

## **'The Reading Challenge': a Teacher Training Program to Improve Reading Competences**

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### **Abstract**

The paper presents the design and results of an in-service teacher training program that aims to improve the students' reading competences. The program was developed starting from the data in Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS) that explores the students' reading comprehension at the end of primary school. The PIRLS data base has been analysed in order to identify the students' misconceptions and also to compare the scores of the young Romanians with the ones of the highest ranking countries, the lowest ranking countries, the neighbouring countries and the international average. The research results constitute a core of valuable data for the development of the training curriculum which is designed so that it should challenge unproductive teaching practice and stimulate a reading for comprehension-based approach in the class.

"The Reading Challenge" teacher training program includes a face-to-face component where participants become familiar to the PIRLS data, type of texts and items; compare them with their classroom practice; and look for solutions to reduce the students' failures. The program also comprises an online component that offers four topics of discussion during eight weeks of distance learning which are meant to stimulate: innovative applications in the classroom, an exchange of motivating reading texts and strategies among participants and the development of a virtual collection of reading best practices for both primary and lower secondary education.

As of June 20<sup>th</sup>, 2013, 300 teachers from almost all the counties in Romania participated in the program. The results show the weaknesses of the current teaching practice, some successes in overcoming these, good quality outcomes from the groups of students where reading for comprehension strategies have been used. The online collection of reading practices that was developed throughout the training – with the good examples and the less good – will be used for the next series of the program which is scheduled for the fall 2013 as well as for the development of a reading for comprehension teaching guide.

Key words: reading competences, blended learning, students' misconceptions