

# Introducing Reading and writing to young learners in English and Croatian languages

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**SVEUČILIŠTE U ZAGREBU  
UČITELJSKI FAKULTET  
ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**

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**DIPLOMSKI RAD**

**INTRODUCING INITIAL READING AND  
WRITING TO YOUNG LEARNERS IN  
CROATIAN AND ENGLISH LANGUAGES**

Zagreb, rujan 2020.

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**ODSJEK ZA UČITELJSKE STUDIJE**  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Initial reading and writing is one of the first skills developing processes the pupils will encounter when starting their compulsory education and has been a focus of research for many years and in many different areas of research. In this thesis we will outline some of the basic factors that more or less directly set the path of individual development in this field for each learner in Croatian schools in both the Croatian and English language acquisition. Firstly we will bring the focus on the historical development of different theories and their applications in teaching young learners to read and write, shifting from skill drilling to understanding the complexity of literacy development process and all determining factors. Further on we will go through these determining factors such as learner's age and developmental traits, and on the other hand more extrinsic factors such as the context in which education is takes place. We can see how the Croatian educational system in primary schools and its defining documents reflect on the textbook contents for the youngest participants in the last chapter, and prior to that, how different syllabi and programmes on teacher education institutions can take the impact on the level of competence for new teachers in means of understanding the main theories behind the early literacy development.

Key words: initial reading, initial writing, young learners, pre-reading skills, pre-writing skills

## SAŽETAK

Početno čitanje i pisanje jedan je od prvih procesa u razvijanju školskih vještina s kojima će se učenici susresti na početku obveznog obrazovanja i ono je predmetom istraživanja dug broj godina u brojnim različitim područjima istraživanja. U ovom radu ćemo iznijeti neke od osnovnih čimbenika koji izravnije ili manje izravno ucrtavaju put individualnog razvoja za svakog učenika u hrvatskim školama pri usvajanju i razvoju jezičnih vještina hrvatskog i engleskog jezika.

Prvo ćemo se usredotočiti na povijesni razvoj različitih teorija i njihove primjene u poučavanju učenika ranog uzrast čitanju i pisanju, polazeći od vježbanja vještina do razumijevanja složenosti procesa razvoja pismenosti i svih njegovih određujućih čimbenika. Dalje ćemo proći kroz odlučujuće faktore, kao što su dob i razvojni stadij učenika, i s druge strane izvanjske čimbenike, poput konteksta u kojem se obrazovanje odvija. Možemo vidjeti kako hrvatski obrazovni sustav u osnovnim školama i njegovi definirajući dokumenti utječu na sadržaje udžbenika za najmlađe polaznike u posljednjem poglavlju, a prije toga kako različiti nastavni programi i programi na ustanovama za nastavničko obrazovanje mogu utjecati na razinu kompetencije za nove učitelje u smislu razumijevanja glavnih teorija koje stoje iza ranog razvoja pismenosti.

Ključne riječi: početno čitanje, početno pisanje, rano učenje, predčitačke vještine



# 1 INTRODUCTION

Every year in every school there are thousands of first graders, young learners who are, more or less ready to acquire literacy. Learning how to write and read becomes their first serious objective and purpose as soon as they step into the classroom. Over the years, teaching methods, practices, and approaches to this very basic component of the schooling process have been changing. The teachers in the field have been trying to be responsive to the cognitive discoveries to how the process improves. Being ready to change and adapt to the current occasion and opportunities is somehow crucial for teachers if they are trying to teach in a way that is the best for their learners. Teaching learners how to read and write is one of the greatest challenges for every teacher, and it becomes somewhat a bigger challenge if the teacher teaches a foreign language. Being able to overcome the obstacles in this process in the means of finding available methods, theoretical and practical approaches, props and other components that are suitable for a certain class of young language learners soon becomes our motivator in becoming better teachers every day.

On the pages to follow we will try to depict some of the crucial moments in the initial literacy development in Croatian schools, starting from the basic theoretical understanding on how we got to understand the process of language skill acquisition as it is.

## **2 READING AND WRITING RESEARCH OR LITERACY RESEARCH: A SHORT HISTORICAL OVERVIEW**

The research in the field of reading as we know it today began in the middle of the twentieth century. To be more precise, it started in the U.S.A. in the 1950s with the notion of conditioned learning that was greatly influenced by the Skinnerian behaviourism. What was specific to this way of teaching was the “look-and-say” approach in which learners were given texts with controlled vocabulary, and synthetic phonic drill (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 34). The skills and the processes of learning to read were broken into separate units and, as such, were taught and practiced in the classroom. In other words, learning was not to be viewed as a process or in some way development, but as “acquiring behaviours as a result of certain environmental contingencies” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 35). What we can recognise in this era of L2 literacy teaching is what Renata Šamo refers to as the *bottom-up model* characterised by sequential processing from letters to sounds, words, sentences and finally to meaning (Šamo, 2015, p. 142). Opposed to this model, there is the *top-down model* “implying thinking and meaning at a very early stage of reading and very little attention is paid to grapho-phonemic correspondence (Šamo, 2015, p. 142). The latter model is an indication of an era to come, in which the experts turned to higher level of cognitive activity such as predicting and guessing in order to understand the context of the text as an aid in teaching young learners to read.

The second era in teaching reading and writing - the era of natural learning (1966-1975) occurred under the influence of social changes in the mid-1960s. There was a growth of interest in neurology and artificial intelligence accompanied with some degree of distrust towards the behavioural approach as a set of “skills passively drilled and practiced until reflexively demonstrated” (Alexander & Fox, 2004 p. 36). The research of reading process soon became an interest of a wide range of disciplines which resulted in the interdisciplinary perspective on the nature of reading. Two categories of experts made the strongest influence in this stage, linguists following the tradition of Noam Chomsky with his “hard-wired view of

language acquisition”, and psycholinguists who advocated reading as the “natural communicative power” and “inherent aesthetic of reading”. The notion of Noam Chomsky’s “hard-wired” capacity was a product of blending the explanatory languages of physiology and psychology. He proposed the idea of learners being “biologically programmed to acquire language under favourable conditions” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.37), summoned as Language Acquisition Device. Psycholinguists also made a great effort in investigating semantics and how learners acquired, represented and used meaning during the process of reading.

Other than the perspective of learning language as a natural process, some other ideas and fields of research appeared in this era. One was the tendency to the integration of language arts into the unified field of literacy on one hand, and the other was the research in the field of artificial intelligence which resulted with a growing interest in the “text-based performance, memory, recall and problem-solving approaches and for the degree in which the specific domain of study and the task altered mental processes” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.39).

The new approaching era was the era of information processing (1976-1985), again with certain theoretical changes, which included growing attention to the structure and processes of the human mind. Due to the establishment of research centres in the U.S.A. a great number of researchers in cognitive psychology gathered, but also those in the fields of English language, literature and communication. Now researchers shifted from the predominant stance on language acquisition as a natural, innate process, to knowledge research and, especially, to the construct of prior knowledge which was immensely influenced by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.40). His work was based on making a distinction between different sources of knowledge and the greatest division between them is the knowledge received through senses and the knowledge received through intellect or reason.

His view on the human mind, led to a new field of enquiry, so researchers began searching for the inherent “laws” and mechanisms of the human mind. Consequently, the paradigm of “diagnosis, prescription and remediation” as an approach to literacy teaching was replaced with the “mechanistic processing” paradigm.

This era also brought writings on story grammar, text cohesion, text structure, and text genres in the field of reading. Researchers also investigated how knowledge is

organised in the mind and in what way that organisation made difference between novice readers and more expert readers.

In contrast to the information-processing advocates stood those who held to a more naturalistic view on literacy, concerned about the aesthetic over the rational reading. The most prominent author in this field was Louise Rosenblatt with her classic work *The Reader, the Text and the Poem: The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work*(1978.). She has opposed the previous, ‘*effere*nt’ approach to reading to the new ‘*aesthetic*’ approach. Rosenblatt states that “students need to be allowed to develop aesthetic reading skills which enhance the reader’s enjoyment of literature and assist in the development of critical thinking” (Rosenblatt, 1982 in Schnell, 1990, p.5).

This time researches became more interested in the writing process, rooted in the field of rhetoric in the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s (Langer & Flihan, 2000, p.2). We can say that this was the beginning of a modern research in writing that will continue in the next periods, and mostly because of the shift in perceiving reading and writing as integrated language processes that this era delivered.

The mid-1980s brought new changes in literacy research, largely influenced by the writings in social and cultural anthropology, the works of Vygotsky, Lave and others. These writings opened the door for the ethnographic and qualitative models of inquiry in the field of literacy research, which descended from social and cultural anthropology. This was the era of sociocultural learning (1986-1995). Along with the previously mentioned, came the changes in studying literacy in terms of “naturally occurring texts with natural settings such as classrooms, homes, and workplaces” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p.44). This sparked the shift in the methodology of literacy research towards a more holistic and aesthetic approach. Less importance was being given to the outcome of learning, and more to the learning process due to growing distrust in the formal knowledge and the traditional mode of scientific inquiry. Individualistic learning and instruction was replaced with group-oriented learning. Literacy research was interested in studying the understanding of many, as opposed to the private knowledge of an individual. The goal of this era became the “description of the ways of knowing unique to particular social, cultural, and educational group” (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 45). The new awareness of the important role of the group in the process of learning resulted in creating new terms

in the theory of literacy research, such as learning communities, socially shared cognition, distributed cognition, shared expertise, guided participation, situated action and anchored instruction.

The teacher now became the facilitator or guide who was to provide scaffolding upon which pupils could build their knowledge and strategic abilities in a particular area, so to encourage their self-direction and autonomy (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 46).

Finally, the year of 1996 brought a new paradigm into the literacy research and instruction, and we can say that we are still in that era. This is characteristic for engaged learning in which our views on the perceptions of text, readers and reading has changed. The new viewpoint on reading boosted the research on the learner's motivation and its factors such as interest, goals, self-efficacy, self-regulation, and active participation in reading and text-based learning. The idea of the "engaged learner" refers to the learner's active and goal-directed participation in the process of text-based learning. What Janice F. Almasi, Margaret McKeown and Isabel L. Black found in their research in 1996 is that using interpreting tools such as relating the content of the text to personal experiences, actually triggers further cognitive engagement in the text and developing new interpretation instruments. ( Almasi, McKeown and Black, 1996, p. 119). The theoretical background of each era that we can find in the most influential writings of Skinner, Chomsky, Kant and Vygotsky, were replaced with writings of John Dewey who was focused experiential learning and interest as unavoidable parts in the theory of engaged learning. This era delivered a shift in the way we classify a component reader, so being a component reader does not just refer to demonstrating the basic language skills or fluency in reading, but rather a continuous growth in reading and writing. That points to the developmental dimension of language learning, according to which individuals are continually in the process of learning and have a direct role to take in their literacy. The developmental perspective widens concerns beyond the early years into adolescence adulthood.

Opposite to the view of the learner as motivated, engaged knowledge-seeker, and to the learning as a developmental process that happens in the sociocultural context, stands a reconditioning perspective on learning, interested in the "identification, teaching and remediation of the subskills or components underlying reading acquisition" (Alexander & Fox, 2004, p. 53). While schools and researchers

in the previous era of conditioned learning were centred on dealing with a serious problem of inadequate levels in children's' literacy and a wide number of learners facing problems in reading and writing, this new conditioning approach had a different background. It was aimed at creating a national standard and unified tests to assess skills and contents the learner should have acquired at a given point in the schooling process which brought this new stance of reconditioning.

We can summarise these fifty years of research on literacy as a process of developing the wide interdisciplinary basis which serves as an anchorage in creating literacy instruction that would meet every child's needs. Experts such as reading specialists, psycholinguists, literature researchers, cognitive scientists, generative grammarians, anthropologists, neurobiologists, psychologists and many others gave the best of the fields of their inquiry and thus created a framework within which we can place the process of literacy development.

## 3 READING AND WRITING PROCESSES

The traditional way of perceiving reading and writing is as two out of four language skills –listening, speaking, reading and writing. There is a division of these four skills in two pairs of two, which Jeremy Harmer mentions in *The Practice of English Language Teaching*, into “productive skills in the term for speaking and writing”, and “receptive skills in the term used for reading and listening” (Harmer, 2015 , p.144).

The modern concept of reading and writing is as an integrated process of developing literacy. This view does not leave the previously detected elements of reading and writing acquisition, such as developmental phases, or mastering of some subskills, but rather integrates them in one process of acquiring literacy.

### 3.1 Reading Development

The process of learning to read is established on phonemic awareness <sup>1</sup>and knowledge of the alphabetic system (Ehri, 2005, p. 167). Every step in the process of introducing initial reading and writing to pupils starts with developing these two skills. In order to structure their classes in the way that is most suitable for their pupils, and to achieve their learners to develop their reading and writing skills, teachers should be aware of the stages in the reading and writing development. Harley (2008, p. 241) mentions Ehri’s theory about the acquisition of reading in four phases, which is shown in Figure 1. A similar division can be found in Čudina-Obradović (2008. p. 21).

The first phase is called the *pre-alphabetic phase* which means that children are supposed to be able to understand a correspondence of the meaning of the word and its visual content, the so-called grapheme-phoneme correspondence (Harley, 2008, p.241).Furthermore, Čudina-Obradović says that children can “read” words learned this way in a text when they are put in a context, but what happens is that they recognise the familiar words, and guess the meaning of the other words using

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<sup>1</sup>Smith Simmons& Kame'enui, (1998). In *Phonological awareness: Instructional and curricular basics and implications* defined phonemic awareness as “the ability to hear and manipulate sounds in spoken words and the understanding that spoken wordsand syllables are made up sequences of sounds” (as cited in *Phonemic awareness*, n.d.). Umbrella term for phonemic awareness is *phonological awareness*, which besides phonemic awareness, also applies to *word awareness*, *syllable awareness*, and *onset-rime awareness* as reading and writing developmental levels.

the logical reasoning (2008, p. 21).

The second phase is recognised as the *partial alphabetic reading phase* in which children start noticing letters within the word, they can associate some letters with the corresponding sounds. What is mostly proposed is that children first associate the initial and the final letter of the word with their sounds, because they are the easiest to pick out (Ehri 1992. in Harley, 2008.). Čudina-Obradović (2008, p. 21) notes that the phonetic segmentation starts in this phase, which is an indicator of increased awareness of the elements that form a word, but that children are not able to completely segment a word into all of its sounds.

The third phase is identified as the *full alphabetic phase* in which children are expected to be able to make complete connections between letters and sounds. Consequently, they can read the words they have never seen before; the more children read, the more words they learn by sight. Getting to know words by sight enables them to read more quickly because they no longer depend on the letter-sound conversion. That is why children who read more also learn to read faster, since the sight-word reading requires less time than the letter-sound conversion.

The final phase is known as the *consolidated alphabetic phase* in which children can read like adults since they learn to “operate with multi-letter units such as syllables, rimes and morphemes” (Harley, 2008, p. 242). Harley points out the importance of using rhymes in the process of reading development. Rime, the end part of a word that produces rhyme, is the phonological equivalent of the orthographic body of monosyllabic words; it is crucial in developing this connection between the visual body of a certain word and how it is pronounced. Therefore, exposing children to rhymes helps them develop their phonological recording skills which were found essential in the further development of reading. It is easier for children to record a word if it is similar to another word they have already learned, and if a child is able to notice a pattern in words, soon s/he becomes able to read words fluently, without having to know the meaning of a specific word.



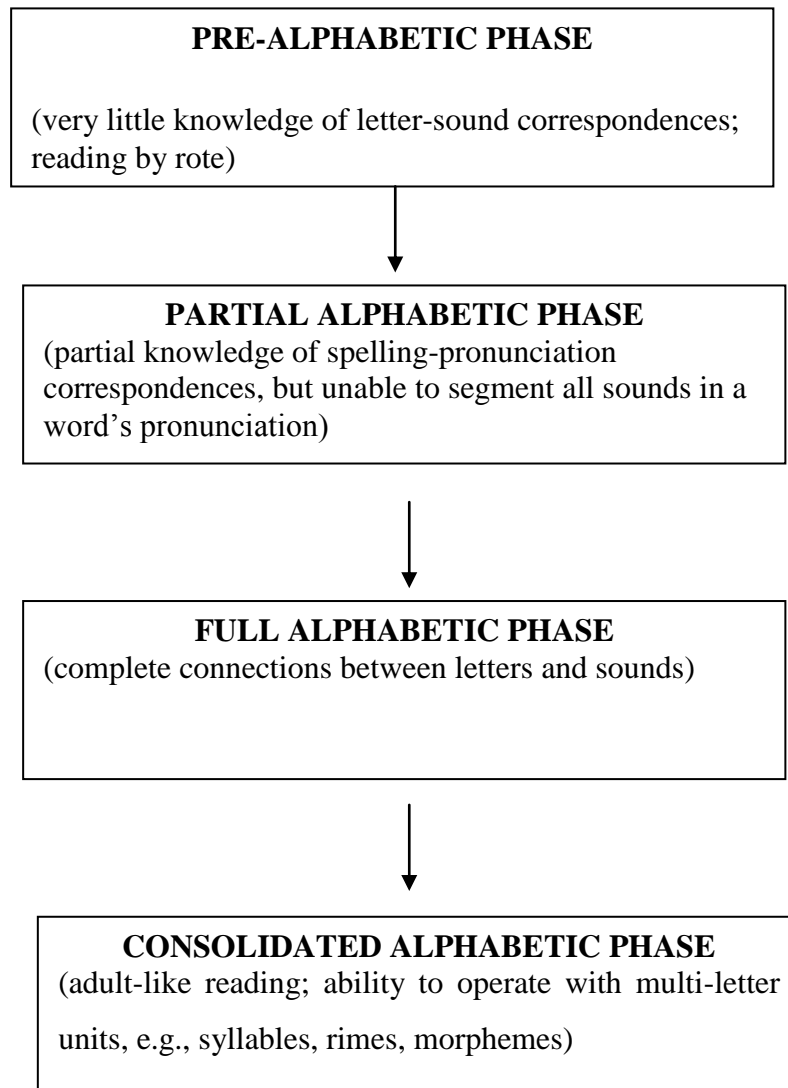


Figure 1 Ehri's four stages of reading development (Harley, 2008)

### ***3.1.1 Pre-reading Skills and Reading skills.***

Children start developing their awareness of the written language at a very early age. As young as two or three years of age they can show some initial understanding of how the written language functions and we refer to this as pre-reading skills. These skills change and develop in several stages, in a process that is dependent on the child's age, surroundings and predispositions in general.

The ability to understand how language functions and the message-transferring purpose of the written language depends vastly on the frequency of usage of the written information in child's surroundings, as Čudina-Obradović states (2008, p. 23).

Further on, children aged four or five should be able to understand some basic principles in reading and writing. Such principles are that we read and write from left to right (in the Western societies) and from up to down. Children of this age should also acquire and understand the basic vocabulary in reading and writing like words and letters. To develop the awareness of words being separate visual objects in a sentence, as well as to develop the knowledge of the phonemic structures of words is crucial in this phase.

The next phase is related to the ages five or six, and is strongly marked with improvements in noticing word structures. Children at this age are able to divide words into letters and play with rhyme and alliteration. The consciousness of the word structure itself is a basis of learning to read because it enables a child to divide the spoken words into abstract units, or phonemes that correspond to their written symbols - letters.

The final phase in the pre-reading development occurs between the ages of six and seven. Children in this phase, many of them even earlier, are able to understand the connection between phonemes and graphemes. They will easily sort words according to their first or last letters.

We can say that the pre-reading skills are an accurate marker of the future success in acquiring the ability to read, but also indicative of how successful a pupil will be in the schooling process in general (Čudina-Obradović, 2008, p.24).

What Čudina-Obradović (2008, p.24) says about the next phase in the literary development is that, at the ages of seven and eight, children are competent to understand that each sound has its written sign and can code and decode words using letters. Such activities are not only used for achieving automatism in the pre-reading skills, but also for applying the alphabetic principle<sup>2</sup> automatically, distinguishing between capital and lowercase letters, the knowledge in semantics and syntax, and orthographic knowledge.

Finally, children aged eight and nine have improved their skill to code or decode words using letters enough to start focusing on the content and message of

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<sup>2</sup> Alphabetic principle is the understanding that letters represent sounds which form words; it is the knowledge of predictable relationships between written letters and spoken sounds. Retrieved from <http://www.sightwordsgame.com/learning-to-read/what-is-the-alphabetic-principle/>.

the text they are reading. They start to notice unusual patterns in the text, humour, parts of the text that carry ethical or aesthetic importance and different parts of the text that are in contrast to one another. In other words, children at this age can start to enjoy reading as a meaningful activity that serves for no other purpose than to read, as opposed to the earlier stages in which reading activities served to practice and master the skill of reading itself. Also, children at this age are becoming able to imagine or visualise and, therefore, start relying on illustrations less than in the earlier stages.

### **3.2 Writing Development**

It is well known that the reading and writing development occurs simultaneously and in a relation to one another. In the development of the writing skills, we can also determine some developmental phases. As we have already mentioned, the basic difference between reading and writing is that reading is classified as a receptive skill, and writing as a productive skill.

Knowing that, we can assume that the writing development depends in a great percentage on child's motor skills, as well as on his or her cognitive skills.

The writing development starts at around the second year of age, and this is in some way a preparation for its later phases. Čudina-Obradović (2004) mentions six developmental phases of writing.

The first one occurs when a child is at two years of age, able to communicate with the world through his or her scribbles. The activities of drawing in this phase clearly indicate the child's desire to express himself/herself and his/her inner world to the ones around him/her. There are various ways to encourage children to explore in this phase, and the most important thing is to offer them different accessories like pencils, crayons, chalks in different colours, papers, boards, etc.

The exact message which a child conveys in this developmental phase can only be known to that particular child; though some research has shown that even at this early stage it is possible to determine a difference between "writing" and "drawing". In this phase, children are focused on the trace that their movement with a pencil leaves on the paper, and should not be rushed into activities that are more suitable for other higher phases of writing.

The next phase brings the child's awareness of the messages s/he is trying to transfer by what they have written, and that there are their recipients. An important role of parents and educators is to carefully observe children's descriptions of what they are drawing or writing, and what they are saying about it in order to fully understand the messages behind their scribbles. It is very important to encourage the child and praise him/her each time s/he tries to represent something with their drawings.

Children in the third phase are able to represent a certain situation or event that is important to them. They will try to tell a story with what they have written, or tell what they have experienced related to some event in their life. The ability to connect speech and scribbling, or drawing is practiced in the interaction with the educator or a parent when a child is interpreting some of their drawings. This is particularly important, because the connection between speech and drawing is a precondition to further development of writing. Parents' and educators' role in this phase is to encourage children to create a story about their drawings and to say the messages their drawings convey. Asking questions about their drawings will help children develop the notion of connectedness between what they have drawn and what message, or content it brings.

A child in the fourth phase starts using figures that serve as a symbol for the message he or she is trying to deliver. After having successfully made a connection between the story and the drawing in the previous phase, a child's scribbles start to resemble writing, more than drawing.

In this phase a child's own writing system is established. S/he starts to imitate the writing of letters, numbers and other formal symbols organised in a form that resembles a certain message or a piece of text. In some cases a certain symbol may represent different words or letters, and a child can also add his or her understanding of the world, and perhaps show the symbol for "butterfly" physically smaller than the symbol for "elephant".

In the fifth stage, a child is ready to start to notice and perform the process of translating the spoken language into writing. With the help of an adult, the child will be able to acquire the basic knowledge of each letter in the alphabet. Allowing

children to experience each letter in the means of their characteristics, such as shape, orientation and how they are positioned in a certain word can be achieved by instructing children to physically draw each letter, first by following the lines of a written letter, and then encouraging children to write by using a pencil. It is crucial that a child first follows the lines of a certain letter using his/her finger, and perhaps tries to write it using colours in the sand or on the paper. This is the way a child creates the bond between the cognitive knowledge of a certain letter and the sound it represents and the material sign for that letter. After a child has acquired the physical characteristics of a certain letter, the parent or a teacher should encourage the child to practice writing, first by copying letters from a textbook, and finally to write letters using their memory and knowledge of each letter they have learned.

The sixth developmental stage of writing is characterised by the complete understanding of the connectedness between sounds and letters. Now children can apply the alphabetic principle and autonomously write even words that they have not written earlier. Children's writing in this final stage is more readable than earlier and resembles the conventional writing more than in any earlier stage.

These developmental stages of writing, as Čudina-Obradović explained, are referential for average children, and the knowledge of how they occur and are manifested makes it easier for teachers to provide their instruction suitable for each child in the class.

What we should carry in mind is also the difference in the processes of writing development in different groups of languages. The Croatian language is phonic, and at the point the child has maintained to understand the letter-sound correspondence, the teacher's work mostly aims at pupils acquiring fluency in writing.

On the other hand, the English language is not phonic, and therefore, it is necessary for children who are in the process of learning how to write in English to acquire the correspondence between spelling and the spoken word. So, the children who have made a connection between the spoken and the written language, in order to progress in writing, need to have a clear structure of a certain word that is formed of consonants and syllables. In this stage of development,

consonants are in some way a scaffold and the words that a child hears and writes down resemble in a great scale. The child in the early stage of second language acquisition will often use the familiar pattern when writing new words.

The difficulty to write the word correctly comes from not understanding the language system, and in order to overcome that obstacle, the learner should be offered a very large number of exercises of mechanically copying the frequent words, so that later s/he could deductively use the known patterns for spelling the new words.

## **4 YOUNG LEARNERS**

Young learners in the Croatian schools are the children between six and seven at the beginning of their formal education. Their physical, psychical and socio-cultural features vary, but the basic overall condition of a child enrolling the primary education in Croatia is regulated by the Croatian Primary and Secondary Education Act, Article 19. Parents are obliged to register each child that has turned six years of age by April 1<sup>st</sup> of a current year to the nearest school. The school committee will then conduct the testing for all the registered children. The purpose of the testing is to establish whether the children that have been registered for the beginning of primary education are school-ready or not. The testing is done by a doctor, psychologist or pedagogue, special education teacher, and primary school teacher; it covers the overall child's development in the fields of motor, intellectual, speech and socio-emotional competences.

Learning to write and read requires children to have developed physical competences that enable them to participate in the schooling system without any significant difficulties.

### **4.1 Motor Competence**

Motor competence is generally divided in gross motor (locomotor) skills and object control skills. Starc, Čudina-Obradović, Pleša, Profaca and Letica (2004, pp. 154-155) bring the basic division of each category and a level of proficiency in each skill for children aged 6-7.

#### ***4.1.1 Locomotor and Object Control Skills.***

Children of this age should be able to easily shift between the different types of moving; from walking to running, and from walking to crossing over the obstacles. Average six and seven year olds are able to throw ball while running and interchange running and climbing over obstacles. Introducing writing in the first grade of primary school requires children not only to be cognitively ready for the educational system,

but also physically. The most important aspect of motor skills required in this field is object control, or more specifically, fine motor skills. Children aged 6-7 are able to:

- hit a target at 1.5 meters distance, using one hand;
- throw an object while coordinating the extremities and the rest of the body;
- throw a ball vertically and catch it;
- cut different paper shapes more precisely;
- use spreading knife;
- use cutlery with both hands simultaneously.

In terms of drawing, the first graders are able to properly hold a pencil and correctly draw horizontal, vertical and diagonal lines. The child of this age is more proficient in writing letters or numbers, but still prone to mirror writing.

## **4.2 Cognitive Competence**

According to Piaget's Cognitive Theory, children aged 6-7 are in a transition from the pre-operational to the concrete operational stage. Children of this age start to learn through language and logic, instead through observation as in the previous stages. First-graders are involved in abstract thinking and reasoning, and are drawn into games that are in some way a challenge, and require them to use the higher level of thinking (such as word games, mystery cases or problem solving games). The cognitive development in children occurs in two major areas; learning about the world and thinking in general.

### ***4.2.1 Learning about world.***

Constructing knowledge of the external world is a result of intended observations. Children of this age learn about the world by observing and actively exploring their surroundings through testing the common features of objects, such as size, depth, width, shape, scent, taste or sound. Children aged 6-7 are active in achieving proper orientation skills in time and space. Knowing the surroundings globally is as much interesting as knowing details of each element their surroundings are consisted of.



An important aspect of children's cognitive development in this phase is attention. First-grade children can intentionally hold their attention from 10 to 15 minutes, and can be involved in an activity for up to 60 minutes, when given a several short breaks. According to Starc et al. (2004, p. 156), children aged 6-7 can be focused on taking an action by being given verbal instructions, which is a crucial ability for children in the classroom while they are not yet proficient in reading, but are required to participate in classroom activities, with a limited time span.

#### **4.2.2 Thinking.**

Children at this age have already managed to overcome the previous stages of cognitive development, each child in their own time. The best way to check if a child has managed to shift from the pre-operational to the concrete operational phase is to carry Piaget's conservation experiment. A child who can understand that the amount of water does not change when poured into a beaker of a different size has developed the concept of conservation, and therefore should have managed to shift from the pre-operational phase into the concrete operational phase. Except the different forms of conservation, Starc et al.(2004., p. 156) add other aspects of thinking development that are specific for children aged 6-7, and those are:

- A. Finding connections between objects and events
- B. Memory
- C. Problem solving.

#### **A. Finding connections between objects and phenomena.**

At this stage, children can easily categorise different objects and phenomena in their surroundings based upon their common features.

In other words, children aged 6-7 are able to:

- make difference between *correct* and *incorrect*;
- correctly name each colour, name, measure and compare different sizes, such as bigger –smaller-equal, longer-shorter-equal, thicker-thinner;
- name and differentiate circle, square and triangle;
- make difference among sphere, cylinder and cube;

- name the days of the week and follow their correct sequence;
- use time terms, such as *yesterday*, *today*, and *tomorrow*, and *before*, *later*, *now* correctly.
- use time units, such as *hour*, or *minute*, but not quite accurately;
- mechanically count to 30, count and show numbers 10-13;
- add and subtract to 10 using realia.

### ***B. Memory.***

At this point of development, children start developing *metamemory*; that is, the knowledge and awareness of our own memory processes (Schwartz, Bennett, 2014).

More precisely, children of this age can realise that they will remember common things more easily, compared to uncommon or unfamiliar ones, and that shorter chunks of information are easier to memorise than longer ones (Starck et al. 2004, p. 157)

Children aged 6-7 are more prone to using mnemonic strategies, such as repetition (e.g. rhyme), visualisation and association, motor images, etc. They will memorise easier information they find interesting. The overall accuracy and the amount of memorised information is at growth at this age.

### ***C. Problem solving.***

First graders have already successfully adopted the strategies of problem solving, such as remembering and imitating the previous problem solutions, trial and error, and brainstorming and choosing one or several possible problem solutions. At this age, children still successfully use the adopted skills, but now they can learn and apply the general principles of work and problem solving. Children at this age are able to grasp casual connections and adjust their problem solving accordingly.

## **4.3 Speech Skills.**

Speech at this age is fully developed; children are fluent speakers, use complete sentences and have fewer grammatical errors. Children use language for

communication and problem solving. Their logical reasoning and critical thinking is vastly improved at this age, which enables children to explore the world around them, learn about it, and think of new ideas, which is why their vocabulary is expanding and now consists of several thousand words.

#### ***4.3.1 Listening and attention***

According to Starc et al. (2004, p. 158) children aged 6-7 are able to:

- locate the sound precisely;
- correctly compare sounds: loud-louder, quiet-quieter, high- higher, low-lower;
- analyse phonemes and synthesize phonemes into words with more precision due to the development of phonological awareness;
- classify words according to their first or last letter.

#### ***4.3.2 Articulation.***

Children have already learned how to articulate words of their mother tongue. What happens at this age is that children start losing baby teeth which then can affect their articulation and pronunciation of some words and sounds. Such sounds in the Croatian language are: *s*, *z*, *c*, *š*, *ž*, *č*, *ć* *dž*, and *đ*. Articulation alliterations caused by the loss of baby teeth in English are present in these sounds: /s/, /z/, /tʃ/, /dʒ/, /ʃ/, and /ʒ/.

#### ***4.3.3 Vocabulary and Grammar.***

Aged 6-7, children have already successfully adopted the majority of grammar rules. They start using longer, more complex sentences that now contain more conjunctions. Children are interested in the written language, wish to learn how to read and write.

#### ***4.3.4 Communication.***

Children at this age use language to communicate in everyday situations. They like to participate in role play, acting out their favourite superheroes or other model figures. They are able to verbally sort out any lighter conflict, communicate

with the rest of the group in group activities, initiate and hold communication, logically report about their experiences with the correct sequence of events in time.

#### **4.4 Socio-emotional Competences.**

Driven by the classification and establishing clear structures in the area of thinking and mental activities in general, a similar phenomenon happens in the area of children's moral, social and emotional relations. Children at this age are more and more aware of social norms and rules of behaviour in interaction with other people (Bugge, 2002, p. 95).

##### ***4.4.1 Understanding and expressing emotions***

Children at this age start thinking about the internal worlds of other people and their emotions (Oatley & Jenkins, 2003, p. 184). The ability to understand and think of other people's mental state is crucial for the development of cooperation and partnership later on. At this age, children start hiding their actual emotion or consciously showing other than their actual emotion, a more convenient one for a certain situation (Oatley & Jenkins, 2003, p. 185). They are able to understand and name their own emotions and emotions of other people. At this age, children experience tantrums less frequently than in the previous stages, and more frequently express their rage through verbal aggression (mocking, arguing, teasing, insulting). Children at this age experience vast improvements in their emotion control, and now are able to see the negative impact of uncontrolled emotional actions.

As in the other developmental phases, children at this age will experience certain phobias or fears, depending on their point of emotional development.

##### ***A) Fear at the age of six.***

Children aged six are well in enduring pain of more serious injuries, but are afraid of blood, thorns or cutting. At this age occurs the fear of witches, monsters under the bed, ghosts, etc. Children start fearing that someone might get lost, that something could happen to their mother, or that she could die. Children are afraid of thunders, lightning and water and of being left home alone and sleeping alone (Starck et al., 2004, p. 159).

### ***B) Fear at the age of seven.***

Children aged seven still have a persistent fear of supernatural phenomena like witches, monsters, ghosts, and they also fear everything hidden and shady, such as spies or people hiding in the closet and under the bed. At this age they are afraid of the dark, and being in dark places, such as basements and attics. Children experience fear after being told scary stories, or after watching scary TV shows. At this age, the fear of losing parents' or other significant adult's love deepens.

#### ***4.4.2 Self-awareness.***

Children aged 6-7 are capable of addressing their own behaviour, skills and competences and emotions. In this period, they find belonging to a certain category important and they are eager in pointing that out. Children's feeling of self-worth in this period is greatly influenced by their peers and their acceptance or non-acceptance. Also, parents have a very important role in encouraging them to explore and make an effort to solve certain problems. What happens if the child experiences criticising by their parents on a great scale is that the child will most probably develop a pattern of feeling and acting "helpless", or incompetent.

#### ***4.4.3 Autonomy and independence.***

Children are competent in planning, performing and finishing an activity from start to end. Six-year-old and seven-year-old children are completely autonomous in fulfilling their physiological needs, but still need occasional control and encouragement.

#### ***4.4.4 Peer and adult relations.***

At this age children relate to other children in cooperative, but also competitive, relationships. Conflicts with other children at this age are rather frequent, but last for a short period of time, and possible to be dealt with verbally in most cases. Children choose their friends mostly according to their location, meaning that a child's closest friend would most probably be living in the same neighbourhood.

With the growing desire of knowledge of the world around them, children aged six to seven seek a more profound and open relation with significant adults, their parents, grandparents, caregivers and teachers.

#### ***4.4.5 Moral development.***

According to Piaget's theory of moral development, children aged 6-7 are in the stage of heteronomy, or moral realism (Piaget, 1932 as cited in Ma, 2013), meaning that children of this age perceive rules as "external", or "ready-made". Starc et al. (2004, p.162) state that children of this age evaluate actions "according to their outcomes", instead of the intentions for a certain action. In moral behaviour and reasoning, children of this age are driven by the belief that rules are unchangeable (the sanctity of rules), which is why they would perceive any behaviour or action being either "black" or "white", excluding any possible mid-tones.

To be able to successfully teach in a way that brings the most positive outcomes both for teachers and pupils, it is crucial to know what stimulates children of a certain age. It is assumable that a teacher who understands a child's possibilities and can meet his/her needs in the first period of the educational process will help the child to set positive patterns of behaviour and develop virtues, which will then be some of the most valuable resources in the further education.

## **5 THE CONTEXT**

When speaking of introducing reading and writing to young learners, it is crucial to determine both intrinsic factors (such as learner's cognitive, social, physical, moral and psychological skills), and extrinsic factors, such as educational system and teacher education.

### **5.1 Croatian Educational System**

In Croatia, the function of the educational system is regulated by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, which proscribes fundamental regulations, documents, strategies, and projects that govern the educational process, and defines the subjects of the process and their roles. Primary education in Croatia is compulsory and lasts for eight years. Every activity in the field of primary education is based on the National Curriculum (2019), subject curricula and school curriculum.

#### ***5.1.1. School for Life – The New Curriculum.***

Starting in 2019 all Croatian schools have accepted the new, reformed schooling system. The new subject curricula have been published and put into force at the beginning of the school year 2019/2020. The school reform has been introduced to the 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades of primary schools, and 1<sup>st</sup> grade of secondary schools. Apart from introducing the new curricula, this meant introducing new textbooks that would follow the changes in the teaching paradigm and abolishing the previous curricula. In terms of initial reading and writing for the first-grade pupils, it has brought some of the major differences in comparison to the previous period, and especially for Croatian language teaching and writing. Below we will bring a short overview of the new Croatian language curriculum and the major impact it has brought in the field of teaching young pupils how to read and write.

##### ***5.1.1.1 Croatian Language Curriculum for Primary Schools and Grammar Schools.***

The new Curriculum brings the division of Croatian language as a school subject into three areas: Croatian language and communication, literacy and language production, and culture and media. This structure in some way follows the previously defined areas in the Croatian language as a subject, where language skills are considered tools used to develop other skills, mainly communication competence, and in which initial reading and writing are just the starting form of the mentioned language skills.

This, however, does not mean that developing reading and writing is a less important component than it has previously been or that it is taken easily, as there are gradually developing educational objectives that should reflect the level of mastery in each communication-related skill and which directly determine the forms and methods of teaching, teaching materials and media used to facilitate the learning and teaching process. We can now understand the position of language skills as a set of tools used to achieve educational goals in the three mentioned areas of teaching, but mainly in the area of Croatian language and communication. This teaching area, as detailed in the Curriculum is based on pupils utilising language activities of listening, speaking, reading, and writing to acquire language communication competence in Croatian standard language variety. Overall aims in this area of teaching and studying are defined as:

- acquiring linguistic, operational and socio-linguistic competence;
- acquiring communication skills and the ability to cooperate with others in different contexts, media and communication situations;
- acquiring communication strategies for the purpose of understanding and creating texts based on previous learning and previously acquired knowledge;
- acquiring competence in comprehensive reading reports and literary texts, being able to analyse and give an interpretation of a text while understanding the context and different layers of the meaning of the text;
- acquiring competence in creating texts of different types and functional styles;
- developing the idea of a self as a person who builds, is respectful of and expresses their (linguistic) identity while being respectful towards the identity of others in the means of a linguistic and cultural-linguistic community of speakers.

As the greatest focus on developing initial literacy is given in the area of Croatian language and communication, we will only give the short brake-down of the basic educational aims in the other two areas and then focus more closely to disclose the



most important assets of this curriculum regarding the subject of this work, which is initial reading and writing.

The educational area of literacy and language production focuses on enabling pupils to understand and develop a comprehensive approach to the works of literature in which the literature is understood as the art of words and special language usage. Pupils are expected to develop a sense of understanding of the works of literature and their individual, cultural, national, sociological, and aesthetic importance. Pupils are expected to develop an understanding of the creative and artistic aspects of the language and the impact of the literary works on the culture in general and on the Croatian national culture and identity. Acquiring the knowledge in the fields of literary theory and the history of literature by exploring the major literary works of national and world literature, the pupils will be enabled to develop a critical and educated opinion of certain literary works. Also, the education in this area should encourage pupils to develop the need to read literary works and on a daily basis search for those works that would help them develop their vocabulary, linguistic creativity, and positive attitude towards literature.

The area of culture and media is based upon the idea of understanding the text in different social, cultural, and intercultural contexts. The pupils are expected to develop critical thinking and judgment of the messages conveyed in the media as well as the understanding of their impact on an individual and society as well. Further on, the pupils are expected to develop an understanding of the culture and its impact on everyday life, society, and national cultural identity, and its relation to pop-culture, literature, and other fields of art. The pupils should be encouraged to develop an understanding of how different opinions, perceptions, ideas, cultures, and societies are unique and valuable so as to be able to understand the others and those who might be different.

As in the previous period, the number of Croatian language instructional lessons has not been changed, and 1<sup>st</sup>-grade pupils are expected to have 175 Croatian language lessons, but what we will be able to see below is that the teaching objectives are somewhat different, especially in regards to initial writing. The new curriculum implements a different approach to initial writing according to which the pupils in the first grade will only be expected to acquire literacy in formal letters, meaning that

they are not expected to acquire cursive handwriting until the end of the second grade. This new approach should allow for an introduction into initial writing which is more age-appropriate, and with more activities that would aim to develop pre-reading and pre-writing skills in young learners.

As already mentioned and to some extent explained, the new Croatian Language Curriculum has defined the educational aims for each area and different levels of education in the means of different grades for primary and secondary grammar schools as well. Below we will bring a break-down of the expected educational aims for the first year of education in the area of language and communication with special emphasis on those aims that focus on developing initial literacy. The document defines educational aims, elaborates them in more details and describes the competence in regards to a certain aim at the end of school year for the level of acquisition defined as “good”. Apart from listing the educational aims, their elaboration and description, we can also find suggestions on how to realise them in terms of strategies and tools.

Globally, in terms of initial reading, the students are expected to read the text appropriate for initial literacy development and the corresponding linguistic development. In more details, learners should be able to:

- make difference between letters and other symbols;
- recognise letters;
- pair phonemes and corresponding letters;
- connect phonemes and letters into syllables and words, words into sentences;
- answer simple questions after text reading;
- ask questions appropriate for the period of initial literacy development;
- present information and read information presented graphically and textually in other school subjects (such as Maths, Science, etc.).

The definition of the competence on the level "good" is that pupil can read with comprehension words and short sentences appropriate for initial literacy development.

The texts should be short and adjusted for young learners in the at the beginning of initial literacy development (containing words and letters the pupils have already learnt). In the means of style, they should be reporting or literary texts in accordance with the pupil's age and linguistic development. Teachers are suggested to create reading motivating environment. It is also suggested that teacher teaches pupils the reading techniques that would encourage the development of accuracy in reading, correct word articulation and sentence intonation, and reading skills improvement.

Educational aim for initial writing has been globally defined as pupil's ability to write letters, words and short sentences in formal school script. More precisely, the pupils should be able to:

- make connection between phonemes and corresponding letters;
- make difference between letters and other symbols;
- connect the phonemes and letters into words and words into sentences;
- write upper-case and down-case formal school letters;
- copy words and sentences;
- autonomously write words and sentences using letters they have learned;
- form a short text appropriate for initial literacy development;
- write capital letters for: first words in the sentences, first and last personal names, names of settlements and nearby special places;
- use punctuation at the end of the sentence.

At the level of competence marked as “good”, pupils should be able to write words and short sentences in formal school letters at the end of the school year.

The suggestion is to use short texts containing three to five sentences that are cohesive in meaning and contents. Suggestions on which steps to follow when introducing initial writing in terms of methodology are: The pupil can hold the pencil correctly, practices writing formal letters in pre-writing activities, can present the form of a letter by gross-motor

movement (those of a hand or entire body), models the letter using different materials (paper, string ties, clay, etc.), the pupil describes the form of the letter, the pupil listens to the phoneme and writes down the corresponding letter, acquires the alphabetic principle through play and play-like activities, the pupil can fill in the missing words in the sentence. It is suggested that the pupils write in capital letters, and only short sentences to practice writing in the down-case formal letters, and to predominantly use them only for reading practice.

In terms of phonological awareness, pupils are expected to recognise the phonological structure of a word and to be able to phonetically analyse and synthesise words suitable for initial literacy development. More precisely, the aims are defined as:

- being able to recognise the phonetic structure of a word
- can recognise syllables on the beginning, in the middle and at the end of a word
- being able to perform phonetic analysis and synthesis
- being able to properly pronounce phonemes and words appropriate for the initial literacy development

#### ***5.1.1.2 English Language Curriculum for Primary and Secondary Grammar Schools***

The new Curriculum expresses the need of the EFL education to be communication, multiculturalism, and creativity oriented, while empowering pupils to take responsibility of their own second language learning and providing the environment in which pupils can grow in second language competence. The final goal of EFL education is defined as enabling pupils to properly communicate in English as a foreign language.

The structure of English language education is divided into three major areas of interest defined as:

- communication competence in language;

- autonomy in language acquisition;
- multicultural competence in language.

Initial reading and writing is tightly connected and well elaborated in the area of communication competence. The educational aims in this area of teaching are based upon acquiring linguistic knowledge relevant for the English language (such as vocabulary, grammar, spelling and correct pronunciation, etc.) and on mastering language communication skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). In the area of Intercultural communication competence pupils are expected to develop intercultural curiosity, consciousness and positive attitude towards differences in one's own culture and culture of others which should encourage learning to respect others and those who might be different.

The area of Autonomy in language learning should provide for the development of positive attitude and autonomy in regard to learning the English language.

The number of English language lessons for the first-grade and second-grade learners has also not been changed, so it is expected that there should be 70 instructional lessons in both years of learning. The educational objectives for English language education have been defined similarly to the ones for the Croatian language education and we can get the information on which aims are expected to be acquired globally, specifically and what level of competence is marked with a descriptive grade "good".

The educational aims in the area of communication competence for the first grade in regard to language skills are listed as the ability to verbally and non-verbally react to the spoken words and short and simple questions and instruction. In more details, pupils should be able to

- make connection between the spoken and recorded words or to their graphic representation and material objects;
- connect the spoken instruction and corresponding actions;
- answer the 'Yes'/'No' questions.

To acquire the level 'good' of competence, pupils should be able to react more frequently non-verbally than verbally, and with a lot of support react to the frequently used words and instructions.

Further on, pupils should be able to recognise the graphemic representations of the simple words. In more detail, this educational aim is defined as the ability to connect the graphemic picture of a simple word to their illustration and to connect the graphemic picture of a word to its pronunciation. At the level 'good', pupils are able to repeat the pronunciation of less complex phonemes in frequent words and sentences, while being frequently supported.

In terms of initial writing, the educational aims are defined as pupils being able to copy the form of the English alphabet letters according to a provided model with special emphasis on letters q, w, x and y. At the level 'good', pupils are expected to be able to neatly and correctly copy the forms of English alphabet letters, while being frequently supported by the teacher.

Pupils are also expected to be able to copy simple and frequently used words with emphasis on graphomotor development in the activities such as writing a shopping, wish or word list or simple greeting cards. The competence for the grade 'good' should mark the ability to correctly and neatly copy most words while being given enough support and time.

In terms of literacy development in the second grade the pupils are expected to be able to:

- connect the written and spoken form of simple words that are similar in pronunciation and writing (can recognise the written form of target word relying on the word they hear);
- copy simple and frequently used words and simple sentences;
- pronounce frequently used words and short sentences while imitating the English language phonetic system (the pupil is able to pronounce familiar words and connect them in a sentence using the provided picture, audible or written model of the word).

The rest of the educational aims in the field of language and communication are more speech development oriented, so the pupils are expected to be able to use the communication forms to have short conversations with others to ask and answer the questions, present others and give instructions.

### ***5.1.2 School Curriculum.***

School curriculum should define long-term and short-term school plan and programme, that includes extracurricular activities planning (for both out-of-curriculum and out-of-school activities) based on School curriculum should also define school development strategy; activity, programme and/or project; activity, programme and/or project goals and purpose; activity, programme and/or project managers and their responsibilities; activity, programme and/or project realisation methods; activity, programme and/or project time schedule; activity, programme and/or project approximate list of expenses, and assessment methods. Each school is obliged to deliver own annual operative plan and programme which should define place, time, methods and affairs executants.

### ***5.1.3 Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR).***

The Council of Europe in 2001 published a document with a purpose to “provide a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, etc. across Europe”. Apart from setting the common basis for the elaboration of the language teaching-related sources, it also served to establish the unified levels of the language proficiency, and the descriptors corresponding to each level. Levels moving from A1 to C2 depict the growing competence in language proficiency and the build-up of the acquired skills. The document provided a comprehensive tool for assessment for language teachers, as well as for self-evaluation of the competence in different areas of language learning, namely four language skills: listening, speaking, reading, and writing.

In short, the Council of Europe defined the main objectives of the CEFR on their website and listed them as:

- promoting multilingualism and diversification in the choice of languages in the curriculum;

- supporting the development and demonstration of the multilingual profile of individual learners;
- developing and reviewing the content of language curricula and defining positive ‘can do’ descriptors adapted to the age, interests, and needs of learners;
- designing and developing textbooks and teaching material;
- supporting teacher education and cooperation among teachers of different languages;
- enhancing quality and success in learning, teaching, and assessment;
- facilitating transparency in testing and the comparability of certifications.

In terms of foreign language teaching, the influence of CEFR is most usually reflected in the expected outcomes in the subject curricula. Most frequently the expected outcomes at the end of a certain teaching period will be in line with the CEFR descriptors at least to some extent. The levels of proficiency and their illustrative descriptors are, as already mentioned, divided into three main groups, according to the CEFR:

- Basic user (levels A1 and A2),
- Independent user (levels B1 and B2),
- Proficient user (C1 and C2).

There are also possible inter-levels such as A1.1, A1.2, A2.1, A2.1.1, A2.1.2, etc., which would indicate growing levels of proficiency before reaching the next defined level (e.g. moving from A2 to B1). Later on, a few documents followed CEFR, which depicted in more detail the descriptors corresponding to different levels. One of which has been *Collated Representative Samples of Descriptors of Language Competences Developed for Young Learners* published in 2018 which in particular dealt with the descriptors for young learners. The young learners have been divided into two groups, those aged 7-10, and who should acquire level A1 by the end of the correspondent period of formal education, and those aged 11-14, belonging to the



level A2 of foreign language proficiency. Below we will bring some of the basic descriptors in relation to communication competence as detailed for level A1 learners, and also for the newly introduced level Pre-A1.

**1) Language reception: Listening**

<b>A1</b>	<b>Pre A1</b>
Can follow speech that is very slow and carefully articulated, with long pauses for him/her to assimilate meaning.	Can recognise everyday, familiar words, provided they are delivered clearly and slowly in a clearly defined, familiar, everyday context.
Can recognise concrete information (e.g. places and times) on familiar topics encountered in everyday life, provided it is delivered in slow and clear speech.	Can recognise numbers, prices, dates and days of the week, provided they are delivered slowly and clearly in a defined, familiar, everyday context.
	Can understand short, very simple questions and statements provided that they are delivered slowly and clearly and accompanied by visuals or manual gestures to support understanding and repeated if necessary.
Can understand instructions addressed carefully and slowly to him/her and follow short, simple directions.	Can understand short, simple instructions for actions such as ‘Stop,’ ‘Close the door,’ etc., provided they are delivered slowly face-to-face, accompanied by pictures or manual gestures and repeated if necessary.

**2) Language reception: Reading**

<b>A1</b>	<b>Pre A1</b>
Can understand very short, simple texts a single phrase at a time, picking up familiar names, words, and basic phrases and rereading as required.	Can recognise familiar words accompanied by pictures, such as a fast-food restaurant menu illustrated with photos or a picture book using familiar vocabulary
Can understand short, simple messages on postcards.	-
Can recognise familiar names, words and very basic phrases on simple notices in the most common everyday situations	Can get an idea of the content of simpler informational material and short simple descriptions, especially if there is visual

	support.
Can understand short, illustrated narratives about everyday activities that are written in simple words.	Can deduce the meaning of a word from an accompanying picture or icon.

### 3) Language production: Speaking

A1	Pre A1
Can produce simple mainly isolated phrases about people and places.	Can produce short phrases about themselves, giving basic personal information (e.g. name, address, family, nationality)
Can describe him/herself, what he/she does, and where he/she lives.	Can describe him/herself (e.g. name, age, family), using simple words and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance
Can describe simple aspects of his/her everyday life in a series of simple sentences, using simple words and basic phrases, provided he/she can prepare in advance.	Can say how he/she is feeling using simple words like 'happy,' 'tired,' accompanied by body language
Can give a simple description of an object or picture while showing it to others using basic words, phrases and formulaic expressions, provided he/she can prepare in advance	

### 4) Language production: Writing

A1	Pre A1
Can give information in writing about matters of personal relevance (e.g. likes and dislikes, family, pets) using simple words and basic expressions.	Can write simple isolated phrases and sentences. Can give basic personal information in writing (e.g. name, address, nationality), perhaps with the use of a dictionary.
Can write simple phrases and sentences about themselves and imaginary people, where they live, and what they do.	<i>No descriptors regarding creative writing.</i>
Can describe in very simple language what a room looks like	<i>No descriptors regarding creative writing.</i>

Can use simple words and phrases to describe certain everyday objects (e.g. the colour of a car, whether it is big or small).	<i>No descriptors regarding creative writing.</i>
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## 5.2 Teacher education.

The Croatian educational system has teacher education organised as university degree studies in several higher education centres. In general, teacher education programmes qualify teachers to become, either generalist teachers<sup>3</sup>, or generalist teachers and specialist teachers<sup>4</sup> from the first to fourth, or fifth to eighth grade of primary school. Faculties of teacher education differ in the curriculum, as each study programme is different from one another. However, some parameters of teacher education are unified, as the level and the form of education is strictly defined in the matter of teacher hiring. Concerning teacher education in relation to initial reading and writing education, we will bring a short overview of teacher education study programmes and more closely, what type of qualification in this area is available for teacher education students in several different universities. According to tradition and the annual number of participants, we can conclude that major educational institutions providing generalist teacher education for generalist teachers in Croatia would be:

- Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb;
- Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Osijek;
- Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Rijeka;
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies, University of Split.

Educational institutions providing English language teacher education for specialist teachers would be:

- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb;
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Osijek;

<sup>3</sup> The term *generalist teacher* is used to refer to primary education class teachers (grades 1-4).

<sup>4</sup> The term *specialist teacher* is used to refer to primary education subject teachers (grades 1-4, and 5-8).

- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Rijeka;
- Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Split.

Brief research into university programmes among faculties of teacher education showed that initial reading and writing education is covered by only a small number of subjects available in the four among mentioned faculties. More precisely, there are only two subjects that are specifically oriented towards initial reading and writing education for future teachers and those are *Strategies and Methods of Initial Reading and Writing 1*, and *Strategies and Methods of Initial Reading and Writing 2*, available to students of teacher education at Faculty of Teacher Education, University of Zagreb. Other study programmes mostly offer initial reading and writing education as one of the themes under different subjects. A short overview of such subjects in different institutions of teacher education is presented in the table below.

FACULTY/UNIVERSITY	SUBJECT	GOALS AND EXPECTED OUTCOMES REGARDING INITIAL READING AND WRITING
Faculty of Teacher Education/ University of Zagreb	Croatian Language Teaching Methodology 1	Being able to understand and implement theoretical and practical needs of initial reading and writing education, such as methodical systems, lesson structure, suggested assessment elements and criteria. Enabling students to choose proper activities and performing lesson units in the area of initial reading and writing education.
	ELT Methodology: Teaching English to Young Learners	Acquiring knowledge on how to teach the skills of reading and writing to young learners.

Faculty of Teacher Education/ University of Rijeka	Croatian Language Teaching Methodology 1	Properly interpreting Croatian language methodology related terminology, and use the acquired knowledge in organising and performing Croatian language lessons, focusing on initial reading and writing.
	Early Foreign Language Acquisition	The subject focuses, among other topics, on developing initial reading and writing as part of four language skills early development.
Faculty of Teacher Education/ University of Osijek	Early Foreign Language Acquisition	Acquiring knowledge in teaching initial reading and writing to young learners as a part of language skills development in early language teaching.
	Croatian Language Methodology	Being able to define purpose, goals, and outcomes in initial reading and writing education in the Croatian language, and to perform initial reading and writing classes.
Faculty of Humanities and Social Studies/University of Split.	Croatian Language Education Methodology 1	Understanding the theoretical background of initial reading and writing education; planning, analysing, and assessing initial reading and writing lesson units; applying principles, teaching methods and forms of teaching, teaching resources and tools in Croatian language initial reading and writing education
	Croatian Language Education Methodology 2	Planning and writing lesson plans; performing and assessing initial reading and writing lesson units.
	Croatian Language Education Methodology 3	Planning and writing lesson plans; performing and assessing initial reading and writing lesson units.

As mentioned above, most of the teacher education programmes deal with initial reading and writing under different linguistic and methodology-related subjects, so the following table will present the content related to initial reading and writing under different subjects provided by the four mentioned faculties for specialist teachers. This content is usually presented in the form of different topics throughout the subject course. The expected outcomes rarely do refer to initial reading and writing itself, but rather focus on acquiring knowledge about reading and writing skills acquisition in general, in terms of basic principles, methods, and theoretical approaches to reading and writing in a foreign language.

FACULTY/UNIVERSITY	SUBJECT	CONTENT REGARDING INITIAL READING AND WRITING
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/University of Zagreb	Psycholinguistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Productive and receptive language skills</li> <li>• The whole-word approach vs. The decoding approach</li> </ul>
	TEFL Methodology	Developing reading comprehension skills and developing writing skills in English as a foreign language
	Glotodyactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teaching language skills</li> <li>• The concept of communicative competence</li> </ul>
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/University of Osijek	Teaching English in Early School Age	Overview of the methods and procedures used for teaching language skills appropriate to young pupils (games, rhymes and chants, drama activities, stories, etc.)

	Glotodyactics	Receptive and productive language skills teaching methods and principles
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/University of Rijeka	ELT Methodology	Basic principles of four language skills teaching.
	Introduction to Psycholinguistics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language production (speech and writing)</li> <li>• Psycholinguistic basis of reading and listening</li> <li>• Written word recognition</li> </ul>
	Acquisition of English as a Second Language	Four language skills development in English as a second language.
Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences/University of Split	Glotodyactics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The process of teaching receptive and productive language skills</li> <li>• Linguistic communication competence as a theoretical background in modern FLT</li> </ul>
	Psycholinguistics and cognitive aspects of learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Language production</li> <li>• Word recognition</li> </ul>

## 6 INITIAL READING AND WRITING METHODOLOGY

Probably the clearest position of initial reading and writing as a teaching area in the Croatian language subject has been defined in the *Metodika: znanost o poučavanju nastavnog predmeta* [Methodology – The Science of Teaching a School Subject] by Bežen (2008). His work has been followed by a number of publications in which teachers could find some kind of step-by-step instructions on how to introduce the first-grade pupils into the reading and writing acquisition processes and how to perform well-structured initial reading and writing classes. Having compiled the essential knowledge belonging to different areas of study in the field of initial reading and writing in correlation to the existing official Curriculum and expected goals, Bežen created some sort of scaffolding for the future research into this area in Croatian schools. He defined major scientific disciplines as correlation sciences, auxiliary sciences, and substratum sciences, the latter dividing into primary sciences and basic educational sciences.

The primary and basic educational sciences involved in teaching initial reading and writing are listed under linguistics, psychology, psycholinguistics, artistic sciences and grapheme sciences (Bežen, 2008, p.93).

The cooperation with professionals in the field of graphic arts, such as Siniša Reberski, brought a new, unified and standardised script for all primary schools in Croatia, and for the first time, a school script has been included in a Croatian Orthography (2013), which meant that the proposed script should be taught equally in every school, regardless of the teacher's preferences in terms of textbook used, or the personal script, especially the cursive variant. The already mentioned authors published the book *Početo pisanje na hrvatskome jeziku: priručnik uz Hrvatski pravopis* [Writing in the Croatian Language – Handbook to Croatian Orthography] in 2014 as a guideline for implementing the new script by the first and second-grade teachers, textbook publishers and everyone involved in the development of initial reading and writing.

The Croatian alphabet contains 30 phonemes relating to 27 individual separate letter units, and 3 diphthongs (see figures 2 and 3).





Figure 2: Formal school letters according to Bežen and Reberski



Figure 3: Cursive school letters according to Bežen and Reberski

Other than proposing the unified graphics of the letters, the authors also suggested the correct way of teaching them to young learners. The following two figures show a few examples of the writing techniques.

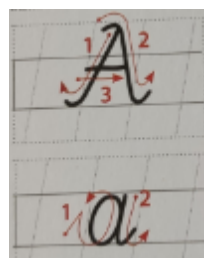
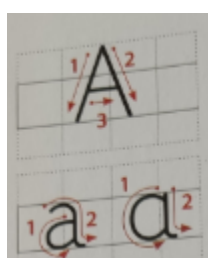


Figure 4 and 5: Instruction on how to write letter a, regular and cursive script

The standard Croatian alphabet does not contain q, w, x, and y, so they are taught neither in the first grade as the formal letters nor in the second grade as the cursive letters. The examples below show the proposed techniques for writing the four above-mentioned letters that we can find in the English alphabet, but not in the Croatian alphabet.

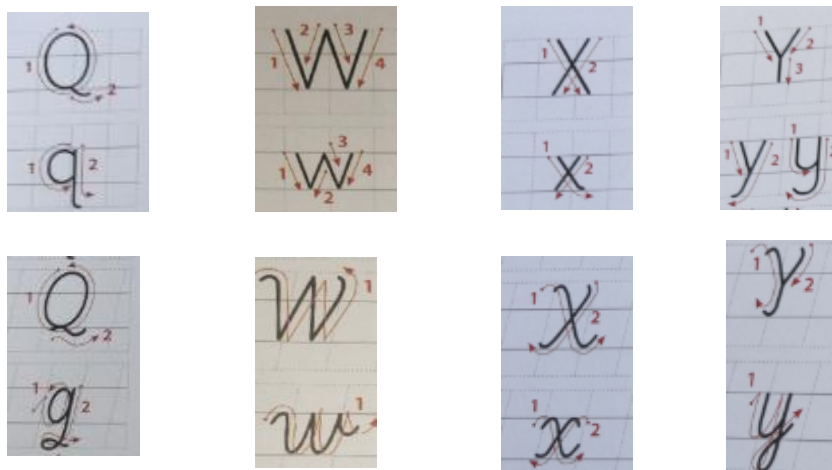


Figure 6 Instructions how to write letters q, w, x and y

As clear instructions on how to teach these letters in Croatian primary schools are available to teachers, but the teaching time for these letters is not found in the programmes for the first and second grade in the Croatian language subject, the question remains if the long-wanted unification has been achieved. Foreign language teachers have not been provided with any kind of official training for the new script, and their handwriting may or may not be aligned with the new script, directly influencing the variety of these letters their pupils will acquire in the foreign language education. We can agree with the authors that, to achieve the unified script in Croatian schools, it is necessary to “break the psychological barrier and teach the teachers” (2014, p. 74). The psychological barrier the authors refer to is the teacher’s inclination to keep using the previous patterns (their individual variety of the school script), is only a psychological barrier in the end, as the newly proposed script is found graphomotor-wise easier to implement both for teachers and learners.

Along with mastering the knowledge of the mere object of teaching (the letters themselves, their graphical structure, and methods of how to teach them to young learners), the teacher should be able to implement the understanding of the basic principles of the educational process in the area of initial reading and writing into their classroom work. The established parts of the educational process in the field of initial writing and reading methodology are:

- speech and graphomotor pre-reading and pre-writing activities;
- initial reading;
- initial writing (Bežen, 2008, p.92).

Although we have not been provided with exact instruction on how to implement initial reading and writing in English as L2, there are guidelines provided and an excessive work done in by experts in this field, such as Renata Šamo. The author clearly states that “teachers should be aware of many issues before they start teaching young learners how to read” (Šamo, 2014, p.129). It is crucial that the teachers understand the key factors in the development of second language literacy, which are: first language literacy; cultural and background knowledge; and oral language (Mc Kay, 2006 in Šamo, 2014, p. 128). This would indicate that even if a L2 learner has acquired initial literacy in their L1, there other issues affecting their ability to acquire literacy in L2 caused by different cultural and background knowledge and underdeveloped oral language. That is why L2 English teachers in Croatian schools need to adapt their teaching methods to overcome the cultural/background differences, and also differences in the phonetic systems of the two languages. This implies that the focus in the first year of teaching should be on oral language, providing such activities and materials that would help learners develop vocabulary and global reading skills.

### **6.1 Speech and graphomotor pre-reading and pre-writing activities.**

Glenda Thorne gave a definition of graphomotor skill, or handwriting as “a complex perceptual-motor skill that is dependent upon the maturation and integration of a number of cognitive, perceptual and motor skills, and is developed through instruction” (Hamstra-Bletz and Blote, 1993; Maeland, 1992, as cited in Thorne, n.d). Ranko Rajović also states that the graphomotor activity is developed gradually, starting at the eighteen months of age and should be fully developed by the school-age (Rajović, 2017, p. 90). To help the child to develop his/her graphomotor skills, Rajović additionally promotes everyday activities such as turning pages of picture books, cutting, collecting and gluing small pieces of paper, drawing, colouring, manipulating dough and play dough, etc., which will help developing the child’s hand muscles, eye-hand or visual-motor coordination, observation and concentration. Exposure to this kind of activities from an early age will help the child finally develop the correct pencil grasp, and lower the stress level in the period of learning how to write.

The first contact of a child with somewhat structured graphomotor and speech development activities for children who have not attended kindergarten in Croatia usually occurs as early as in the preschool programme year. This pre-school period is obligatory for all children one year before starting primary education, and two years for those children who have a mother tongue other than Croatian. The preschool programme is in service of introducing young children to the schooling system and early education. The official plan of activities has not been published so far, but there is a list of skill development areas planned in the Curriculum. Other than the social, physical, mental, emotional, and intellectual aspects of development, we can also find that the Curriculum provides the activities to be implemented. These activities aim for the verbal and communication skills development through enriching children's' vocabulary, practicing speech and listening development activities as well as introducing pre-reading and graphomotor skills. The programme is planned for a total of 250 hours, over a period of 8 months, for more than ten targeted areas of education. We can conclude from this that the graphomotor and pre-reading activities can only take as much time over the course of the programme, as there is left or planned.

The level of graphomotor and literacy development in the pre-school period surely can depend on a child's innate capacity and preferences in terms of literacy development, as well as on the level of stimuli he or she would be offered in everyday life, which is why the pre-school year of introducing pre-reading and pre-writing activities can be crucial for some children in preparing them for early school years.

It is not possible to determine the exact amount of time children would be involved in the activities for developing graphomotor and pre-reading skills, but the time spent on these activities during the pre-school programme will further encourage children who have developed pre-reading and pre-writing skills previously, while the children who have not been introduced to such content will start developing these skills. As education is not obligatory until the 6<sup>th</sup> year of age, and not all children have been given pre-reading and pre-writing activities before coming to preschool, it is not possible to reach the same level in the graphomotor and speech development for all children, so each child has a different initial level when starting the primary education as well. It is the teacher's task to offer different pre-reading and pre-writing activities, modified to meet each child's needs and level of competence. In

order to establish the level of competence in reading and writing, the teacher will usually conduct initial testing at the beginning of the school year and evaluate the results for each student individually and the class as a whole. After the initial evaluation has been done, the teacher can start with the use of graphomotor developing activities. Since the Curriculum provides time for this period in the course of the Croatian language education for the first grade, some of these activities can usually be found in textbooks. We will bring an overview of what some textbooks offer regarding this issue in the next chapter, but for now, we can list suggested activities that will help pupils according to their age and developmental phase.

According to Ragnhild A. Oussoren, handwriting is usually an activity in which girls thrive faster and easier than boys. She relies on a thought that boys often struggle to “learn the basic movements that enable the logical, rhythmical connection of letters” (Oussoren, 2007, p.13). The reason for this is that boys’ movements are most often naturally straight and explosive, while to be successful in connecting letters in a word, they would have to be able to perform more subtle and round movements, which is more natural to girls. For this reason, children should be offered activities that develop this kind of fine motor activity and provide practice for both round and straight lines.

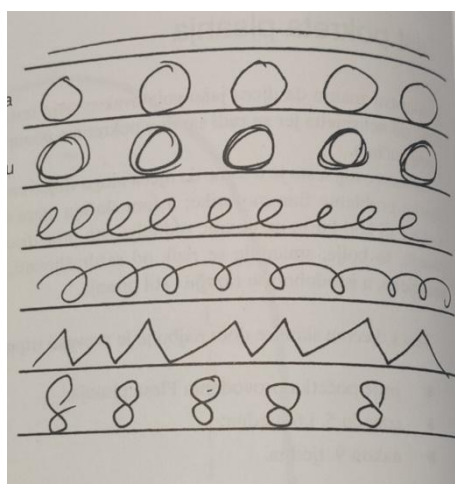


Figure 7 Different types of straight and round lines

More precisely, Oussoren defines eight useful shapes and patterns for practice in this phase that will help the child develop writing easier and more efficiently. The shapes are listed as:

1. Long straight lines;
2. Circles and spaces;
3. Circles;
4. Garlands of loops;
5. Arches with loops;
6. Angles;
7. Number eight shapes (vertical and horizontal).

As the author primarily deals with the basic movements that help children develop literacy in a less stressful way (or write dancing), she suggests the patterns and shapes to be done in the way so that the whole body participates, shifting the moves from gross motor activity to fine motor activity, and then finally to graphomotor activity, or handwriting. Such a sequence of activities should set a foundation for the child to achieve fluency and flexibility in handwriting (2007, p. 30). There is a number of activities which rely on different media in which children can practice the motor activity needed to write a certain letter. Such media can be sand, water or rice. Of course, the largest group of activities involves children in actively using a pencil (or other writing tools) to draw or write. These activities will help the child develop the correct pencil grasp, practice visual-motor skills (eye-hand movement) and perfect a specific fine motor activity necessary to write certain letters or draw certain symbols. Such activities may include solving different kinds of mazes, connecting dots-to-dots of various shapes, lines and finally targeted letters.

While developing the pre-reading and pre-writing skills, it is very necessary to expose children to the written language as much as possible. Sally Moomaw and Brenda Hieronymus (2001, p. 22) suggested numerous activities and resources suitable for the period of pre-reading and pre-writing education. Such materials and activities are predominantly oriented to reading development can include:

- **Name tags** (that help children memorise the “picture” of their name letters;
- **Large picture books** (which can involve pupils in active observations of the relations between the written and spoken language);

- **Word banks** (which enable children to notice the written form of the words they are most interested in);
- **Dictations** (in which an adult would write down children's stories or ideas as they tell them - a useful tool to help children understand a connection between the spoken and written language much better), etc.

Some of the pre-writing activities and teaching materials they suggested are as follows (pp. 23-24):

- **Writing corners** (a space that would encourage pupils to write providing them with different interesting materials and appropriate models of the written language)
- **Pocket stories** (which would encourage pupils to learn about words and establish a connection between the spoken and written language. In short, the pupil should dictate the sentences describing the pictures they drew, which the teacher writes down. The words can be written down on separate cards and then later reused in different contexts.)
- **Sentence stubs** (which invite pupils to experiment with the written language by adding words or phrases to a predictable text model. They give learners an idea of how the meaning in the sentence can change when they add different words. )
- **Carts with writing tools** (which provide different writing tools such as pencils, markers, colouring pencils, etc., located in different places around the classroom.)
- **Chests with writing supplies** (which can also be taken and used at home, which is their main purpose. They should be made according to the pupil's desires and needs, but they are very similar to writing corners and carts with writing tools.)

The number and the variety of the activities the teachers will offer to their pupils in this early phase of introducing reading and writing will surely depend on the overall assessment of the level of competence. The teacher should keep track of the pupils' progress, and give them enough time to become ready for the next phase (in which

they will be actively involved in reading and writing), but also decide to which extent the pupils should remain in the phase of pre-reading and pre-writing activities, taking care that the pupils do not lose interest in writing due to monotony and weariness, as Bežen and Reberski pointed out (2014, p. 80).

## 6.2. Initial Reading and Initial Writing

In the process of writing acquisition, children will first learn how to write formal school letters in the first grade, and then how to write cursive school letters in the second grade.

The proposed structure of the initial reading and writing lesson for teaching formal letters is shown in the table below (Bežen, 2008, p. 312).

<b>Lesson stage</b>	<b>Lesson situation</b>
<b>initial motivation</b>	verbal (lexical, phonetic, grammatical, story, drama), artistic or music
<b>reading chosen letter uppercase and lowercase varieties</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reading short words globally</li> <li>- listening to the models of words containing the chosen letter/phoneme</li> <li>- new letter/phoneme announcement</li> <li>- phonetic analysis and synthesis of the word containing the chosen letter at the beginning, in the middle, and at the end of the word</li> <li>- finding new examples of the words containing the chosen letter/phoneme</li> </ul>
<b>phoneme to letter transfer</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- chosen formal letter uppercase and lowercase variety observation and graphic analysis of the letter</li> <li>- drawing chosen formal letter uppercase and lowercase variety</li> <li>- modeling the chosen letter in different materials (paper, clay)</li> <li>- writing chosen formal letter uppercase and lowercase variety and the words containing the chosen letter</li> </ul>
<b>reading and writing words and short texts</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- reading exercises</li> <li>- writing exercises</li> </ul>

We can find a similar form of the lesson for teaching cursive letters in Bežen and Reberski (2014, p. 65). There are some differences in the teaching approach, mostly caused by the fact that pupils have already learned to read and write each letter in their formal variety, and there is less need to focus on phonological awareness than earlier. Also, children in this phase should be able to read all letters and engage in reading short texts, which gives the teacher a chance to discuss the text they use in the motivational phase and encourage pupils to engage in reading comprehension and develop skills involved in it. The proposed structure of the lesson will be shown in the following table.



<b>Lesson stage</b>	<b>Lesson situation</b>
<b>Motivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- emotional and intellectual motivation</li> <li>- text announcement; expressive reading of the text</li> <li>- emotional and intellectual pause</li> <li>- expressing opinions and listening comprehension</li> <li>- synthesis</li> <li>- focusing on the new grapheme.</li> </ul>
<b>Graphic analysis of the new letter</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- observing the features of the new cursive letter</li> <li>- comparing the cursive letter to its formal pair</li> <li>- writing the new cursive letter in free space (in the notebook, on the board, or in the spelling book)</li> <li>- writing the letter in the copybook for cursive letters</li> <li>- writing syllables, words, and sentences using the new letter in cursive</li> </ul>
<b>reading texts in cursive script</b>	
<b>language production</b>	
<b>cursive script writing practice (in school or at home)</b>	

Introducing the processes of initial reading and writing is simultaneous, and one cannot be taught separately from the other. What differs one from the other are the processes around each of them.

We can divide the reading development process according to Čudina-Obradović (2004) into the following six processes:

- speech development,
- Understanding the purpose and form of the written language,
- Phonological awareness,
- Application of the alphabetic principle (decoding),
- Writing (coding),
- Fluent reading with comprehension.

It is important to understand that some of these processes the child should have developed before starting school (when it comes to reading in the mother tongue), such as speaking and understanding the purpose and form of the written language. The remaining processes are simultaneous; one process can directly influence the pace of the others. For children starting to learn English as a foreign language in the first grade, it is very important to start developing speaking and listening before shifting to reading and writing.

Writing consists of both graphomotor activity and text production. There are different strategies used to develop both. Čudina-Obradović (2004, p. 111) defined graphomotor developing strategies as:

- 1) copying motor activity;
- 2) letter model as a visual support;
- 3) recalling into memory the form of the letter;
- 4) combining methods 2 and 3;
- 5) copying the letter;

The basic and most commonly used strategies to develop writing as a text production skill are listed as (p. 113):

- brainstorming ideas before starting to write;
- planning (goals, or the message of the text; introduction, body, and conclusion; characters, time and place, etc.);
- sketching according to plan;
- creating non-detailed text based on the draft;
- multiple checking and detailing the text;
- applying the self-control strategies to check if the wanted message has been successfully communicated in the text.

## **7 RESEARCH**

In this chapter, we will analyse some of the textbooks used for teaching Croatian and English in the first and second grade of primary school. The content refers to the activities that are provided to develop initial reading and writing in both languages while focusing on the processes involved in their development.

### **7.1 Aim and Research Questions.**

The aim of this research is to gather the information on what extent some of the available publishers and textbook creators follow certain general guidelines while compiling their materials aimed for the classroom use. Our presumption is that the quantity of certain tasks will differ in major numbers when comparing the Croatian and English language textbooks in the first grade, such as: tasks aiming at developing the phonological awareness and alphabetic principle, simply because the writing skill development is not found as an educational aim in the English language curriculum for the first year of learning. On the other hand, we presume that the number of speaking developing tasks would be larger in the English language textbooks. In terms of the comparison of English language textbooks for the first and second year of learning, we assume that the number of writing tasks should be higher in the second-grade textbooks, when learners have already acquired writing in the Croatian language.

### **7.2 Methodology.**

We will analyse the quantity of tasks aimed at the reading and writing development in each of the selected textbooks/workbooks. More precisely, we will look into the content that focuses on developing:

- graphomotor skills (drawing, connecting dots, colouring);
- speaking (answering open and closed questions, telling stories, introducing, chanting, reciting);
- phonological awareness (phoneme sequencing, connecting syllables into words);
- understanding the form of a letter (e.g. writing a certain letter in different media);

- application of the alphabetic principle (recognising the position of a certain letter in the alphabet);
- writing as motor activity (copying letters, words and short sentences, writing short answers);
- Reading (letters, words, short sentences, short texts, task instructions, global reading);
- Writing as text production (producing texts in different forms).

### **7.3 Corpus.**

We will analyse two types of textbook sets used with first-grade Croatian language learners from two different publishers and also textbook sets for first and second-grade English language learners (English as a first foreign language). The Croatian language textbook sets are: *Moji tragovi* ( a three-part textbook set) by the Croatian publisher *Profil Klett* and *Pčelica 1* (a four-part textbook set, divided into two textbooks and two workbooks) by *Školska knjiga*. In terms of English textbook analysis, the textbook sets used are: *New building blocks 1* (the textbook and workbook for the first year of learning) and *New building blocks 2* (the textbook and workbook for the second year of learning) by *Profil Klett*, and *Dip In 1* (the textbook and workbook for the first year of learning) and *Dip In 2* (the textbook and workbook for the second year of learning) by *Školska knjiga*.

### **7.4 Results and discussion.**

The tables below show the research results. In Table 1 we can compare the number of tasks in English language textbooks aiming at a certain skill divided into different years of learning and different sets of textbooks. Abbreviations are as follows:

- NBB1 – New building blocks 1,
- NBB2 – New building blocks 2,
- TB – textbook,
- WB – workbook.

task/book	DIP IN 1		NBB 1		DIP IN 2		NBB 2	
	TB	WB	TB	WB	TB	WB	TB	WB
<b>graphomotor</b>	23	68	7	79	-	-	2	1
<b>Speaking</b>	52	4	47	31	46	7	39	7
<b>phonological awareness</b>	-	9	1	2	7	15	2	5
<b>understanding the form of the letter</b>	-	-	2	1	1	-	1	2
<b>alphabetic principle</b>	-	-	3	2	3	-	2	2
<b>Writing</b>	10	25	3	24	19	103	5	75
<b>writing production</b>	-	-	-	-	3	1	1	1
<b>Reading</b>	26	57	27	53	61	94	35	63

Table 1EFL textbooks and workbooks tasks in numbers

In Table 2 we present the number of tasks in the same categories, but for the first-grade Croatian language textbooks. It is important to notice that the second one presented (*Moji tragovi*) is an integrated workbook and textbook in three parts, as opposed to the classic division of the first one (*Pčelica*) for which the textbook and workbook come as separate units.

task/book	PČELICA 1		MOJI TRAGOVI
	TB	WB	3parts TB
<b>graphomotor</b>	58	154	157
<b>Speaking</b>	81	-	200
<b>phonological awareness</b>	52	48	95
<b>understanding the form of the letter</b>	29	82	98
<b>alphabetic principle</b>	23	25	116
<b>Writing</b>	82	105	197
<b>writing production</b>	-	1	44

<b>Reading</b>	138	63	261
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Table 2 Croatian language textbook/ workbook tasks in numbers

As expected to some extent, the English language textbooks and workbooks for the first two years of learning put an emphasis on speech development skills, as this would provide for vocabulary development, and developing a positive attitude towards the language acquisition. Following that, a great number of tasks are oriented to reading, and moreover, global reading. The number of writing tasks gradually increases, as the learners attain more skills in writing in the mother tongue.

There is a significantly greater number of tasks aiming at pre-reading and pre-writing activities, such as those developing phonological awareness, alphabetic principle and graphomotor skills in the Croatian language textbooks as opposed to the English language textbooks, although the highest number of tasks are graphomotor developing activities for both sets of the English language textbooks for the first-grade learners.

As expected, the number of writing tasks increases in the second-grade textbooks for L2, when learners have acquired enough vocabulary and acquired initial reading and writing skills in their L1.

## 8. CONCLUSION

In this work we have revised some of the main aspects of teaching young pupils to read and write. Once mechanically developed, the two skills become an endless source of research over the years. Different theoretical movements have brought different insights on ‘how-to’, ‘what-to’ and ‘when-to’ in terms of introducing the initial reading and writing in both the mother tongue and the second language. Being able to understand the child’s developmental traits and determining how ready the child is for the schooling system to which he or she has been introduced are, perhaps the starting points for teachers in teaching reading and writing.

We have been able to take a look into some of the textbooks that are currently available for the use in classrooms and realised that, more or less, the tasks provided do reflect the educational aims set in the curricula and other defining documents, but also that maybe some additional teacher’s efforts are needed in order to cover all areas of development properly (e.g. providing additional tasks in which children would become more familiar with the English alphabet letters, and also with the English phonological system). Having a teacher that can deeply understand the differences between the first and second language acquisition and literacy development sets a positive background for young learners to start gaining confidence and interest in the process of developing the new skills. Choosing the appropriate methods and different tools, such as textbooks, workbooks and other teaching materials tailored in such a manner to provide support for both general and individual needs of each pupil is a very crucial moment for teachers, as these are supposed to help pupils reach the objectives of initial literacy acquisition. They serve as mediators between the teacher’s theoretical knowledge of methods and methodology, and their activity planning, so it is of great importance to be able to choose among those textbooks that can provide a comprehensive approach to developing young learners’ literacy, which then becomes not only a school skill, but also a life skill.

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## **Izjava o samostalnoj izradi rada.**

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