encourage disassembling and reassembling can be particularly useful. This includes approaches such as creating collages, where students are encouraged to "destroy" a book/magazine by cutting it to pieces and using the pieces of text and images to create their own narratives.

### Reading to unlearn prejudices and stereotypes

It is a major problem when egalitarian values get socialized into the culture to such an extent that children, who usually learn stereotypes very early in childhood (arguably even around the age of 3, 4 and 5 years old) ingrain them firmly and eventually activate and practice them frequently, spontaneously, unintentionally, to the point that people are not even aware that there are stereotypes activated. This is an interesting predicament, because the values that are usually and officially taught are quite opposite to these spontaneous reactions. So, if we agree that having stereotypes is not something we have a choice about, then let us also agree that what we do have a choice about is engaging with them.

One can reject gender bias, race bias, and a number of other types of biases, but one can also instantaneously recognize the stereotypes. We know that we should not act based on the stereotypes, but this does not mean that our awareness or knowledge of those stereotypes can just go away.

There exists a correlation between implicit bias and discriminatory behaviour. A list of strategies, developed by psychologists, for helping recognize and overcome unintentionally biased thinking, are very closely related and can be supported via reading.

One strategy is perspective taking, which involves reflecting on the experiences of groups that have been historically stigmatised and may continue to experience stigmatisation. Reading could be used here for understanding what it would be like to have your scientific abilities questioned just because you are female, or be denied employment, because you are blind, or be thought of as a terrorist because you are Muslim, or be considered hostile and aggressive because of your skin colour and not because of anything that you have done.

Another strategy is to get involved into more contact with representatives from stigmatised groups. If we try to connect that with reading again, finding people from stigmatised groups to read to or with the children and answer questions afterwards or act as living libraries, would be an excellent idea for getting the kids to actually meet and get to know people.

According to Patricia Devine, a professor of psychology and the director of the Prejudice and Intergroup Relations Lab at the University of Wisconsin-Madison "What we say is that you detect it, you reflect about it, you reject it, and then you can replace it with a type of response that is more congenial to your values". Reading is one of our best chances we have at passing this to children and thus increasing the chances of them automating reactions and behaviour, which disallow stigmatisation and discrimination.

#### How to “undo” ingrained stereotypes or inbuilt discrimination attitudes.

**Co-operative Learning** Project work has proven to be a very effective tool in building up teams and developing intergroup harmony. The class is set into heterogeneous groups and given projects that require group cooperation and interaction based on the expertise of each member. Students learn through the process that they need each other to do the task successfully. They learn that each member’s contribution is important to the achievement of the common task.

**Role-playing and simulation activities** provide students with opportunities to learn through experience. Such activities can reduce prejudicial attitudes and are powerful on an affective level as students get engaged in their new roles. Discussions with students on their experiences must be included as an integral part of the simulation to clarify any confusing or ambiguous situations.

#### **Critical Thinking Skills**

Prejudice and stereotyping in many instances are the result of illogical thinking (rarely from feelings of low esteem, bigotry and a sense of superiority as most people would think). Teaching critical thinking skills, (having intellectual curiosity, being objective, having an open mind, following a systematic and logical line of reasoning) enables a student to become anti-prejudicial. Endowed with critical thinking skills, students learn to decode media messages, to challenge bias in curriculum and to be sceptical of stereotypes.

**Videos and films** that are realistic and present authentic characters that students can identify and empathise with can be effective tools. These characters represent role models whose positive attitudes or behavioural development can be appreciated and supported by students. They also trigger discussions on the negative effects of prejudice, stereotyping and discrimination. The most effective videos and films are authentic films, not explicitly designed to “teach about prejudice and discrimination”.

### **Use of Positive Role Models in School Curriculum**

The use of positive role models helps in reducing prejudice and preventing stereotyping and discrimination. We learn stereotypes through our experiences by interacting with others. These experiences lead to generalizations about groups of people, which may develop into stereotypes and may be further reinforced by the media. Keeping in mind the impact of positive role models in reducing prejudice and preventing stereotyping and discrimination teachers should have a careful selection of resources.

### **The study of culture**

Culture is a broad complex and dynamic concept. The study of other cultures does not lead to increased intergroup harmony because the understanding of other cultures goes through the understanding of one’s own culture. It is when you become familiar with the customs, traditions, values and beliefs of your own culture that you accept and get authentic unbiased insights into other cultures. Teachers should start by encouraging students to learn about their own cultures. When introducing other cultures start by looking first at the similarities and then the differences between cultures.

## **Our ideas, experience, and different approaches available to be implemented.**

Schools are places where children can easily be organized in curricular or extra-curricular reading activities in a safe and familiar place. The people defined for facilitating the process can be either teachers from the school or external experts. In order for a storyweb strategy to work best at school though, **the facilitators should be flexible** enough to change their programme according to specific interest, needs or desires of the children.

It is also important **to involve everyone**, so create possibilities for participation by children with learning difficulties or children with different disabilities. Have a sight impaired student read from a braille book to the others, learn some sign language in order to make a deaf participant feel welcome, never rush a participant with a speech impediment, never press anyone to do something, which they feel uncomfortable with. Whoever refuses to read due to lack of confidence or skills today might surprise everyone nicely during the next session. Also, make use of all topics that are raised by the children. If disabilities should come up during

the discussion – be ready with an inspiring text from a book you may advise the kids to read. The same goes for topics related to “Black lives matter”, LGBTQ, women’s rights as well as the so called intersectionality where double and triple discrimination is observed due to a person falling into more than one stereotype category (e.g. black woman, disabled woman, black disabled person, black LGBT woman, etc.). **Use all naturally arising opportunities** to bring these topics into the discussion and encourage children to ask questions in order to build as complete a picture as possible.

Having **more places around the school with areas with books** and possibilities to sit and read for a while, can make the reading look ordinary. The more you encourage children to share what they have read the more confident they would feel.

**Making reading a whole school culture** would mean that there is nothing about it that would make a student look odd or different from the others. Children and later on teenagers have the conflicting desires to both look the same as everyone else and at the same time make an impression and stand out. If more people at the school are reading, this would be considered a regular activity. Standing out in class or in the reading club could come from what has been read and what new concepts the student has picked up. Part of the school library or a classroom that has no specific designation can be dedicated to regular **reading and story making clubs**.

**Literature or Language classes** can be used for involving the whole class in reading or story making activities, however, smaller groups of 5 or 6 up to 10 children might be a lot more productive.

### Knowing the children

When deciding what activities to perform, some factors should be considered. We need to **know the children** who will be participating: what is their level of development, what interests, concerns and learning styles do they have; are there any conflicts or problems in the group, do these children have particular problems within the community; How much do the children already know about human rights and literature? However, that does not mean that you have to wait until you can answer all of these questions before starting the activities. Oftentimes, the activities themselves are the most effective way to get to know your group.

The programme can benefit from **initial exploration of students’ interests** and relationships to storytelling. While not all students are avid readers, many may enjoy other forms of storytelling such as films, TV shows or video games. Incorporating these elements into the programme could be beneficial to get students interested.

If the students are interested in performance arts, the story can be **written as a play** rather than prose. This way the students can talk about different ways of inhabiting the characters, learn empathy and develop emotional intelligence. In addition, it is easier to coordinate communal writing of a play. Alternatively, the students can **write a film script** and film their story.

This programme can be successfully integrated with STEM programmes that teach students to code or art programmes. The students can create a narrative for a video game that they would then code together. Alternatively, visual arts programs can be combined with storytelling where students would create an art book (inspired by Sabrina Ward Harrison) or a comic book/graphic novel.

Some activities can be used to increase general knowledge about literature or values, or they can be just fun. But mostly topics can and should be taken up that affect the children or deal with a problem in the group, the community or the world.

**A learning sequence:** knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that are permanent cannot be conveyed in a single activity. Choose activities that form a block, be it because they have a common theme or because they develop certain skills. You could choose activities that fit into the school curriculum or address current issues in the group or community.

**Modification of activities:** Activities can be used like a cookbook. Just like good cooks, when moderating, they should take the liberty of modifying the "ingredients" of an activity to suit the time and materials available, the size and competence of the group, and other conditions. In most of the activities you will find tips for modifications.

Remember that there are many different styles of learning in each group of children and that the children's skills are at different levels of development. It is easier if you offer children multiple learning opportunities than if they have to adapt a child to a single method that you specify. Careful selection and adaptation of activities is important to ensure that children with special needs - for example street children, immigrant children, refugee children and children in care - are included and able to participate on an equal basis. Avoid exposing differences that the children may be suffering from.

Use of **interactive teaching strategies** aimed at improving children's reading skills, enthusing them to become lifelong readers as well as enhancing their critical thinking skills and creativity; **reading out loud** is embedded with engaging activities meant to challenge children's intellect and stimulate their imagination and reflection such as predicting, asking open thought-provoking questions which guide children through the story, identifying and discussing the key messages of the stories, making connections to children's prior knowledge and experiences, organising peer discussions/debates following the story reading, exploring words and pictures or exploring the world of words and their meanings.

Use of effective strategies for improving writing skills tapping into children's interests through the use of technology, **interactive writing techniques** (asking students for ideas to complete sentences, stories, etc) or the implementation of positive diverse literacy practices (graphic organizers, cooperative learning, scaffolding, read-aloud, or group discussions).

Having a **consistency** of at least one meeting per week helps the children to connect and dedicate to what they are doing, follow the program effectively, understand the offered tools and ideas, enhance their way of writing and expressing themselves, and reflecting on the

targeted ideas. Things children love: using fun ways of narration; games of action; narrations where we use costumes or sceneries; time for reflection after reading every story, and especially reflection; including some type of art: drawing, clay etc; Imagine their story to be published in the book.

**“Capsules” designed for the WWS workshops** worked well in several aspects. Being different from a traditional structure, it resulted in more attractiveness for both teachers and students even at the beginning. So, it’s a fascinating and useful approach for triggering the initial interest and engagement in the workshop.

In some of the workshop during the WWS we offered teachers several sessions to suit themselves. Also, **the adaptive nature of the content** allowed us, together with the teachers, to choose the most interesting modules and develop the content focused on those. In this sense, even the act of choosing among more options gives the teachers more feeling of decision making on one hand, based on their expertise and close knowledge of their students, and, at the same time allows space for some fresh and innovative extra-curricular approaches. So, wide-ranging possibilities are a big plus, meaning the schools have more options to adapt the workshop to their specific needs. Thus, combining the playful, creative and useful aspects.

The same way that we adapted the contents, we also intertwined the three core values of the WWS Project: equality, inclusion, and diversity. Added to this, leaving the structure and content as open as possible gave us the possibility to be more adaptive to children’s interests and inspiration. Although we decided to have a face-to-face WWS workshop, we opted for mixing the digital input with books, including social media and book clubs.

Also, another strong advantage when dealing with both school administration and students was convincing them that a fresh approach to literacy would be an advantage throughout all their lives, additionally helping them in their work, personal relations and realization, etc. Literacy, language, speaking, writing, expression, and creativity explained as a much broader dimension and as a valuable asset in one’s life happened to be a very effective tools.

In terms of teaching, we found that teachers taking part in and “copying” the development of the session with the tutor, and applying afterward in other groups, have highly satisfying results. It means the contents and structure are easy to follow and use.

### Suggestions for improvement

The two big challenges are still convincing school administration and teachers not of the need (which they clearly acknowledge) but of the necessary time in an inexorably more busy and time-consuming life. Promoting the idea that literacy is not just reading, we are more likely to persuade schools to give more space to it. Also being open to designing new materials, easy to follow by teachers, and exciting to engage students is a must.

From our experience in face-to-face activities, we still think this is the best way to develop the workshop. Nevertheless, once there is a strong enough engagement and interest from the

students, it might be a plus to add some “virtual” side, making the workshop sort of hybrid. But this should be done not pressed by necessity (such as pandemic restrictions, for ex.), but as an added value, an integral part of the literacy project.

The biggest challenge still is to grab children’s attention, and to get them interested a little more, particularly when it’s not compulsory, so the stories need to be interesting and exciting for them. The first two sessions can be used to explore their specific interests, and to adapt or redesign the contents. As part of the feedback we had from students, some open-air activities can be included as part of the workshop.

## Suggested bibliography and resources.

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Information about the EU policy and the national policy in Bulgaria Introducing inclusion in schools is set as a priority in:

Council resolutions:

2008/C 319/01 - Resolution of the Council and the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 20 November 2008 on the health and well-being of young people

2008/C 319/02 - Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States, meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies

Both available from here:

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The Bulgarian state in the face of the Ministry of Education and Science has developed a special strategy for upbringing work in educational establishments in the country /2019-2030/.

According to the upbringing interactions, which are prescribed by the strategy within the classes, during extracurricular and out-of-school (including project work) activities and class periods, the schools should:

1. Form a prosocial behavior via activities in support of voluntarism, charity, environmental initiatives and others – on the territories of the educational institutions or beyond them.
2. Form attitudes for tolerance towards differences between the children and the students based on race, nationality, ethnic background, religion, etc.
3. Create conditions for prevention against hate speech.
4. Increase the motivation for learning, including regular attending of school, management of one's own development and progress in the context of educational and vocational orientation.
7. Include in the teaching strategies elements with upbringing impact and influence.

According to the strategy, the development and formation of values via pedagogical activity is at the grounds of the upbringing work in the educational institutions. The importance of the value development of the citizens of the EU as a community, characterized by pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between men and women is a part of the mere beginning of the Treaty of Lisbon, where article 1a marks the main values, which the EU is based on -

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