



The Reading Matrix © 2009
Volume 9, Number 2, September 2009

Can Teenagers be Motivated to Read Literature?

Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous

University of Nicosia

ABSTRACT

Over the last years, in many countries worldwide, there has been a decline in the reading skills of upper secondary school students, and their ability to read and understand advanced literature. Seeing this as an alarming change for the worse, governments, educational bodies and interested groups have taken various measures to address the issue. Five schools in five European countries—Italy, Lithuania, Sweden, Finland and Cyprus—have decided to take measures against the students’ inability and unwillingness to read literature. Their 2007-2009 Comenius ALCUIN project (Active Literacy: Competence and Understanding, Internally Naturalised—From Decoding to Understanding) aimed to develop reading methods which would motivate students to develop their reading skills, make them competent readers and users of their mother tongue as well as English as a second language. It also aimed to help them address more demanding texts, and also enable them to analyse and critically evaluate literary texts of various genres as well as European perspectives, and degrees of sophistication. This evaluative article aims to establish whether the first four new pedagogical methods used in the first year of the project in the five high schools have managed to motivate students in reading literature.

INTRODUCTION

Reading maketh a full man.

— Francis Bacon

Today, a significant part of society appears to distance itself from the world of reading. According to the National Endowment for the Arts (NEA) (a United States independent federal agency supporting artists and arts organisations) survey *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America* (2004), literary reading was in dramatic decline in USA, with fewer than half of American adults reading literature. This report indicated drops in all groups studied, with the steepest rate of decline, 28 percent, occurring in the youngest age groups. A follow-up to the 2004 NEA survey, the latest NEA report *To Read or Not to Read: A Question of National Consequence* (2007) claimed that Americans are reading a lot less. This survey found that young people in America are less and less likely to read for pleasure, and that their reading scores are also declining. Griswold (2008) says that one “might believe that the Harry Potter craze and

Oprah Winfrey's book endorsements offer reassuring news to the contrary, but the truth is that these are only isolated phenomena within the larger and more depressing picture... reading for fun in elementary school begins to drop off in middle school and fall even more in high school. This continues through college and into adult life..." (p. 1). NEA Report 2007 indicates exactly that: "Both reading ability and the habit of regular reading have greatly declined among college graduates" (p. 5).

This tendency for American children to spend less and less time reading at home parallels developments in England. According to the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) 2001 (2003) and 2006 (2007) Reports, the reading performance of children in England has dropped considerably from the 3rd to the 19th place. The reports claim that children are less likely to enjoy reading in 2007 than they did five years earlier.

Similarly in many other European countries, over the last years, there has been a decline in the reading skills of upper secondary school students, and their ability to read and understand advanced literature. Seeing this as an alarming change for the worse, the governments in Italy, Lithuania and Sweden (ALCUIN Project Application, 2007), for example, have decided to take measures against the students' inability and unwillingness to read literature. The disheartening results from OECD Pisa survey (2003), made the Italian Minister of Education promote different activities to find possible solutions in Italy. The Lithuanian Government has initiated a Promotion of Reading Program in order to diminish regional and social differences regarding reading skills in the country. In Sweden, there is a continuous debate concerning the decreasing number of people interested in literature, let alone upper secondary students.

Today is the age of information and entertainment. When people read the sports page, for example, they are interested only in the facts. And when they watch television or go to the cinema, after a day's hard work, they go because they need a break, and want to relax and be entertained. They do not have the time or the energy for anything else. Literature on the other hand, stories, poems, and plays, is really never written just to give facts. And while it can indeed be entertaining, the entertainment always comes from paying attention—never from being distracted.

It might seem a paradox that the decrease in reading skills comes at the same time as the computerized society makes higher demands on people's ability to take in and analyze written information. What is called information society requires much of the individual and demands a high competence to sort, evaluate and make critical judgments about the texts one is constantly exposed to. Such abilities are required in our changeable society, where mass media now play an increasing role in shaping our opinions. Rather than facilitating the access to knowledge, discovery of meaning, and interpretation of the world, modern society entails many new obstacles to all-round education.

Reading is the effort of the reader to actively understand the message of the writer. "an active attempt on the part of the reader to understand a writer's message" (Smith & Robinson, 1980, cited in Dutta, 2008, p. 11). It involves decoding, in other words learning to correlate speech sound of the language to the written symbols used to present the speech sounds, and some more sophisticated abilities such as analyzing, reasoning, thinking, imagining, and judging as one reads. All these activities require a sufficiently good knowledge of syntax or language structure as well as of semantics or word-meaning correlations. The degree and level of reasoning, imagining and judging required in the reading process depends largely on the particular purpose of reading. People read for various reasons: information, knowledge,

discovery of meaning, interpretation of the world, appreciation, pleasure, leisure and relaxation, or any combination of the above.

Moreover, the ability to analyze and evaluate texts is not developed by, for example, a casual browsing of Internet pages as there is a marked difference between the skimming of pages on the web and the delving into a complex narrative of a novel. In this context, literature, as a source of knowledge, has pride of place as it inspires students to mental activities, for example, logical and analytical thinking, to be of great help in the confrontation with the daily information society. It takes a long process before one becomes an advanced reader. As advanced readers, students could be in better command of their mother tongue and any second language they learn, thus being able to articulate and communicate even an abstract and complex reasoning. However, as Griswold (2008) says in the section “When Reading Skills Replaces Reading for Fun,”

Nowadays in schools, a concern with literature is disappearing and being displaced by an almost exclusive attention to literacy (measurable literacy). Instead of meaningful encounters with *To Kill a Mockingbird* or *Charlotte’s Web*, these days, literature is being used more and more as a *tool* to teach reading skills—albeit, an important skill not to be overlooked—rather than as a *subject* itself. The result of this trend is that students’ encounters with stories are limited to identifying main ideas, memorizing facts, and increasing their vocabulary. (p. 2)

Literature and reading literature is certainly not that. According to Sartre (1967), literature offers new, creative ways to interpret the world. Furthermore, we all perceive the physical world differently and assign different meanings to what we see and experience. When someone perceives order and meaning in what they see, and they write down their perception to communicate it to other people, what they write down is literature. It is through literature that a student learns to examine thought and action compassionately. When a reader is able to identify with a character and his conflict or problem in a story and see life through the eyes of this character, then the reader begins to share an author’s insight and thus begins to read with appreciation. Reading in this way is responding both emotionally and intellectually.

Story telling (fiction), songs (poetry), or rituals (drama) have been very popular since ancient times. People have always tried to make sense of their personal lives by telling stories, composing songs and writing plays talking about events from their lives and sharing them with other people. Through that, people come to understand both happy and tragic events and their meaning in their lives. From this, it seems that literature plays a central role in people’s lives and in the pursuit of their identity and of making sense of things. This would give an opportunity to share diachronically people’s experiences, knowledge, and interpretation of the world. Literature helps people learn to understand and interpret others and govern themselves by assessing motives, judging from past behaviour, looking beneath the surface, and considering context. Moreover, literature can be a very good form of social practice. This probably explains why literature (story telling, songs and drama) plays such an important role in human societies and in people’s private lives. Reading literary texts then is not just fun, it is vital. Understanding literature helps us understand ourselves and others more successfully. It is on this skill that our success in many important aspects of life depends on: finding a true friend, succeeding in our profession, face and win over enemies, knowing who to trust in a risky situation, making the best choice in a difficult situation, and interpreting the world. Analyzing literature is good practice for all of these reasons and many more.

As we have seen, literature is not a neutral presentation of facts or a report. It is an opportunity for social practice. It is also what the author wants the reader to see and when and how to see it. In other words, the reader needs to think of both the surface and the deeper meanings of a literary work at the same time. That is why it is of vital importance to facilitate students in practicing reading skills through reading literature, rather than just reading in the way people read a sports page. Moreover, literature offers itself for communication. Students can talk about literature in detail with others. They can compare orally and in writing what and how they notice things, their interpretations and their conclusions. Furthermore, when people read and write, they communicate with many more people than they could ever imagine they would. This communication contributes to more learning oneself and the others. In addition, writing offers practice in thinking. Drafting and redrafting makes the writer think of different ways of interpreting or presenting things. The process of thinking and deciding the best way to do that contributes to a deeper understanding not only of what the writer believes but why he or she believes it. In turn, the reader goes through a similar process when he or she reads or hears what other people say. Literature makes people think. Literature also makes people communicate, and through this communication, it gives them the opportunity to understand themselves and other people. It takes the development of one's thought process to become a proficient reader.

In this context then, literature is an unparalleled asset for all that it can offer in the form of knowledge about human nature. By reflecting on one's own experience of living literature, students can share this experience with other students and teachers from their school, their country and other countries thereby acquiring a greater empathy, tolerance and ability to understand not only human nature, but also different cultures and values. In the process of understanding and interpreting literary texts, students are given the opportunity to shape and develop a personal language, which can improve their communicative skills. Armed with such proficiency, they can be considerably better equipped for the challenges of tomorrow's working life within both the European and the world community. It is therefore important that students are prepared and made both confident and competent to meet the demands of a competitive Europe and the world. As Furedi (2008) already stated, "Maybe it is time that we shifted the focus from literacy skills to an education that cultivates a real love of reading" (§ 14). Students need to be motivated to read literature, so that they are better equipped for the society of the future.

PURPOSE OF ALCUIN PROJECT

The ALCUIN project sought to develop efficient and concrete pedagogical methods, which would help the teachers in their challenging task to motivate students to develop their reading skills, thus making them competent readers and users of their mother tongue and English as a second language. The aims were to help students acquire the ability to analyze and critically evaluate, both in writing and speaking, literary texts of various genres as well as European perspectives, and degrees of sophistication. The purpose was to develop methods of reading which will motivate them to address more demanding texts, and also make it possible for them to carry out reflective in-depth readings. The reading process aimed to go from decoding to understanding.

This evaluative article intended to establish whether the first four new pedagogical methods used in the first year of the project in five-country high schools have managed to meet their expected outcomes, which were to motivate students in reading literature.

DATA COLLECTION

During the first year, three partner meetings intervened by two eight work periods. A student questionnaire initially investigated the students' reading habits. During the partner meetings the whole partnership discussed and developed new pedagogical methods that were implemented in the next work period. During the meetings the partnership also decided choice of literature and other art forms that were tested together with methods. Two students from each partner school participated in the meetings, where they took part in in-depth interviews carried out by the researchers. They also contributed to the general discussion throughout the meeting. During the work periods, methods and choice of literature were implemented, tested and evaluated by students in the form of journals and reading logs. Teachers wrote reports that were based on students' as well as teachers' documentation of the work in progress which was collected by the coordinator, summarized and sent to researchers who analyzed and evaluated the report. The teachers as well as the students shared their experiences between the partner meetings through the online Forum, where they discussed the current work and choice of literature.

Participants

Five Upper Secondary Schools from different European countries (Cyprus, Finland, Italy, Lithuania, and Sweden) participated in the project. Each school took part with two classes of students, one reading literature in the mother tongue and the other reading English literature. Two teachers from each partner school also participated, one teaching the mother-tongue and the other teaching English. Four researchers also participated from different universities from the respective participating countries.

Needs Analysis

An electronic questionnaire aimed to establish students' reading habits was distributed. 191 students—103 girls (53.9%) and 88 boys (46.1%)—from the five the European countries were questioned during the research. Students from Italy and Sweden were represented the most, 46 (24.1%) and 57 (29.8%) accordingly. Lithuania was represented the least with 18 students (9.4%). The majority of the respondents were between 15 to 21 years of age (97.9 %).

On the whole, the participating students enjoyed reading. They mostly evaluated their reading as 5, 7 and 8 on a 10-point scale. Two major groups of students were being identified: those who read because they have to and those who read because they enjoy it. Only three students identified their reading as unsatisfactory. 33.5% of the students read on a daily basis (they were the ones who actually thought they read enough); 12% of the students never read, and 56.5% of the students thought they do not read enough. The majority of the participating students have a computer at home (181 students or 94.8%), as well as a relatively large amount of books (84.8%), so they do not face any difficulties in finding the literature they are interested in.

The majority had their own desk (75.4%) and they read newspapers (69.1%) and magazines (71.2%). Three students answered they did not possess and did not do any of the things listed above. Talking with their parents about the readings is not popular among the participating students. Students do not think that reading is boring and hard or suits girls only. Reading was regarded an important activity by almost all participating students (89.5%).

Visiting a library is enjoyed only by one third of the students. Almost half of the students would be happy to receive a book as a gift. According to the students, reading helps to explore the world. Their choice of the books is mostly influenced by recommendations, intriguing prologue or friends' advice. After class, students mostly enjoy browsing internet websites, emailing, and reading newspapers and magazines. They enjoy adventure literature, love and funny stories the most. The most preferred reading place is their bedroom and the living room, whereas some students read while on the bus. Time availability directly influences reading; participating students said that if they had more spare time, they would read more. Students are often encouraged to read mostly by their teachers and their parents. Participating students said that talking about the literature they liked, and meeting the authors also influences their reading. The reading made by their parents is evaluated positively by the students. Students understand the benefits of reading and noted that they should be encouraged to read more.

From the teachers' perceptions of students' answers, the reading habits of students varied among the different schools here investigated. In Italy, for example, where other reading projects were well established in the school, students seemed to have well established habits of reading literature in their free time. However, as the teacher had put it, this was reading for the school. In Sweden, questionnaires indicated that students as a whole were motivated and interested in reading literature. In Finland, interest was mixed. In the rest of the schools, on the whole, students did not seem to have strong habits in reading literature, although they were studying literature at school. It was interesting to note that the questionnaire proved useful in raising many interesting ideas on reading (Lithuania) and in making students think about and become more aware of their reading habits and the types of reading in their daily life (Cyprus).

The needs analysis results, although encouraging, indicated that more motivating means are needed to encourage students to read more substantially in general and literature in particular. They also showed that some countries needed more encouragement than others. Finally, it was clear that students needed to be exposed to more and different types of literature.

FIRST IMPLEMENTATION AND TESTING / DATA ANALYSIS

Participants' Profile

A total of 191 students participated in the project: 50 from Italy, 55 from Sweden, 13 from Finland, 20 from Lithuania, and 53 from Cyprus. There were groups of first (L1) and second language (L2). Their age ranged from fifteen to seventeen years old and the participants represented approximately equally both sexes. A total of ten teachers participated in the project, two from each country, an L1 and an L2 teacher.

Text Choice

For the first choice of literature, it was unanimously decided to use the following text: (a) *Hills like White Elephants* by Ernest Hemingway, for L2 students and (b) the translated version of the same short story for L1 students.

New Teaching Methods 1 and 2

The first activity involved student reflection on other students' comments about the story, group and class discussion, creative writing and reporting on own and other classmates' thoughts. The aims were to give students the necessary tools to help them reflect on the reading process, through speaking and writing, to have the opportunity to verbalize their understanding and thoughts of the text, to cater for student different learning styles, and to motivate students and encourage them in reading.

The second activity examined the different dimensions of the text and examined a different aspect of the text. The aim of the activity was to help students understand how a text is written.

Student and Teacher Logs

Students' logs varied. In some schools, student logs were brief ("most students' journals were laconic from the start, but during the course of the two methods, I could discern a tendency to expansion among many of the students," L2 teacher, Sweden), whereas in others, they were "really detailed, precise and show[ed] a great thinking of the work done" (L2 teacher, Italy). It would have been more comparable if all teachers had referred to students' log work. However, these are some of the comments expressed:

My starting point was a group of students that I did not feel was very interested in reading literature. I do not know if the students are now more enthusiastic about reading literature, but I do feel that they have gained some insights as far as reading strategies are concerned. (L1 Teacher, Finland)

Students had to express their own ideas in the students' journals. They commented on the text and each other's opinions. (L1 & L2 Teacher, Lithuania)

According to the students' reflections in their journals, most of them enjoyed these methods. (L1 Teacher, Sweden)

According to the students' journals most of them enjoyed these methods (L1 & L2). There were no complaints although some boys wanted more 'action'! Others wrote that they were surprised as to how much can be found in a text just by thinking and analysing a little further than normal. (L2 Teacher, Cyprus)

Some found the text slightly boring. Others enjoyed freely expressing themselves and others enjoyed the fact this was about a relationship. I think that this was a positive start and it was really enlightening to read some journal entries. (L1 Teacher, Cyprus)

Teachers' logs recorded the implementation of the two new methods, and described their students' profiles, their impressions of the students' questionnaires, logs and their own perceptions of the whole process. The general impression is that some students in some schools had some more involvement to reading literature programmes (Sweden, Italy) than others. Some teachers felt the teacher's role is equally important in the introduction of new methods:

The teachers' role is important in acknowledging students with active reading methods. The teachers must be very well prepared and pre-plan before the lessons of reading. (L1 & L2 Teacher, Lithuania).

Discussion and Reflection: *Have the new methods motivated students in reading literature?*

According to teachers' perceptions, the extent the new methods had motivated students in reading literature varied. Teachers whose students had been exposed to reading literature programs extensively before in their schools, did not seem to feel that students had been motivated to read more, although suggesting that "students read enough for school" does not give evidence of motivation. "Reading in their free time," however, can suggest that. Such teachers claimed at the same time that the new methods helped their students "to accept teachers' proposals and to compare their opinions with those of their school's friends (L1 Teacher, Italy).

In the same tone, another teacher claimed: "I can't say they all feel more motivated, but they are certainly more confident in approaching literary texts, and I think this will support their future motivation too" (L2 Teacher, Italy). Other teachers who claimed that their students are fond of literature said that "according to the students' reflections in their journals, most of them enjoyed these methods" (L1 Teacher, Sweden). A student in this group said: "I am now beginning to realize what I really know and what I imagine that I know – and the difference in between." The same teacher said: "The first method gave my students the chance to be more confident in listening to their own voice and opinion. The second method helped them understand the way a literary text is created and I think it made some of them more interested in reading as well."

L1 and L2 teachers from Cyprus commented about the two methods and the log use in the following way:

The first method really allowed the students to understand how to look closely at a text and to realize that things do not have to be overtly obvious in order for a writer to convey his story or message. It also allowed them to have an opinion and to realize that this opinion really does count. They also realized that first reactions are important and that critical analysis of the reactions of others can deepen one's own understanding of a text. The group work was profoundly beneficial and the discussion time was invaluable. The second method, although confusing at first, seemed to catch the attention of most of the class, and helped them again to look deeper into a text and see what the writer was trying to do at certain point. The fact that some 'layers' overlapped also sparked a great interest and the assignments done at the end really helped them understand that what they had been doing in class was useful and interesting. Journals were well received and they soon caught on to the fact that writing in them was not just something the teacher had asked them to do but was in fact a useful analytical tool through which they could freely express themselves and their ideas and reflections.

Another teacher said: "I cannot say whether the two methods have enhanced the students' motivation for reading literature in general, but I think the methods have made them more active as readers and also made some of the students realize that a text might seem different after a close reading" (L2 Teacher, Sweden). The L1 & L2 teacher from Lithuania felt that "active reading motivates. From the results of the questionnaire we can see that students are not fond of reading. But they got interested in this text because the methods were interesting, [and] the text was not typical." Moreover, another important point from the same teacher was the acknowledgement of the importance of the teacher's role.

Classroom Implications

From what we have seen so far, the perceptions of the teachers from the students' journals and the teachers' involvement in the implementation of the two new pedagogical methods indicate varied increase of motivation. However, all students seemed to have gained from the two new methods which seemed to have enhanced motivation to some degree and supported different learning styles. They motivated students in looking and approaching literary reading from different angles, appreciating and sharing views of others, listening to other students' opinions, sharing them on the forum, and working in groups. The new methods also helped students develop skills in reading literary work, which motivated them in reading the actual text to analyze and understand different aspects of it. Moreover, students experienced different levels of approaching and understanding literary texts and were engaged in writing. Finally, they had the opportunity to link literary work issues with their life and current social issues. All in all, they were engaged in alternative methods to approaching reading literature. On a different level, the important role of the teacher, acting as a very well organized facilitator was also noted.

The study and analysis of all teachers' report indicated the following: the two methods used were different from the methods usually used in the teaching of literature. Therefore, they certainly made a difference in the students' study of literature and contributed to some degree, different level to each group, in their motivation increase. Although the different groups had different linguistic and cultural backgrounds and some differences in the methods of studying literature, they all seemed to have been involved with interest in the activities and have benefited from them. Finally, it is worth noting, that another difference was due to the varied background of the participating teachers: they differed in linguistic and cultural background, in knowledge and experience in teaching, and in teaching style. Some participating teachers were more and better informed by current practices in language teaching, and more specifically in teaching literature; others were somewhat traditional in their methods or their teaching method knowledge was limited. The level of understanding of the new methods by the teachers seemed to have some effect on their implementation and their input on students. It is certain that the use of journal from both teachers and students has contributed to reflection of the teaching and learning processes at deeper levels. This was beneficial in the increase of motivation to both students and teachers.

SECOND IMPLEMENTATION AND TESTING / DATA ANALYSIS

Participants' Profile

Similar number students participated in this phase from all five countries and schools as they did in Phase 1. There were groups of first (L1) and second language (L2). Their age ranged from fifteen to seventeen years old and the participants represented approximately equally both sexes. A total of ten teachers participated in the project, two from each country, an L1 and an L2 teacher.

Text Choice

For the second choice of literature, it was unanimously decided to use the following text: (a) *Much Ado About Nothing*, a comedy by William Shakespeare, for L2 students and (b) the translated version of the same comedy for L1 students

New Teaching Methods 3 and 4

The aim of Method 3 was to give students the opportunity to ‘live’ literature through dramatization, using props and generally living the roles of the play and the era it represented. The students were to focus on the shaping and understanding of a character and reflect on their own chosen part in the play. Another aim was to give students the opportunity to enjoy and express themselves through literature dramatization. Method 4 involved keeping reading logs. The aim was to give students the opportunity to voice their innermost thoughts and reflections in connection with the work in progress during the whole phase, that is, the stage work, focusing on character portrayal, the video recorded performance and, finally, the reviewing part.

Student and Teacher Logs

It was clearly evident that the students’ reading logs and journals played a very important role in their reflective learning. Students seemed to have found them as a great way to express their impressions on their work, develop their critical thinking, exercise very successfully the skill of reflective learning, and document with comments the whole process, including highlights and difficulties. Great analytical thinking at various levels was reflected in these students’ writings: shaping and understanding of a character; reflect on their own chosen part in the play; possibility of changing accent as well as pitch and diction in order to experiment with possible ways of expression; change the way the character talked or moved, for example, dialect, accent, or class belonging; anchor the scenes in modern times; reflect on the characters and on their own relation to their characters and if they could pinpoint anything in their characters’ personalities that was independent of time and space; how the story could change if moved to another time period or another place; and, finally, meaning of words during different historic times. The students’ reading logs reflected deep involvement in the learning activities, great enthusiasm and involvement, problem solving of practical video recording problems, end of the year heavy activity load, etc. The following are some examples of students’ log writing:

I don’t think my view on Beatrice has changed that much... What has changed is that I now believe she is much gentler than I thought she was at the beginning. This may be because of two things: either I am able to relate to her more now and in that way I can understand and like her more, or our group ‘made her’ more kind while we acted since we changed her language and time scenario. (Student L1 Reading Log, Sweden)

We have decided to have our scene take place in an American High School environment. This means that we had to change the character a little bit. It was difficult but fun to do this because we had to be aware so we wouldn’t change the relationship between the characters. When we changed the accent, we really had to think about the hidden meaning in the text. (Student L1 Reading Log, Sweden)

Beatrice’s personality seems very cold on the outside, but inside, I think she’s sensitive, which is common among young people today. (Student L2 Reading Log, Sweden)

Don John would probably be a Mafia boss surrounded by bribed policemen looking the other way or some criminal not caring about other people's feelings. (Student L2 Reading Log, Sweden)

Students really enjoyed filming the scenes and wrote very enthusiastically afterwards. (Teacher 1 Log, Cyprus)

Teachers' logs recorded the implementation of the two new methods, and described their students' profiles, their impressions of the students' logs and their own perceptions of the whole process. The general impression was that all students were deeply involved in both activities. Teachers commented strongly on the way students developed their learning management skills, independent and reflective learning, problem solving and initiative taking. According to them, students took responsibilities constantly, worked independently, took initiatives, showed great creativity, for example, when it came to filling in for absent people and cutting long dialogues, and showed great enthusiasm and involvement. According to their teachers, students were involved in deep reflection and critical thinking of the play characters, context, content, language, comparison of English and mother tongue version of the play, and adaptation at different levels. Teachers gave their students ample independence and students came up with great ideas in adapting the play in many different ways, solving practical problems, involving themselves enthusiastically and with vivid motivation. The following are but a few examples of teachers' log writing:

The students were motivated because it was non-traditional lesson...students were interested in acting because they got better experience how it is done in reality. (Teacher L1 Log, Lithuania)

Non-traditional lessons let the students improvise, and gain self-confidence in their abilities and language skills. (Teacher L2 Log, Lithuania)

Students were very enthusiastic and they were happy that they had a lot more autonomy and responsibility in the lesson... due to the nature of the methods, not only have they maybe broadened their literacy horizons, but have also done something creative. (Teacher L1 Log, Cyprus)

Discussion and Reflection: *Have the new methods motivated students in reading literature?*

It seems that all teachers felt both methods really motivated students to read a Shakespearean play and be enthusiastically and deeply involved and exploratory in the different facets of the two activities. "This time it was not very difficult to enthuse the students, rather I had to stop them bringing out more spectacular events..." (L1 Teacher, Sweden). The first activity gave students the possibility to engage in reading literature in an involving, active, practical and creative way, which involved cooperative, collaborative learning, problem solving and decision making: "They decided who was going to film the scenes, to arrange the setting and the costumes, and to perform the characters. Enthusiasm was great!" (Teacher L2, Italy). It also gave students the opportunity to engage in the use of technology in their learning with the use of video recorders. The second activity developed students' reflective skills, critical thinking, and recording of their learning, thoughts and reactions. Here are some teacher comments about student motivation:

Practice work motivates students, and it is interesting because they work creatively and independently. (Teacher L2 Log, Lithuania)

I also told the students to feel free to anchor the scenes in modern times, which seemed to appeal to many of them. (L2 Teacher, Sweden)

Students worked separately in groups to record their scenes. The problems they faced were many and different and they wrote about them in their journals and logs, but they all liked that new way of doing something for the school... Parents were impressed by the results [of the student performance] and congratulated [both the students and the teachers] for the way of motivating their children, and students felt proud of their work as well... Students have been very motivated by the possibilities to make practical things. (L2 Teacher, Italy)

In general, as stated by Teacher L2 from Cyprus "... as a whole, most students were pleased with this kind of project; it really motivated them and gave them a chance to express themselves..."

Classroom Implications

From what we have seen so far, the perceptions of the teachers from the students' journals and the teachers' involvement in the implementation of the third and fourth new methods indicate a vivid increase of motivation and all students seemed to have gained from both methods. The methods seemed to have enhanced vivid motivation and supported true student involvement, initiative taking, and active and reflective learning. They motivated students in looking and approaching different aspects of their literary reading such as characters, interpretation, dramatization and language from different angles, appreciating a play of a different time than theirs, and working in groups. The new methods also helped students develop skills in reading literary work and understanding it through dramatization and reflection, which motivated them in reading the actual text to analyze and understand different angles of looking at it. Finally, students had the opportunity to compare characters and society of different historic periods and explore ways of adapting them to different periods, including the current one. Consider the following two excerpts here:

It was a very interesting activity for all of them, especially because they've worked in a lot of different ways: reading, watching a film rewriting a literary text, video recording... So I can say that this activity has been very involving and very enjoyable for the whole class and for each student, who could have improved his or her organization and creative abilities. (L1 Teacher, Italy)

This activity has been very involving, because as one of my students wrote in her log 'it develops our organizational and creative abilities, and it is an amazing activity at the same time.' Students used the two methods almost simultaneously and wrote their journals for each session. The reflections written in the logs have often been the basis for discussion in class, both among them and with the teacher. They have been very motivated by the possibilities to make practical things, and in this way to realize how acting can be difficult. Many of them said they had learnt a lot from this new experience defined by G., an L2 student from Italy, as an 'unusual homework.' A., another L2 student from Italy added that she'll read some other play by Shakespeare. (L2 Teacher, Italy)

The following student comment is indicative of the students' feelings:

I think that the performance of some scenes is a way to learn English. I don't have to stay all afternoon to study the English book, but I can learn with my friends and enjoy. (L2 Student, Italy)

CONCLUSIONS

The study and analyses of all data indicated the following: the four methods used were different from the methods usually used in the teaching of literature. Therefore, the combined use of these four methods certainly made a difference in the students' study of literature which no doubt contributed greatly to student motivation increase in reading literature.

Thus far, students and teacher engaged in reading short stories (Ernest Hemingway, 1899-1961, American) and theatrical plays (William Shakespeare, 1564-1616, UK). The first new method involved student participation, reflection on other students' comments about the short story, group and class discussion, creative writing and reporting on own and others thoughts. The second new method explored the different dimensions of the text, and examined different aspects of it. The third new method involved deepening awareness of a play through character and story studying and adaptation of the story and roles in different ways through dramatization. Finally, the fourth new method involved the keeping of a student log supporting the development of reflective learning. Naturally, a series of other phases will follow. The aim will continue to be the choice and use of further literary texts and the implementation of new methods in the five European contexts. Even more importantly, the aim is to come up with more new methods in motivating high school students to read literary texts, trial them and have them available for use by any interested teacher or student. This is an endeavour worth pursuing today and tomorrow.

REFERENCES

- ALCUIN Project Retrieved December 31, 2008, from http://www.alcuine.se/blog/?page_id=2
- Bacon, F. (1625). 'Of Studies.' In J. Spedding, R. Ellis, & D. Heath (Eds.). *The Works of Francis Bacon* (1887-1901), Vol. 6, 498.
- Furedi, F. (May 2008). *Let's turn a new page in the world of reading*. Spiked. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from <http://www.spiked-online.com/index.php?site/printable/5131/>
- Griswold, J. (2008). *Whatever happened to reading for fun?* Retrieved December 31, 2008, from <http://wordsalive.org/docs/GriswoldReadingForFun.doc>
- Martin, M. O., Gonzalez, E. J., & Kennedy, A. M. (2003). *PIRLS 2001 International Report: IEA's Study of Reading Literacy Achievement in Primary Schools*, Mullis, I.V.S., Chestnut Hill, MA: Boston College. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2001i/pdf/p1_IR_book.pdf
http://timss.bc.edu/pirls2001i/PIRLS2001_Pubs_IR.html

- Mullis, I., Martin, M., Kennedy, A., & Foy, P. (2007). *PIRLS 2006 International Report IEA's Progress International Reading Literacy Study in Primary Schools in 40 Countries*. Chestnut Hill, MA: TIMSS & PIRLS International Study Center, Boston College. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from http://timss.bc.edu/PDF/PIRLS2006_international_report.pdf
- National Endowment for the Arts. (2004). *Reading at Risk: A Survey of Literary Reading in America*. Research Division Report #46 Washington, DC. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from <http://www.nea.gov/pub/ReadingAtRisk.pdf>
- National Endowment for the Arts. (Nov. 2007). *To Read or not to Read Research Report #47*. Washington, DC. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from <http://www.arts.gov/research/ToRead.pdf>
- OECD Directorate for Education. (2003). *The PISA 2003 Assessment Framework: Mathematics, Reading, Science and Problem Solving Knowledge and Skills*. OECD (Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development) Directorate of Education. Retrieved December 31, 2008, from http://www.oecd.org/document/29/0,3343,en_32252351_32236173_33694301_1_1_1_1,00.html
- Sartre, J. P. (1967). *What is Literature?* Bernard Frechtman (Tr.). Guildford, UK: Methuen. (PN45.S2 1965)
- Dutta, C. (2008). *Information Literacy Competency and Readership Study of Five Specific Localities in Urban, Industrial and Semi-Urban Areas of Kolkata Metropolitan City. Kolkata*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall Inc.

Acknowledgments: Special thanks to the students, teachers and academics involved in the ALCUIN project.

Dr. Salomi Papadima-Sophocleous is an assistant professor at the University of Nicosia, Cyprus. She teaches TEFL and CALL. She has taught in Australia and Greece and her research interests include on campus and online L2 teaching and learning (English, French, and Greek), teacher-training, testing, curriculum development (printed/electronic), CALL, and Quality Assurance. Her publications include journal articles, conference proceedings and printed/electronic L2 teaching materials. She has also participated in teacher education projects in Australia and Europe.

E-mail: papadima.s@unic.ac.cy