

## **SERVICE-LEARNING PROGRAM AT UNIVERSITY AND IT'S ROLE IN BUILDING CHILD-FRIENDLY COMMUNITY**

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### ***Abstract***

This paper presents an action research associated with Faculty of Education in Osijek, dislocated study in Slavonski Brod with pre-service teachers during the four academic years. The study follows the process of improving student learning through collaboration colleges and local communities for the benefit of gifted children in lower grades of elementary school. This work follows the process of creating workshops and creativity, imagination and cooperation that has developed through activities related to Children's ceremony, "In the world of fairytales of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić" in SlavonskiBrod. The paper traces not only the development of future teachers learning, but also the creativity of children and the circumstances that lead to better cooperation with local institutions.

**Key words:** service-learning, pre-serviceteachers, childrencommunities, actionresearch, universityeducation

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### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The roles of universities and education in general have changed significantly in 21stcentury due to the changes in the labor market and the needs of economic development which is based on new knowledge and working individuals who are expected to possess specific skills. Changes in the society point to the need for individuals with various competencies and knowledge, which requires innovative learning approaches. The leader of these changes is certainly the teacher who has to combine innovative strategies with experience-based learning and theory with practice. This is especially important for the universities that educate teachers. University learning has changed because the conditions for studying have changed. Bologna process set high goals and compelled universities to increase the quality of education continually (MarentičPožarnik 2009: 342). This means directing attention in university teaching towards pedagogical competencies in teaching. "The quality of teaching connected to the competencies of teaching staff is slowly getting its place among quality criteria" (M. Požarnik 2009: 343). It is also emphasised that there have to be changes

in teaching in higher education especially in traditional "lecture-based teaching to more student-centred concept of encouraging active learning with more diverse methods" (M. Požarnik 2009: 343). "Active teaching strategies" contribute to this and they include "dialogue, brainstorming, interactive lecturing, group work, pair work, experiment, role-play, project based teaching plan" (Mattes 2007). Chiari (according to Močinić 2010: 98) says that methods of active learning are, "a) simulation methods: games involving simulation of imaginary situations and role play, b) discussion methods: discussion, case study, brainstorming and c) problem based teaching."

Higher education teaching and active teaching methods research conducted at one Croatian university (Močinić 2012: 101) shows that these methods are not used enough and that the frontal method is prevalent. This means that students learn by listening, watching and repeating using one-way communication whereas their needs are completely different. They want to be relaxed, take an active role, be successful in acquiring knowledge and build their confidence while learning (Močinić 2012: 102).

The answer to these needs can be found in John Dewey's theory in 1938. He pointed out that students need to be active participants involved in the learning process and learn through experience with the help of well-planned classroom activities which should encourage students to become members of society. Service learning is the most widely spread experience-based learning in the USA.

It is a "special approach to teaching which combines theories and concepts of scientific disciplines with real community problems and society in general. It is also a teaching method which encourages active learning and a model of experience-based learning; a pedagogical approach that integrates the study programme and service learning; the process of practical and direct implementation of the existing resources of educational institutions in a community with the aim to respond to the needs of a community in which students learn from their own experience" (Ćulum, Ledić 2009: 77). Service-learning is a model which enables students to learn and to develop through active participation in carefully planned and organised activities that respond to the needs of a community, and are coordinated by both university and partner organisations/institutions in the community integrated in the academic curriculum. Furco (2000: 12) points out that "service-learning programmes are distinguished from other approaches to experiential education by their intention to equally benefit the provider and the recipient of the service as well as to ensure equal focus on both the service being provided and the learning that is occurring". Tinkler and others (2014) emphasise the importance of a transformational relation between the institution and the community which is based on a long-term change of both parties.

Jami L. Warren's research (2012) confirmed that service-learning has a positive influence on the success of students' learning results, and it develops social awareness and responsibility. This is the reason why service-learning is a welcomed teaching method in higher education and an opportunity to apply it in teaching pre-service teachers.

## **2. METHODOLOGY**

The activities that have been undertaken in this research are aimed at improving the existing higher education teaching and encouraging the development of creative potential in all participants. This is the reason why action research is a suitable scientific frame that enables realization, monitoring and evaluation of the changes that occurred upon implementing certain activities.

Action research is the key strategy of professional development that can be generally defined as individual or group analysis of one's professional practice for the purpose of self-improvement which in turn increases the probability of a more successful learning for the student. Furthermore, it improves teacher professionalism

because they recognize that they are capable of solving problems in teaching by themselves and encourages them to do so. (Markowitz, 2011:12)

The action research commenced in 2008 and was finished in 2011. It included pre-service teachers of Faculty of Teacher Education in Osijek, Slavonski Brod Branch. We wanted to encourage students to organize high-quality activities for gifted pupils by setting example through improving our own teaching methods. We connected service-learning and our teachers' teaching practice in order to follow and implement these changes by using questionnaires for students that questioned their level of content, expectancy and creativity.

Every year a new group of students was prepared to participate in the workshops for gifted pupils. The students were familiarized with the organizational possibilities of pedagogical workshops and characteristics of gifted pupils at the very beginning. Next, the students were taught how to plan and prepare workshops. The preparation usually lasted for two months. Finally, the students did these workshops with pupils from several schools. After the workshops, the students filled a questionnaire comprising of questions that evaluated the level of content on a Likert scale (from 1 strongly disagree to 5 strongly agree). A similar questionnaire adapted to the teachers who observed the workshops and the pupils that participated in them was conducted as well. The teachers that observed the workshops were encouraged to write comments about the things they observed in the workshops.

In our research, we tried to encourage changes in students' creativity and cooperation and to improve and expand working methods with gifted pupils. We also think that service-learning approach opens up a large number of possibilities for cooperation, teamwork, creativity of all participants so the questionnaires were aimed at self-reflection and self-rating.

The information about the workshops were collected in several ways: via interviews, continuous observation with the help of a video camera and a camera, participating and observing, statistics, teachers' opinions about the workshops. All participants wanted complete anonymity, which was respected in this research.

### 3. THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

Irena Krumes Šimunović and Mirela Števanić-Pavelić participated in creating the workshops for the research. They are senior assistants at courses Methodology of Croatian language and Methodology of Science and Social Studies at the Faculty of Teacher Education in Osijek, Slavonski Brod Branch. The Faculty of Teacher Education was renamed Fakultet za odgojne i obrazovne znanosti in Slavonski Brod. Mirela passed away in 2010.

Along with the need to improve our own classes, we thought that teaching students should suit the real needs of the society and the community in which we live and work. Therefore, we had tried to build bridges of cooperation with our local community and search for its real needs before we implemented changes in the practice of Methodology of teaching curriculum. We talked about the needs of the community with the Administrative Department of Social Affairs and Services of Slavonski Brod.

The conclusions were that we lack programmes for gifted children<sup>1</sup> in our primary schools. Therefore, our faculty should join children celebration In the World of Fairy Tales of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić.

This long-standing children festivity organized by the City of Slavonski Brod is very important for the City and the country because it promotes unfading cultural values and literary

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<sup>1</sup> The school system often does not recognise gifted children nor does it have prepared and developed methods to teach them according to their needs and abilities. Gifted children are noticed in practice but this is mostly teacher's subjective estimation. Teaching these children comes down to their teacher's knowledge and effort. These pupils should get more systematic attention so their skills and abilities could be seen and their potentials developed. So far, there are only attempts of some teachers to prepare a programme for gifted pupils or a group of them gifted in one field.

heritage of this famous author at the same time encouraging students' activity and creativity. It was also an opportunity for students to participate actively in planning the activities for gifted pupils in Brod area during the practice at the faculty. This resulted in a fruitful collaboration with local authorities and numerous schools to the benefit of children.

The result of this was a project called Searching for Ivana's Treasure which included students of the faculty and town pupils. The pre-service teachers, supervised by the two of us, planned and prepared the workshops for gifted pupils based on new learning and teaching theories acquired during practice in Methodology of Croatian language course. These workshops were then realized with pupils that came from various schools in our County.

These workshops were held annually, in April, during the children celebration In the World of Fairy Tales of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić in Slavonski Brod<sup>2</sup>. They were coordinated by students and held in the open, in the city park in front of the Theatre and Concert Hall Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić where the bust of this great author could also be seen. All the activities were open to the public so passers-by and citizens could watch. The workshops lasted three to four classes.

The workshops were prepared and held for four years (from 2008 to 2011), and around 100 pupils, 51 students, 26 teachers observers, nine schools (Antun Mihanović Primary School, Bogoslav Šulek Primary School, Dragutin Tadijačnović Primary School, Ivan Goran Kovačić Primary School, Hugo Badalić Primary School from Slavonski Brod, also Ivan Mažuranić Primary School from Sibenj, Ivan Filipović Primary School from Velika Kopanica, Antun Mihanović Primary School from Nova Kapela Batrina, Viktor Car Emin Primary School from Donji Andrijevc) participated.

The programmes prepared every year in collaboration with students were supplemented and adapted to the responses of pupils, teachers' observers and students who filled in surveys and questionnaires after each workshop, wrote comments or suggested other new activities.

The basic values promoted in these workshops were about creativity, cooperation and an active role of students. They in turn, promoted the same values in pupils. The local community recognized the advantages of the programme designed to encourage the learning of gifted pupils. An interrelated circle of activities was created so that all participants could benefit from it<sup>3</sup>.

The workshops were a part of an official programme of Children celebration In the World of Fairy Tales of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić and can be found on web pages of the celebration in the document archives from 2008 to 2011.<http://www.usvijetubajki.org/>

#### **4. THE PROBLEM AND THE PLAN OF THE RESEARCH**

We noticed that higher education does not always comply with the needs of students for modern, active classes. Disinterest of some students for faculty activities pointed to this as well as their lower results in comparison to their abilities. It was necessary to motivate the fourth-year students to do some extra-curricular activities, implement active learning methods, and build cooperation in teaching, to motivate students' creativity as future teachers and to integrate their activity in the local community context.

We also believed that the local community does not fully recognize the potential of students who are educated in the same town. Similarly, the local community does not have any long-term activities planned to include gifted pupils (apart from Lidrano) in learning programmes which would encourage their creativity. Namely, there is no place for their

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<sup>2</sup> These celebrations have been held traditionally since 1971 and are a part of the cultural heritage of Slavonski Brod. They are supported by the Ministry of Culture of Croatia.

<sup>3</sup> Books awarded to pupils who participated in the first workshop, in 2008, were donated by publication houses: Školska knjiga, Mozaik knjiga, Profil and Matica hrvatska Slavonski Brod Branch.

specific needs in the programme. Furthermore, school teachers have no time, strategies or methods to encourage gifted pupils to be creative.

We concluded that in higher education in general as well as in Methodology of Croatian language that we teach, there is a lack of connection between theory and practice for pre-service teachers. Therefore, we decided to involve students in creating better learning conditions for pupils in the local community through active learning and service-learning. "Teaching through practice is an excellent way to prepare future teachers for the classroom, but also to promote values of active participation in the civil society and development of cultural competencies" (Tinkler et al. 2014: 219).

Accordingly, we expected changes in more levels than one: in higher education teaching Methodology of Croatian language and Methodology of Science and Social Studies, learning of lower-grade pupils and in the local community which would improve the lives of our youngest citizens.

The principal purpose of this action research was to improve the relationship between students – future teachers and lower-grade primary school pupils as well as the local community by implementing service-learning methods.

In order to realise this purpose, we set special aims of the research along with the criteria to assess the successfulness at several levels:

1st level: Improving higher education by creating motivating surroundings for student activities, cooperation and creativity development

The successfulness criteria are:

- Increased student satisfaction (the sources of this successfulness are the evaluations of students themselves after the conducted workshops),
- Increased students' creative activities (self-evaluation of the achieved and evaluation of teachers critical friends),
- Positive reaction of pupils to the organized activities (evaluation of pupils after the workshops)

2nd level: Improving the knowledge of gifted lower-grade pupils in primary school and developing their creativity

The criteria to assess the successfulness:

- Pupils show an increased interest and a better understanding of life and works of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić (pupils' written statements),
- Satisfaction with the conducted activities (pupils' evaluation paper),

3rd level: Improving the cooperation between the faculty and the local community

The criteria to assess the successfulness:

- Cooperation with local government (Administrative Department of Social Affairs and Services and the Administrative Department for Education, Sport and Culture of Brodsko-Posavska County),
- Cooperation with other educational and pedagogical institutions ("Braco I Seka" Kindergarten in Slavonski Brod, other schools e.g. "Milan Amruš" Primary School to educate and rehabilitate pupils with developmental delay),
- Permanent follow-up of activities by the local media (radio, SB Television, Posavska Hrvatska)

Critical friends were numerous teachers-observers who accompanied gifted pupils in all activities in which their pupils were involved. After each workshop, they wrote comments that were a valuable feedback about the success of the activities. Their comments pointed to what was good and what was not, they expressed their opinion and often encouraged the research.

The two of us were in turn critical friends to our students helping them to prepare the workshops for gifted pupils. We recorded and photographed all workshop stages. We respected the ethical code, especially the right to privacy and anonymity of participants, children rights, human rights and dignity, the principles of protecting child welfare. Pupils were notified in

advance about the length and type of workshops and about the possibility to opt out. The place to conduct the activities was chosen in compliance with ecology education and basic values of respecting nature and surroundings. All participating schools had a written parental agreement about photographing and taping the pupils.

## **5. DESCRIPTION AND INTERPRETATION OF THE CONDUCTED ACTIVITIES**

Since our project was realized in collaboration with local authorities, the task of notifying the schools and providing a suitable place was given to the Department of Social Affairs of the City Slavonski Brod. The department communicated with schools and informed us about the number of entrants that helped us plan and prepare the activities. Invitation emphasized that pupils who stand out with their results in curricular and extra-curricular activities in Croatian language and Science and Social Studies should enter.

Improving higher education teaching was realized through correlation and integration of two courses, which was the reason to begin the cooperation. Together with Mirela, who taught Methodology of Science and Social Studies, I held a meeting at which we discussed finding the links between our courses and organizing them. Our first aim was to improve higher education and we thought that by setting our own example we could contribute the most to the learning qualities of our students. We came to realize that the best idea was to offer students to participate in the planned extra-curricular activities. Students had to be given an opportunity to create and daydream freely, which is why participation was not obligatory. However, around ten students were happy to embrace our ideas.

Since one of our goals was to improve the quality of work of gifted lower-grade primary school pupils, we decided, together with our students, to offer more information about the compulsory reading works of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić that could not be found at school. We chose a literary sample (a book by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić) and asked our students to find links with Croatian language and then with Science and Social Studies<sup>4</sup>. We were aware that in class teaching there could be a methodological correlation between subjects because this type of teaching motivates students to develop a wholesome understanding and active problem solving.

We coordinated the team activities and supported those students who started with the notion that pupils should be led into a situation to discover problems themselves and through solving them, acquire new knowledge. We were led by the idea that the pupil "has to be given a chance to participate and undertake new cognitive adventures in order to gain a more wholesome and profound knowledge." (Polić, 2008: 188). Sometimes we had meeting three times a week in order to supervise their ideas and suggestions. We encouraged them not to repeat familiar methods of working with pupils but to create their own, to develop their potential (e.g. to think of names for planets, of a story in which Quest saves his grandfather, to illustrate and create flags for their stations, to create an original way of character analysis, figure 1). This built their self-confidence because they had doubts at the beginning about the quality of their activities or that pupils would not like them.

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<sup>4</sup> Contemporary research in the field of literature shows that correlation and integration methodical approach in teaching Croatian language deepens the experience of characters and situations, encourages pupils to develop their own creativity when expressing their emotions but understanding a literary text as well (Visinko, 1994:47).

Figure 1. Students at the faculty are working on creating and preparing teaching materials for pupils



Students worked together on analyzing motifs of a part of a fairy tale so they could present this to their colleagues. They all expressed their opinions about the ideas proposed and only those acceptable to the majority were accepted. Mirela and I coordinated the activities so they would not be repeated but connected logically. We wanted to increase our students' content and meet their ideas with special attention. Their content was to be measured through the final evaluation paper.

The other part of the research was aimed at involving pupils in the workshops which were meant to familiarize pupils with less known facts about the life and works of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić. We tried to do that through active learning, exploration and game. For example, one student thought of a way to check whether the pupils had read the story by telling them that every new question or a task had to be earned by a correct answer, solving a riddle or reading instructions that guided them to the next activity. All this was met with satisfaction because the pupils participated in fun, dynamic and creative learning (Figure 2). At the beginning, these activities were competitive, but in our second year, we abandoned that.

Figure 2. A workshop prepared to motivate experience, fun and dynamic learning (the work of students)



We built a template for the workshops which was then supplemented with matching activities depending on the text which served as the basis: the first part meant interpreting fairy tales and checking the level of comprehension. The activities for interpretation of fairy tales included answering different types of questions that motivate pupils' various mental processes<sup>5</sup> (Figure 3). Each interpretation was adapted to each fairy tale. Different activities encouraged pupils to memorize the plot, analyze characters' actions, role-play, dramatize some textual parts, talk and behave as heroes of the fairy tales, solve their problems and express their own attitudes. For example, the moderator tells the story of Jagor. At one point, they stop narrating at the place where many characters appear. Each pupil chooses one of these characters and has to work with the team of pupils to act out this scene in real life. Everybody stands still and when the moderator taps their shoulder, they start acting the role they were caught in. The moderator can ask everyone some questions.

Figure 3. A students monitoring the stage of the workshop in which reading comprehension is checked using questions. In the background are children from "Braco i Seka" Kindergarten.



In the second part, we prepared outdoor games based on motifs from fairy tales. One motif of each fairy tale was the theme of a certain game. The game *Kraljičini ključevi* (The Queen's Keys), a group game, was based on the motif from the fairy tale *Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins* (Figure 4), the game *Potruga za istinom*<sup>6</sup> (Searching for Truth) on the fairy tale *How Quest Sought the Truth*, as well as *Vreća krumpira*<sup>7</sup> (A Sack of Potatoes), *Stani mi na rep*<sup>8</sup> (Stand on my Tail), played in pairs, based on the motif of rope from *Jagor* or passing under a rope. We wanted to use these games to develop students' creativity, but to encourage interest for reading in pupils as well.

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<sup>5</sup> The questions were based on Bloom taxonomy (Vizek-Vidović, Kletzien, Cota Bekavac, 2005: 35)

<sup>6</sup> This is a modified play with a bottle or some other object that is placed in the center of the circle of children. Papers with scenes from a story are in the bottle. The one at whose direction the bottle points, has to take a paper and use the scene to continue the story. This game is very good for revising the plot or retelling.

<sup>7</sup> The whole group forms a circle and raises their hands above their heads imitating a knot on a sack of potatoes. They play the forest goblins in the sack. At a given mark, they have to mime the untying and jumping out of the sack.

<sup>8</sup> This is a game with a rope. Some pupils are chosen and a long rope is tied to each as a tail. Other pupils try to step on the tail while they run from them. The winner is the pupil whose tail was not stepped on. As a reward, he or she is told where to go next.



Figure 4. The game The Queen's Keys in the Searching for Ivana's Treasure workshop



In the third part of the workshops, the pupils participated in the exploration of unusual natural occurrences and the wildlife that appears in fairy tales (the bark remains in Jagor, making a sun dial in Bridesman Sun and Bride Bridekins<sup>9</sup>, determining the age of a tree using tree rings in Stribor's Forest).

We started our first workshop in 2008, with compulsory reading book, Croatian Tales of Long Ago. The students based their workshop on orienteering and navigating in the countryside using a map which was replaced by a treasure map. The quest or travel was organized in teams of five pupils<sup>10</sup> who followed the instructions with the help of their own, distinguishing color. They were given a map with the trail on it at the beginning of the workshop.

Special attention was given to the organization and script of the workshop in which a team of students took part. Rules and scoring were planned and they were printed and sent to schools so pupils could get ready. The pupils' preparation included reading Croatian Tales of Long Ago by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić.

The results of the cooperation with the local community could be seen in some local media. Workshops were covered by SBTV. The press wrote about the first workshop (Posavska Hrvatska, 25<sup>th</sup> April 2008), and a short text with a photo was published on web pages of The World of Fairy Tales ([http://www.usvijetubajki.org/arhiva/svijet\\_bajki\\_2008/vijesti/u\\_potrazi\\_za\\_ivanim\\_blagom/default.aspx](http://www.usvijetubajki.org/arhiva/svijet_bajki_2008/vijesti/u_potrazi_za_ivanim_blagom/default.aspx)).

In order to evaluate the success of the activities, evaluation was done with the aim of estimating the content of pupils and creativity of students. It was conducted by anonymous, open questionnaires for pupils, participants of the games and a special anonymous survey for the teacher observers of the teams.

Conducting a survey among teacher observers showed very positive reactions and delight. They said that they had never participated in something similar, and they also pointed out the numerous advantages of this workshop for the pupils: expanding the pupil's knowledge,

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<sup>9</sup> In this fairy tale, the sun helped Bride Bridekins. The pupils had to determine the cardinal points of the world and find their direction. Two flat stones were used as points of the compass marked East and West. A stick was stuck in the ground so that most of it was aimed straight in the air. The West stone was to be put at the end of the shadow of the stick and then the other directions were supposed to be determined. When the group determines where East is, they move eastwards.

<sup>10</sup> The groups are heterogeneous and pupils had no saying in forming them. The teachers chose the representatives of their school from different fourth graders. The members of the groups partially knew each other.

reading and enriching their vocabulary, feedback given to the pupils immediately, developing a competitive spirit, creativity and imagination, encouraging cooperation between pupils, their joy and happiness.

We would like to quote one teacher, "The children were content, fulfilled and happy. They had fun in a different way and discovered that they can learn a lot through a fun game, express their creativity... act and be happy!" (a teacher, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008).

Just one reaction of a teacher implied that we have to change something. A small number of participating schools, the place and the time were said to be a drawback.

All teachers say that this model should be used in teaching all school subjects, in the classroom but on the playground as well, "with the proper preparation... and perhaps some help from parents, students as co-moderators etc." (a teacher, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008). One comment was especially encouraging, "This workshop is a great experience and should be held annually, but maybe it should involve more pupils and primary schools. My congratulations to all organizers!" (a teacher, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008).

Pupils' answers show extraordinary motivation which proved that the activities fulfilled the goals of the research. When asked about what she had learned in the game, one pupil wrote, "I learned that we need to read books more and enjoy doing it." A pupil from another school wrote, "We had learned a lot about Croatian Tales of Long Ago by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić. About characters, their personalities, we learned that learning can be fun."

When asked what they liked in the workshop they participated in, some of the answers were:

I like the fact that we used a game to check our knowledge.

I like the creativity of the games.

I like the fact that we learned more about some tales, and had fun as well.

I like the fact that the books were very educational and we could check what we had learned from them.

I like it because it is much easier to learn through a game than through classes.

(Pupils, personal communication, 2008)

After the evaluation, we were proud of our achievement but we were also aware of the fact that the workshops had to concentrate more on the qualitative approach to the text, not on games based on motifs from them. Games have to motivate pupils but they have to be more thought of to influence the cognitive processes of pupils.

The competitive mode of the workshops was not continued the following year although the pupils in the first workshop said that the best moment was when the winner was pronounced. However, the answers to what they did not like, showed that it was the competition, "because we were given points for time."

The next year we narrowed down the number of texts that pupils had to prepare for our workshops. Everything was based on How Quest Sought the Truth which inspired our students' imagination and creativity. A script was written based on basic relationships between the characters that fitted station learning.

From students' responses in the evaluation papers we could conclude that the workshops met their expectations, enabled them to cooperate and express their creativity:

This was more than I had expected. Children learn in a fun way. It was all as we had planned it. Excellent. The children were thrilled.

I liked the creativity that this workshop inspired and our equal participation. I was able to show my creativity.

It was an excellent, new experience. I was happy to work. We had a small clash with other obligations, but somehow we managed (with a few sleepless nights).

(Students, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

Teachers as critical friends praised but also suggested some changes for betterment of the activities:

Everything was great. I was thrilled with the work, ideas, interest of children. I commend the time and effort spent on this. Keep up the good work! Thank you for everything! (a teacher, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

This should be a part of our classes. It has a great influence on the child's development.

(Teacher, personal communication, 16<sup>th</sup> April 2008)

When asked whether this could be used in classes, more than a half of the examined teachers thought this model perfectly applicable in classes, 25% said not completely, and 25% that it was applicable to a lesser degree in everyday classes. In later interviews, we learned that this model could be used in classes but that it was too wide and demanding to prepare. Some flaws of the model were time-consuming preparation of the workshop and the need for a number of teachers to cooperate. Teacher survey showed that on the scale from one to five of the usefulness of this learning model, they all thought that it was extremely useful thus confirming affirmative values in this research.

In the survey in which pupils were asked to grade the workshop, 80% of pupils gave it an excellent grade, 15% gave it a B, and 5% gave it a C. Overall impressions and grades point to a high degree of content. In open-ended questions, pupils expressed their opinions on the success of the workshop: "Fantastic! Unique! Great! Beautiful! All aces! Nice, perfect, fun! Very good! ", and only one student wrote: "Not completely pleased." (Pupils, personal communication, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2009)

A sixth-grader wrote a text about the second workshop on Children celebration "In the World of Fairy Tales of Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić" web pages accompanied by photos: [http://www.usvijetubajki.org/arhiva/svijet\\_bajki\\_2009/vijesti/u\\_potrazi\\_za\\_ivaninim\\_blagom/default.aspx](http://www.usvijetubajki.org/arhiva/svijet_bajki_2009/vijesti/u_potrazi_za_ivaninim_blagom/default.aspx)

These positive reactions motivated us to continue working, but warned us to lessen the number of activities and focus only on basic goals.

In 2010, we chose a less known text by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić with the aim of introducing the artistic creation of our "Croatian Andersen" to our pupils, which also fitted in the extended programme for gifted pupils. The text was Srce od licitara (Gingerbread Heart).

We published a video with clips from our workshops: <http://youtu.be/TPeitJIIZfE>

Pupils' reactions were extremely positive: "the best, great and very interesting, superb and fun, excellent, interesting experience". (Pupils, personal communication, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

In the evaluation form for teacher observers we read some very interesting reactions. All teachers said that this is a very useful teaching model, but they thought it could not be applied in classes because it required extensive preparation. The workshop was given a grade A, and their comments were: Keep up the good work! Excellent ideas! More children should participate" (Teacher, personal communication, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

The students were very happy with the results and they said so in the survey,

We established cooperation between students and pupils. All my expectations were fulfilled.

There was a lot of creativity and success at the workshop amongst pupils and us.

We saw our real success in practice.

I achieved everything I had planned. I am waiting for the children's evaluation.

(Students, personal communication, 20<sup>th</sup> April 2010)

This workshop achieved cooperation between students, motivated creativity, and pupils were happy with the activities.

The last workshop was held in 2011 with a very motivating text U vilinskim dvorima (In the Elven Halls). For the first time, the workshop was held in-doors. The pupils did not have to prepare by reading the text, everything was done during the workshop.

Pupils' reactions were positive once again when asked what they liked the most,

What I liked the most... was being here... outside when we searched for numbers... Elves and fairies and the quest... The clothes, the mime. When the fairies acted in the play... The play... When we acted in the shadow theatre. When we did an interview... The task to make a play with shadows. Acting. Decorations. Everything. The games... The quest. Searching for envelopes... Looking for the continuation of the story. Fairies and elves. Costumes. Shadow theatre... Making fairy tales. When we acted. The story. (Pupils, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2011)

The workshops encouraged pupils' oral creativity through creative tasks<sup>11</sup> (Figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5. Pupils at an interview with the main characters from the fairy tale



Figure 6. Picture shows a scene from the shadow theatre presented by pupils based on one segment of the fairy tale



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<sup>11</sup> For example, one task in the workshop In the elven halls was to use the verbs, nouns and adjectives they found in the text to make a potion (a complex text) to put a spell on the main hero. The potion had to be prepared from the exact amount of ingredients: one verb, three nouns and two adjectives. The second task involved the main characters. The pupils had to think of an interview with all the characters but they also played these characters. The third task was connected with creating a different ending. They were supposed to do it through the shadow theatre. They learned how to create shadow theatre in this task. The task that was related to Science and Social Studies involved the forest in which Tomica, the main hero, lived. The pupils had to make a forest but they were given only leafless trees. The leaves were put in several boxes. Each box contained a different type of leaves for different trees. They had to separate the coniferous from deciduous trees and hang the leaves to their tree. After that, they had to write a poem which puts a spell on the forest.

When asked about their expectations and realization of them, the students said,  
The main aim was for pupils to like the workshop therefore we are pleased. It turned out to be even better than we had expected due to active students (most of them) and a creative professor.

These workshops fulfilled all my expectations because those students who are really creative participated along with our professor Irena.

I think everything was great and that the children had a great time.

(Students, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2011)

Students' creativity could also be seen in costumes they designed and made themselves in order to increase the pupils' experience. (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Various costumes that the students made for the workshops



Teachers as critical friends saw the advantages of this type of work with pupils as well as many values and methods,

Spending time together, learning, play, cooperation.

Developing their creativity. The pupils learn through practice.

The pupils are active and are learning a lot.

Cooperation, interaction, fun learning through playing.

Group work. Creativity. Innovation.

Relaxed atmosphere. Cooperation and learning.

Encourages creativity and various ways of solving tasks. New methods of teaching and learning.

Developing abilities and skills. Freedom of work and expression.

(Teachers, personal communication, 23<sup>rd</sup> April 2011)

One proof of a successful cooperation between the faculty and the local community was the participation of the deputy mayor during the ceremony of giving recognition notes.

Our work was noticed by the officials of the County Office who ensured financial funds and the transport for pupils from distant parts of the County. This was the reason we were able to involve more pupils and schools in the last workshop.

The students who participated in this project expressed a wish to participate again in similar activities, and later we had calls from our former students who started working in the meantime. They said that they had similar workshops with their pupils. In addition, one teacher said that she used these methods in her class.

A new course started on our 5th year called Korelacijsko-integracijski sustav u nastavi hrvatskoga jezika (Correlative and integrative system in teaching Croatian language) in which the basic ideas of the workshops are passed down to the next generations of students. One

segment of the atmosphere in this course can be seen in the following video clip:  
<http://youtu.be/MI7TJMAZXVg>.

## 6. CONCLUSION

In this research, all planned aims were achieved and confirmed by numerous reactions of participants and critical friends at several levels.

In higher education, Methodology courses were modernized because service-learning proved itself to be a successful method of learning through experience. Students', teachers' and children's reactions showed that our aims were achieved,

1. Students were content with the achieved (seen from their evaluations)
2. A positive reaction from pupils participating in the workshop prepared by the students was extremely great (results of the pupils' evaluation after the workshops)
3. A cooperation between students was achieved, and their creativity was noticed which can be seen from the reactions of teachers observers. (evaluation results and personal communication)

At a cognitive level, a positive result was achieved which can be seen from the pupils' reactions because they often emphasize how much they had learned. It can be seen from their reactions and joy after the workshops. Apart from that, creativity of all participants could be seen which is proved by numerous photos and praises of teachers observers.

The cooperation between the faculty and the local community was extended, and is proved by the invitations from the City and County representatives to participate in all festivities that mark certain annual events. The cooperation with kindergartens and "Milan Amruš" Primary School was seen in visiting the workshops in which the children and the pupils were actively involved, and later, the students visited these institutions as guests or participants in professional training lectures.

The local media also covered our work and our cooperation resulted in covering other activities of our faculty.

Numerous goals realized through the service-learning method in preparing pre-service teachers to work with gifted pupils pointed to great possibilities of cooperation between the faculty and the local community. The students are prepared for many real situations through active learning, they could apply the acquired teaching skills to the more sensitive members of our society. These positive results show that the service-learning method should be a permanent part of Methodology curriculum, and that the connection between the faculty and the local community should be expanded. In addition, new methods of learning should be explored in more detail.

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