



# **01 Research report on effective reading promotion to teenage boys**

**01-A2: Conducting a Focus Group in country partners**



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## Introduction

This report presents the findings of the individual focus group reports completed within the framework of the project Boys Reading (BOYSREADING). Each individual report was conducted by the respective consortium member (CARDET, FFST, IPCB, ULO, Doukas School and UPIT). CARDET, as an activity leader, conducted the present report based on the collected data from the partners.

The Boys Reading project aims to make reading an integral part in the life of boys aged 11-15, who are currently unenthusiastic about books. The Boys Reading consortium asserts that this can only be achieved if teenage boys acquire control over their reading and are enabled to choose their readings from books that satisfy their actual needs and interests. Addressing the needs of boys effectively requires dialogue and the collective effort of all partners in the education process, including government, educators, parents, and community members. Among these partners, however, educators play a particularly important role. The Boys Reading project targets all stakeholders but focuses especially on educators, enabling them to provide classroom experiences that respond to the interests, needs, and learning styles of boys, and to engage boys and girls equally as readers and writers.

The main aim of this compile report is to present the findings based on data collected by the different partners during the focus groups. Each participant in this activity conducted two focus groups: one focus group with teachers, parents and librarians and one focus group with boys who are avid and reluctant readers. Thus, the present report consists of two parts: a report based on the data from the teacher, parents and librarians' focus group and another report based on the data from the boys' focus groups. The target of the focus groups was to give insights on the main thematic areas of the Boys Reading project, and the report specifically focused on the following themes: how do boys like to spend their time, boys' the reading habits/attitudes, the kind of books boys prefer and

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how they choose those books, how boys use the house, classroom and school library, boys' attitude to reading for information, boys' attitude to reading for pleasure, the role-model for promoting boys reading and factors that prevent boys from reading. The tables below indicate the number of participants for each focus group.

Partner	Teachers <sup>1</sup> (primary and secondary)	Parents	Librarians	Total
CARDET	5	2	1	8
FFST	5	3	1	9
Doukas School	30 questionnaires were distributed	35 (were given questionnaires: 45% fathers, 55% mothers)	3	68
ULO	3	3	1	7
IPCB	3	2 <sup>2</sup>	2 <sup>3</sup>	7
UPIT	2	3	1	6
Total	48	48	9	105

Partner	Boys <sup>4</sup>		Total
	Avid Readers	Reluctant Readers	
CARDET	7	7	14
FFST	7	8	15
Doukas School	NA	NA	207
ULO	7 <sup>5</sup>	5	12
IPCB	6	5	11
UPIT	6	6	12

<sup>1</sup> Note that some teachers were parents and vice versa.

<sup>2</sup> Fathers

<sup>3</sup> One teacher was as well librarian.

<sup>4</sup> Boys were categorized as avid or reluctant readers according to their teachers' opinion.

<sup>5</sup> The group of avid readers consisted of 4 boys and 3 girls. Girls participated to distinguish the differences in reading between the two genders.





Total			271
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The research findings formulated by the research conducted by the partners involved in this activity of the Boys Reading project revealed that many initiatives exist in all regions/countries under investigation. Furthermore, the research has underlined some examples of best practices provided by the partners, and recommendations suggested by teachers, parents and boys which can be used while conducting the Boys Reading Toolkit. The challenges identified could be considered when developing the relevant material.

## Collected data from the focus groups with teachers, parents and librarians.

This section presents the findings from the focus groups with teachers, parents and librarians. The thematic categories are based on the guidelines given for running the focus groups.

### How do girls and boys like to spend their time?

Boys and girls spend their free time in a similar way. The most popular activities include computer games, social networks and especially Facebook, text messaging and hanging around with friends. They all spend a lot of time on digital devices.

*It's similar, they are constantly on the Internet, on Facebook, writing messages; several of them practice sports, but most are on their laptops and computers and you can see who pale they are in September after spending the summer online.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

However, according to the national reports, there is a difference between genders. The majority of girls prefers more feminine activities such as shopping, navigate on the Internet, listening to the music, talking about school subjects and ballet. On the other hand, boys prefer playing chess or outdoor activities such as playing football, basketball or sport games on computer such as FIFA.

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*Girls usually do ballet, listen to music or even read a book. Boys used to play football, computer games..*  
(Cypriot teacher)

*Computer games all day long. I noticed that a lot of boys seem tired in the morning and they admit playing games the night before. They also play football, judo, taekwondo, but nobody ever mentions reading.*  
(Croatian teacher)

Reading was not listed as a common free time activity. Girls read more than boys and they are two times more likely to borrow books from the school library or to read magazines about fashion, celebrities etc. While it was mentioned that Polish boys might read sports magazines in their spare time, in general, reading is not very popular among boys.

## Reading habits/attitudes of boys

According to the participants, boys are generally reluctant about reading, which they consider to be a passive pastime. Technologies managed to kick out books from boys' routine to a great extent.

*When I used to be a kid I loved reading books instead of playing outside. So book was considered to be unsocial. Today, the tablet has taken the book's place. (...)*  
(Cypriot teacher)

As boys grow up, their reading habits get limited. The main reason is the availability of alternative and more attractive options to choose for entertainment. They prefer to take part in activities in which they are active such as sports or even computer games.

*Until the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of the primary school my son had read all the books we had home. He was maniac with fairytales! (...) Ever since the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, he has read nothing. Neither comics...because the topics that he likes can be found in movies or electronic games. (Cypriot mother)*

Regarding the national reports, boys read in three cases: when they are obliged to, when they are interested in the topic and when there is a reward.





In the first case, teachers or parents might force children to read despite their unwillingness. It is also reported that Greek teachers assign a specific book to be read by the entire class over the holidays, and the boys always grumble about it. They're also asked to write a book report or complete other tasks as proof that they've read it. They are not given a choice; everyone reads the same text.

*Yesterday we had the "Twilight" lesson. I asked whether anybody had read the book and expected that they had. But nobody did. Twilight, a very famous movie, has been watched a million times by them, but nobody read the book.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

Approximately 20-30% of Romanian boys have a good relationship with books and reading. A similar proportion falls at the other extreme (very bad relationship, they do not read, they do not like books). The remaining 50-40% are in the middle: they read only if they "forced", or by duty (because the mother insists). Boys' attitude to reading is the one induced by school and especially by family: teachers support them to read and recommend them books. Family sometimes does not help the school/teachers in this effort. On the contrary they minimize/denigrate the importance of reading (usually based on the fear they have to buy all those books). Rarely the situation is opposite: some mothers ask the help of teachers for their boys' reading and insist getting additional reading for their boy.

The second case concerns the boys who enjoy reading. Boys read, but only what they like, what attracts them. Portuguese boys diversify their reading more than girls. They seem to like to experiment with new titles or they lack concentration.

*Boys read less than girls but those who are readers diversify the kind of book they read, boys easily change from comics, for example, to other books they heard about.*

*(Portuguese Teacher)*

Moreover, one Cypriot teacher reported boys' desire to read books at home after reading out loud during class extracts from literary books. Some boys asked the teacher to provide the book title and the author so as to buy it.





*I started reading extracts from books that we had in classroom and books that I had home. I was impressed when boys asked for the book title and author because they wanted to read it.*

Although boys read less than girls do, when they do read, they like to give their opinion on what they read and to explain why they liked/disliked it. Boys can also be compulsive readers, who reread books several times, though they are in the minority.

*Sometimes, even when they don't like a book they talk about it and explain why. M. reads obsessively out of curiosity. (Portuguese father)*

The third case appeared in Greece where Greek parents noticed that if they promise their boys a reward of some sort, they are more cooperative about reading.

According to Cypriot mothers, boys' daily schedule is hectic because of the private lessons in the afternoon and their free time is significantly restricted. Thus, after studying they prefer to play electronic games instead of reading a book. However, Romanian interviewees supported that boys have more free time than girls due to the fact that they pay less attention to their school work. Besides that, boys claimed that they lack the reading skills and that these skills are much more common in girls. Nevertheless, in boys do not lack the skills but the will. Romanian mothers explained that weak or non-readers are those usually negatively influenced by their family, those involved in any other kind of activities (e.g. sports) or those who are science-oriented (e.g. mathematics, physics).

Despite of boys' technology addiction, with regards to digital reading, they seem to indicate a preference for paper books. It is mentioned that conditions for reading on the computer screen at school are not favourable. However, it is also claimed that boys find computer and mobile games more enticing than reading.

*They prefer reading traditional books, paper books, but there are no good conditions at school to read on the computer. (Portuguese teacher)*

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## What kind of books do boys prefer and how do they choose them?

Boys prefer, adventure, mystery, fantasy books, books with humor, comics, science fiction books or even encyclopaedic and *how to* books. Therefore, boys are not interested in romantic, love stories. Books related to films are also very popular in boys' reading list such as *Harry Potter*, *Hobbit*, *Astérix cartoon series*, *Tintin* and *Lucky Luke*.

*Harry Potter, or books that are sold on the kiosks – they will take these are read until they finish, ignoring their studies. On the other hand, when they have to read something for school, they will read the night before.*

*(Croatian parent)*

*Yes, they like books they read because of the film they saw, and what is interesting is that they usually prefer the book.*

*(Portuguese librarian)*

The most popular book among teenage boys is Jeff Kinney's *Diary of a Wimpy Kid* satirical realistic fiction novel series. The Guinness World Records captivates boys as well because of the colourful photos and funny topics. Surprisingly, some boys read continuously, books like historical fiction and information about technology and automobiles, though they're in the minority.

*I ask my two sons to read books that have been made into movies. Right now we're reading 'Gladiator'. First we all watched the movie together. Then I assign certain chapters for them to read and the three of us discuss it.*

*(Portuguese father)*

The principal criteria for book selection include the small size of the book, big font size, captive book cover and title and impressive illustration. Thick books deter boys so as only-text books.

*The font size and the size of the book plays an important role. Boys usually choose the smallest and briefest book.*

*(Cypriot librarian)*

Polish teachers also note that boys show a great interest in history and mythology and particularly in the mythology of the Greeks and Romans, as well as legends such as Warsaw's legends. Fantasy fiction books are not listed in Polish boys' favourite book. As

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an example, *The Hobbit* is included in school's obligatory reading list but merely 13-14 year-old boys read this books.

In Greece, boys read magazines about their hobbies, cars and technology that can be found as inserts in the Sunday newspaper. Boys also read athletic newspapers and visit news sites to read about their music idols.

Romanian boys however are greatly influenced by their teachers as they choose books mainly based on teachers' suggestions and recommendations. Regarding the authors that they prefer, the boys in small classes especially prefer the Romanian authors such as Ion Creangă and I. L. Caragiale. Cypriot teachers also mentioned that some students are influenced from school Toolkits that contain extracts from literary books. Particularly, the Toolkit for Greek has many extracts from literary books and some boys express their interest in buying these books.

*They show a great interest in these extracts and want to buy the books.*

## How is the Library used?

### Home

All of the parents who participated in the focus group have got book collections at home, dictionaries and encyclopedias. Generally speaking, boys do not use their book collection spontaneously in spite of their parents' and teachers' prompts. They only use occasionally dictionaries and encyclopedias, when they are forced to do so and sometimes book relevant to their interests (e.g. electronics). More specifically, all Romanian mothers pointed out that the frequency of using the home library varies, but in average it is between once a month and two-three times in a year. Romanian boys prefer equally reading books on the PC tablet, online books, online materials.

The boy's character and reading habits of the family members play an important role. According to the Portuguese report, parents sometimes exchange books among them for

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the kids. Greek parents however, argued that only 45.7% had ever visited a proper library with their son. There were two exceptions in Cyprus and Croatia where parents have been systematically trying to advance children's' reading habits since they were babies.

*There was merely a boy who used to have a scheduled reading hour at home where everyone in the family had to read a book during that time.*

*(Cypriot teacher)*

Parents from Cyprus, Poland and Portugal have scheduled reading times at home. Particularly, a father from Portugal, shared his own experience with his son. He tried to encourage his boy to read by creating a reading period. As the father said "J. has recently acquired reading habits and he reads every night 5 minutes in bed before going to sleep".

## Classroom

All the teachers, with an exception to Romanian teachers, reported that classroom libraries as such do not exist. There are though several classes that have small collections of books and magazines according to students' needs.

*We don't even have a classroom, so there is no place to put the books. And I would have, for example, encyclopedias that I would like to put in the classroom – my boys are too big for them, and they will not read them now.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

*In the classroom there is a number of books that the students are free to read. We have some trunks with books that circulate in the school and all classes have access to them.*

*(Portuguese teacher-librarian)*

The Cypriots teachers described how they integrated these books in their class. The teaching method is based on book reading as a way to keep students alert and interested in the lesson. Specifically, when the school program is overloaded with no breaks or when the students are upset, teachers choose to read extracts from the books in their classroom. This method was very effective as the students become quiet. They actually enjoy and crave for that moment. In several classes also read literary books 10 minutes

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before starting the lesson and then discuss with their classmates their favourite parts of the book.

*I have two continuous hours history class. Between these hours I read extracts from Jorge Bucay's books just to have a break and relax a bit. My students love this. A boy actually was very thrilled by Bucay's stories.*

*(Cypriot teacher)*

The National Reading Plan (PNL) of Portugal has also promoted more opportunities to read during lessons. The boys read books and then present them in class or talk about them to their peers. Students can experiment with diverse forms of reading aloud: humoristically, stressing the words or exaggerating the intonation.

*I think that one way of motivating to reading is asking them to read in a different way, for example exaggerating intonation or reading as if singing rap...'*

*(Portuguese teacher)*

However, the Polish teachers mentioned that in History and Language class these books are not available after school and there is also lack of time to use them during the lesson. Otherwise, boys are not interested in those books. In Romania, both, teachers and students are not satisfied with the library. Teachers said there is a limited number of books, not available for all the students.

## School

All the schools are equipped with a library, though usually, it is not available outside school hours. Regarding the reports from the focus groups, most of the school libraries are outdated and there is a significant lack of books. In fact, in Croatia and Poland, the school library has mainly school readings. As reported, new and popular books are expensive. Thus, the school library is not appealing to students.

*We used to have a proper library with a reading space, but we lost it some six-seven years ago.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

*My problem is that pupils refuse books that are older editions! They look at the cover, and refuse the old ones! Even when I have not enough copies to meet their*

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*demand, they refuse the old editions. They prefer not to read the book instead of accepting a book from an older edition...*

*(Romanian librarian)*

Not all the schools have regular visits to the library. Some teachers organise random library visits with their students to check out books and do research for projects. According to Cypriot teachers, the students usually visit the school library with their teacher in order to borrow a book to read when their teacher is absent, when they finish their activities in class or when they finish their school homework. It was also reported that the school library is located in an isolated place inside school and remains locked for safety reasons.

*Indeed! The school library is isolated and not attractive to students. Also it is locked because books have been stolen some time ago. So from that time the library is always locked, even for teachers. Whoever wants to go there must have the key.*

*My students borrow books from the school library and read when they finish other tasks in class or home.*

*(Cypriot teachers)*

In Greece and Portugal, however, the school organises regular sessions at the library after having identified that students do not use the school library. The Greek school has a Literature Club that meets in the Library every week, though it attracts mostly girls. The Library also hosts authors who come to the school to meet the children as part of the Literature Club. For example, recently, students had read different books written by an author who visited their school. In Portugal, there is the reading workshop, promoted by the National Reading Plan (PNL), which is carried out at school through school libraries: every week, 11-15 year-old students go to the library for 45 minutes. Students read autonomously, they are free to choose what they want to read and each student must talk about a book. Each school year, each student reads 3 books.

Teachers and librarians also reported that boys are not frequent library users compared to girls. While Polish boys do not spend time in the library's reading place, Portuguese boys usually go to the library, when they don't have lessons, to use own and library computers. There is also a percentage of 40% of Romanian boys who visit occasionally the school library after someone else's prompt and not with their own will.

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*Boys come to the library only occasionally; now for example, the group that had the interview with you, came to the library and asked for books; otherwise, they require not only books but they also ask for atlases, encyclopaedias (of human anatomy, geography and that's all; so they ask what the teacher ask in the class).  
(Romanian librarian)*

## Reading for information acquisition

Reading for information acquisition usually is related to school work and takes place at school or home. Boys use mainly encyclopedias and dictionaries to find information for their school subjects or research projects. Information acquisition is highly associated with school reading as a Polish teacher claimed. Thus, reading to find information is discourages boys reading.

*If you put together two books from the Harry Potter series, and tell that first one is a school reading and second one is for pleasure, the first one would be immediately rejected.*

With regards to the medium used for information acquisition, some differences were identified in Greek private and public schools. Their private school provides students with tablets as part of a program called 1:1, that is, one computer for one student. The students take their tablets home with them every day. Not only are all their books and workbooks contained in their tablets, but they can go online and search for whatever information is required even at home. According to the teachers, tablets are required and used to complete the regular assignments as well as for Project work and research required for collaborative learning. This is a daily occurrence at the school. The classrooms are also wired and students can surf the net when required to do so during class, without having to go to the library. At the public schools, more conventional methods are used. Students may need to consult encyclopedias or other resources from their home libraries, the school library or from a local public library. In the library, librarians facilitate the

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students by helping them locate resources. They also show students strategies for helping them extract pertinent information from texts.

Moreover, in Croatia, students use mostly the internet to search for information or to finish school assignments. Although, it was identified the issue of being nonselective when choosing information.

*If they have to make a poster for school or anything like that, they will first look at the Wikipedia. It would be good if they would look for something else, something other than Wikipedia. Everything has to be over the Internet and take a second to find. They print it, sometimes even if it's not written in Croatian. They don't even understand it and just take the information for granted. For example, they can mistake Pitagora for Protagora, and not even care about it. To them, it is the same.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

*This is a problem, finding information is not done using the recommended reading, or even the computer. I noticed that they will not spontaneously be able to find the information they need. But, if I say "that was online today, on all big new sites", they will say "what are those, who reads that?"*

*(Croatian parent)*

Romanian teachers and parents also give emphasis on the gender differences regarding the kind of information they look for. Boys read to obtain information thus they do not pay attention to details, while girls read for themselves, for the pleasure of reading and hence they are more descriptive and interested in details. Boys' 'superficial approach' to reading might be explained due to the new assessment method at school.

*Attitudes have also changed in boys compared with those of 20 years ago (generational change!): the boys have become very pragmatic; they gave up emotions, feelings.*

*(Romanian teacher and mother)*

*That is also because of changing the format of assessment and examination. The exam subjects have the same trend, of standardization, of shortening: everything is now standardized by the desire to increase the objectivity of the evaluation (we have now grid-tests, we limited number of lines in the tests for Romanian language!); that induced this pragmatism, this synthetic approach in boys. That has negative effects on reading and it does not stimulate creativity and*

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*imagination of the pupil, on the contrary (it negatively affects imagination, it stops creativity)!*

*(Romanian teacher)*

## Reading books for pleasure

Reading for pleasure relates to the kind of books boys read. Boys read for pleasure only the books they are interested in such as science fiction, adventure, mythology, books with funny stories, series books, comics, sport newspapers, magazines and articles about automobiles, books about animals, books about geography, magazines or other writings about technology and hobbies. The books have to be written in a simple language so that language would not be a barrier to promote pleasure.

*Boys choose books with humor, jokes that make them laugh.*

*(Cypriot teacher)*

*Science fiction, even if it's not the best translation, will hook the boys on reading. After that, they can read other kinds of books and other types of literature. It is important that reading become important. To enjoy reading it has to be easy for them. From the elementary school it has to be something easy. If you don't enjoy reading, the important thing is to overcome the barrier. Many students have problems reading.*

*(Greek librarian)*

Popular books boys read for pleasure include the 'Diary of a Wimpy Kid', 'Harry Potter' series, 'The 39 Clues', Jules Verne etc. Some of the authors that Portuguese boys read for pleasure are some well-known Portuguese authors, such as: Luísa Ducla Soares, António Torrado, António Pina, Ana Maria Magalhães e Isabel Alçada, Ricardo Araújo Pereira, Nuno Markl, Rui Zink. This choice is reflected in the series they read.

Boys' relationship with books is circumstantial and evolutionary as they lose the appetite for reading once they grow up. Hence, reading for pleasure becomes mostly reading to acquire information. With regards to Romanian teachers and librarian, boys during school hours read not for pleasure, but in order to get the information that the teachers require or recommend.

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*Reading for pleasure in class is excluded; there is no time for that! They read for pleasure at home; during the class hours only short fragments, because there's no time to read a lot.*

*(Romanian teacher and librarian)*

*They only do things if they have to for a certain grade. Today, that is the only thing that matters... everything bores them.*

*(Croatian librarian)*

The lack of time and willingness to read for pleasure was mentioned as well by Cypriot and Croatian participants. The school program is too absorbing and teachers do not have time to let children read for pleasure. In addition, boys' daily schedule after school is hectic and there is no will to read further since they have associate reading with school work.

*We might have wrong accusing our boys. Their daily schedule is full of private lessons and they actually don't have time to read other stuff. They prefer electronic games to relax from reading.*

*(Cypriot mother)*

As a consequence, Greek participants suggested the need for encouraging boys to read for pleasure. The teachers could attend training programs to facilitate this process.

*Maybe the teachers need to be reeducated. They can have workshops (...) Most teachers are women, so they should consult librarians. There is a difference between preferences for boys and girls, obviously. Girls like more romantic books or books that deal with emotions and relationships. Boys like to read mysteries, action books. What we try to do to try to encourage both sexes to read is to offer a variety of things, things that are interesting to them. For example, they say they have a hobby. We try to help them find a non-fiction book that deals with that.*

## Role-model for promoting boys reading

Parents and teachers noted that the role-model for promoting boys reading is an imperative. Teachers put great emphasis on the role of parents in shaping the attitudes



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of children reading. They believe that without experience and encouragement at home, there is no chance to get boys into the habit of reading.

*Children need to have somebody they can look up to, that they can see reading and being interested... than, it is possible to find some common topic that interests*  
(Croatian parent)

Even though the majority of the parents mentioned that they love reading, children don't seem to follow in their footsteps. Gender differences as well as generation differences were reported by Croatian teachers and parents as an explanation for their children's unwillingness to read.

*The boy will rarely take a book, he will play with toys, and they both have the same role model. Their father does not read much, but the mother always has a book in her hand. The girl has taken up like her, but the boy not.... Now my father is living with them and he is constantly reading. Maybe Marin will now look at him and also start reading.*

(Croatian teacher)

Hence, there is the issue of the female role-model being most common than the male one and boys might tend to believe that reading is feminine task. However, boys' interests have changed to the technology development.

*I have to say that we are also the children of some other generation. We didn't have Internet, computers or things like that. We only had books and read with pleasure because this was a way of getting into other worlds. They have it easier, they have other ways to do that.*

(Croatian parent)

*I think I am a good model, to my children and my pupils. I have also written several books, and the children are fascinated when they see a book with my name on the cover.*

(Croatian teacher)

There is the widespread belief that teachers are be good role-models for boys reading. Teachers read children's books often, in order to be able to use them in the classroom. They also get informed about books for children and new books online. When teachers give good suggestions and work in tandem with librarians, reading seems to become more enjoyable for students.

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*In this school I am now working at there is a great number of readers when compared with other schools I have been to. I think it resides in the influence of teachers, especially in what concerns those books they have to read.*

*(Portuguese librarian)*

The Greek focus group report has provided some percentages regarding parents and teachers acting as role-models. Approximately half proportion of the parents interviewed, responded that they have never visited a library with their sons. The percentages about reading for pleasure varied: 29.4% corresponds to parents who read on a daily basis, 32.4% to parents who read one or two times a week, 11.8% responded that they read one or two times a month, and finally 35.3% responded that they read during the holidays. A significant percentage of 97.1% used to read to their sons when they were younger. Additionally, the largest fraction (64.7%) mentioned that they visit bookshops to get informed about what types of reading materials are available and of interest to their sons. Following this, the second most popular choice was for parents to visit sites on the Internet (58.8%). Newspapers and magazines and book exhibitions followed by 29.4% and 26.5%, respectively. Very few parents (2.94%) either visited the library or were not informed.

Teachers were asked if they are aware of gender differences between boys and girls. 90% of them responded that they were aware. When asked if they are aware of the types of reading materials in printed and electronic format that boys like to read, 56.7% of the teachers said they were aware. Teachers are also aware of the usefulness of a school library. If they haven't used it as much as they could, it's because of the constraints and pressure to finish chunks of the curriculum within the timeframe. 86.7% of the teachers said that they encourage the boys to read and 93.3% of recommend specific titles to boys. They were asked about the criteria they use to accomplish this. Primarily they responded that they make recommendations according to their interests: science fiction, scientific texts, historical texts, mysteries, books/articles about sports, reading material with content about cars, cinema and music. Teachers said that they are aware of gender

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difference in reading and recommend books specific to their age and interest. They try to connect the books with the curriculum. Some teachers suggested current event articles.

Teachers' attitude to reading has a major influence in boys reading. Books reading should not be mandatory. Assigning tasks on the books they read destroys ultimately their goodwill to read books. It was also stated that the use of new technologies has engaged boys in reading and improved boys' school performance.

*(...) I also used digital books in my classroom to promote reading and it's working!  
(Cypriot teacher)*

*We also come from home with everything we need, with our personal equipment. Why we use them? Because the new technologies are more attractive, boys prove more attractiveness for them than for the materials on paper...  
(Romanian teacher)*

Furthermore there were reported some initiatives taken by the school and the community to promote reading. In Cyprus, some schools organize meetings with authors which have a positive impact in boys reading. The author could motivate boys start reading emphasizing on his/her personal experiences and answering boys' questions.

*When Alki Zei (popular Greek author) visited our school, the boys bought her book and read it.  
(Cypriot teacher)*

Polish parents mentioned a campaign that took place in their community to promote reading. It was called "All Poland Reads to Kids" where parents had to read to their children 15 minutes each day every day while they were younger. Despite this fact, the mother who participated in this campaign reported that her sons do not want to read books.

A Greek librarian from the Athens College explained the school's initiative for reading promotion:





*We actually have a reading session inserted into the program. This is how we cope with that. We have the books spread on the tables and they can choose. They come once a month. Sometimes students come on their own. Some of them ask for help, some of them don't. They know where the fiction section is. The only way we can help is when they're there as a group. I remember one time that there was a boy who was very reluctant to borrow a book and I gave him a book I thought he would enjoy. He came back two weeks later and said, "I liked the book you gave me, Miss, and I read it overnight!" This was extraordinary. It was just a question of finding the right book. He had no difficulty reading; he just didn't have the right book to read!*

Moreover, Greek librarians referred to "Read and Share" initiative in which they implemented new technologies. Students were asked to write in their profile what was interesting to them. Then they were asked to read the profile of another student and recommend a book to them. This happened three times during the year. As the librarians said, it was very successful, though time-consuming:

*(...)The first time they had to choose a book. Then they had to write a letter to their fellow students. We have a learning platform called Microsoft CMS, and they recorded their opinions there. But when it came to implementing this, teachers had a lot of things to do and they had to rush through the curriculum. In order to have time for this, the curriculum has to be less demanding to allow time for these things.*

In Portugal, there is the National Reading Contest (PNL) in which students are free to participate. However, since it is a contest, students are generally highly motivated and there is always a good number of participants.

*We have always a great number of kids participating in The National Reading Contest and our school won some prizes last year'.*

*(Teacher librarian)*

Librarians from all the schools in Portugal have monthly meetings to exchange ideas and promote reading and good role models. Some of these ideas include showing students the diversity of readings and reading materials that are available; another is to guide their reading with a view of engaging them; and there is also the strategy to invite a parent or older sibling to come and read for the young ones.

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*We as teachers have to show them there are different books they should be familiar with to like them, if they don't know them it is impossible to have an opinion, so I try to show different categories of books in a light manner, even poetry, and now, some of my students are reading poems.*

*(Teacher)*

*Kids need guidelines, if they have them, they read and read different kinds of books.*

*(Teacher librarian)*

There is also the Reading week for families. Every week a member of the family reads a book to the class. When there are older brothers (boys) this is a good way of motivating younger ones.

Another powerful motivating factor for reading is for parents to engage in reading with their sons and to engage in joint reading of the same books and authors even if parents read only for information acquisition.

*I read a lot of books for children, I love José Jorge Letria (Portuguese author) and I discovered his books because of my son.*

*(Father)*

## Factors that prevent boys from reading

As emphasized by teacher, parents and librarians, the main factors that prevent boys from reading is lack of interest, time restriction, new technologies and the idea that reading is a passive activity. Boys' daily schedule after school is hectic; full of other activities and homework. Boys prefer to be active rather than reading, which is passive. They often think of reading as a hurdle. Reading demands effort and boys do not seem willing to put an effort. They don't think they can do it and they think that reading will rob them of time spent on some other activity. Their homework takes up more time as they grow older.

*It should be necessary to have fewer hours per day (a pupil has 6-7 classes per day!). Those who learn from 12.00 to 18.00 get home no earlier than 19.00, taking into account the way back home. They are not able to do anything! Even the little*

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*ones have by 5 classes a day. That makes them tired! In addition, pupils also have extra-curricular activities, which also occupy lots of their time!*

*(Romanian teacher)*

*The issue is not only to start reading but to continue reading. Playing games is different. You just take it and play. You don't have to put much effort.*

*(Cypriot teacher)*

Undoubtedly, new technologies such as the release of PlayStation 4, tablets and smartphones kicked books out of boys' interests. The computer is viewed as a powerful trigger of the passive apathetic ways of many boys.

Another reason they cannot find anything to read is because they need guidance in the selection process. Polish teachers, however, believe that students do not have time to read due to poor time management skills and lack of will to read.

Greek teachers referred to the fact that boys do what other boys of their age do. As a consequence, they avoid doing things that would make them seem outsiders. If their peers don't read, they won't be as eager to engage in reading, either. There is a lack of competition in that area. Book competitions could be set up. Many boys said they would like to take part, especially if there is a reward.

*My son stopped reading because he didn't want to be an outsider. (Cypriot mother)*

Parents and teachers observed reading difficulties among their boys due to learning disabilities. Boys may not be fluent enough in the language or have poor reading skills. One solution is to diversify the reading material and guide boys through reading possibilities; while the other solution is to suggest easy readings.

*Some boys don't read because it is tiring for them. They are poor readers and so they take a long time to read a page.*

*(Portuguese teacher)*

Teachers also argued that it is often easier for boys to listen to the story as they could be more concentrated (e.g. dyslexic boys). Hence, audiobooks are considered as a sensible solution. In fact, in Cyprus, students who live in the rural areas have difficulties in reading that might be explained by the stimuli in their environment.

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*My students have difficulties in reading. Thus, I use audio books to facilitate reading..*

Romanian teachers try to help boys with reading difficulties in many ways but the family does not help:

*We could help them only through the family, but the family usually does not help us too much. We organize with them visits to the reading room of the County Library or at the school library ... We pay more attention to them, we give them more tips and recommendations on reading, we provide them with books that meet their needs.*

Croatian interviewees identified that the books in the school curriculum are not appropriate for boys' age and interest.

*So, in the first grade of secondary school, they have to read Russian classics. That is demotivating, it kills them. It kills their motivation for further reading... books for them should have better, more interesting plots.*

*(Croatian teacher)*

In Cyprus, there is the same issue where school libraries have outdated books that are not attractive to boys. In Romania, teachers reported that reduced financial resources impede the acquisition of books.

*The school library needs to be updated. It would be a good idea to visit a bookshop with my students and buy new, contemporary books for boys according to their preferences.*

*(Teacher)*

Lack of interest in reading rises also from the belief that reading is a feminine task since in their families the common avid reader is the mother, grandmother or sister. This factor prevents boys from reading books. Although it is generally accepted that boys between 12 and 15 are not as interested in reading as girls are, Portuguese interviewees supported that boys are not that unaware about reading. Portuguese boys know the books their colleagues (girls) read and prefer.

*When they go out with girls they read less but they know what the girls are reading and know about what they themselves like and dislike.*

*(Portuguese father)*

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As a conclusion boys are demotivated from reading books due to lack interest and will, time restriction, technology development, inadequate guidance, poor time management skills, reading difficulties, outdated school libraries feminist approach to reading, feminine role-models, and finally, due to the need to go with the flow.

## Other

### **Technology Vs Boys reading**

While there was a positive attitude in using the new technologies to promote reading from all the interviewees approximately, Polish parents and teachers seemed to be reluctant. With regards to digital books, they believe that they do not change a thing in the approach towards reading among the boys. In Cyprus, however, a teacher has implemented E-books in the classroom website and she identifies progress in boys reading.

### Collected data from the focus groups with boys: avid and reluctant readers.

This section presents the findings from the focus groups with boys who are avid and reluctant readers. The thematic categories are based on the guidelines given for running the focus groups.

### How do boys like to spend their time?

Boys are involved in various extra- curricular activities that make up an important aspect of their lives. Their leisure activities, whether they are avid or reluctant readers, are more or less similar.

### **Avid Readers**



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Boys' favourite leisure activities are based on their preferences, habits and available time. These activities include sports (football, basketball), computer games, PlayStation (especially football games), watching T.V, listening to the music, playing music, hanging around with their friends, reading and using digital devices (smartphones, tablets).

Avid readers in Croatia recognize that they do not have enough free time during the school year, thus, they during the summer holidays they have more time to read books. They tend to stick to the strict schedule during the school year and they emphasize that they divide their time between three types of activities: the school related activities (including reading books from the obligatory reading list and taking elective classes), sport activities (soccer, basketball, water-polo) and leisure activities (playing digital games and watching television).

*My favourite free time activities are water-polo and swimming... I attend water-polo practice two times a day.*  
(Croatian 8<sup>th</sup> grader)

*I like playing on my tablet to learn some songs and then play with my guitar*  
(Portuguese boy)

*I am playing games, play with my brother.... I like to read a book during the summer and usually select books that I have at home.*  
(Croatian 7<sup>th</sup> grader)

*I spend my free time by reading. My favourite activity is still reading. But I also listen music, I play with friends.*  
(Romanian boy)

Polish avid readers admitted that reading is one of their way to spend free time. Working additionally for school, apart from school homework, was an activity among a minority of avid readers in Croatia and Romania.

*I run a notebook where I draw and paste various information and pictures of my idols ... and for that I have to read.*  
(Polish boy)

*I do not play sports but I am currently taking additional elective classes in chemistry, mathematics and English. I am taking all classes that are available.*  
(Croatian 7<sup>th</sup> grader)





*My favourite activity is to work for physics and chemistry. (Romanian boy)*

According to a study called “The Free Time of Adolescents” survey conducted in Greece (Kokkevi et al, 2010), the activities of adolescent boys in their free time at a frequency of once a week or more are, in order of preference: listening to music (77.3%), engaging in sports (75.2%), playing electronic computer games (71.2%), downloading music from the Internet (53.4%) and editing photos (39.2%). Reading extracurricular books came second-to-last at (26.6%) with playing a musical instrument (20%) being at the bottom of the list.

### **Reluctant Readers**

Among these boys sports and recreational activities predominated, especially outdoor ones, e.g. cycling, playing football, gymnastics. The use of computer and other digital devices to play games such as smartphones, tablets and PlayStation is on the top of their favourite activities. However, three avid readers reported that they read – especially animal books- but this is not their single leisure activity. In general, non-readers do not make distinction between ways in which they spend their free time during the school year and during the summer.

*I read. I also play computer games sometimes. Doing nothing is my passion. I play computer games. My favourite game: Plants versus Zombies.  
(Romanian boy)*

*I spend my free time by playing football; on Thursdays and Saturdays I work out. Football is my passion. I love football even more than school. Some colleagues say to me "there is only football in your head and nothing else!"  
(Romanian boy)*

*We play football with our friends in the neighbourhood and we are on Facebook all day long.  
(Cypriot boy)*

Consequently, boys who are reluctant readers prefer sports and electronic games.





## Reading habits of boys

### Avid Readers

Boys' daily schedule is overloaded, thus, reading books that are not school related, occurs basically during holidays and weekends. A great proportion of boys likes to choose the material they read by themselves they are rarely influenced by advice given by parents or by their friends (Kokkevi *et al*, 2010).

The majority of boys prefers reading at home, in the bedroom.

*Winter holidays are too short and I do not read then, I always make plans about books which I will read during summer recess... I like reading books during the summer... I do not read stories, but rather books about science, space... these are topics of my interest. Last summer I read books about dinosaurs, I have five-six books dealing with that topic... I also watched TV documentaries about dinosaurs.*  
(Croatian boy)

*I like reading at night in my bed. (Portuguese boy)*

Regarding the Greek study about the free time of adolescents (Kokkevi *et al*, 2010), the largest percentage of 36.7% of boys reads for fun and relaxation, 27.1% reads for pleasure, 26.1% reads for information, and 13% reads for other reasons. Visiting a bookshop or a library to buy or get books was not common among the boys interviewed. A remarkable percentage of 65.2% of the boys participated in the study of Kokkevi *et al*, mentioned that they never visit books exhibitions or libraries. Nevertheless, in Romania, boys reported visiting a bookshop or a library once or twice a week. Merely one of the respondents argued that he does this only once in a month and another one that he goes to the library quite rarely.

*I rarely visit libraries and bookstores (once or twice a week), only when the lady teacher of Romanian language gives us to read. I prefer to borrow books. Generally, I read the novels from my library. We have a large collection at home, a gift from my grandfather - a treasure! I borrow/buy books from anywhere...*

(Romanian boy)



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In general, none of interviewees has a reading plan. Boys read when they have free time and particularly, during school holidays. It is significant that boys do not read large number of book, for example 5-6 books per year.

### **Reluctant Readers**

Reluctant readers admitted that reading is not listed in their favourite activities because it is tiring and boring. Instead, they prefer playing outside. Reading occurs only when the weather is bad and there is no alternative form of entertainment.

*Out of laziness. When outside is raining, I read more... (Romanian boy)*

Furthermore, the reluctant readers in Cyprus claimed that there is no free time for them due to school work overload (tests etc.)

*I read all day long the school stuff. Should I read books in my free time too?*

While non-readers tend to loudly state that they are not reading books, additional questioning reveals that they do read texts which they find interesting. Books of the obligatory school list are difficult to understand and no interesting. Hence, reluctant readers might read books according to their interests.

*It depends what books... I like books about cars... (Croatian boy)*

## **What kind of books do boys prefer?**

More or less, both type of readers have similar preferences regarding the kind of books.

Boys prefer to read series: fantasy and science fiction books, adventures and detective stories. Some of the boys indicate series or books by the same author. They said that they like sequence even if the story is completed in one book such as *The Diary of a wimpy kid*.

*The Diary of a wimpy kid however, is a story that has a beginning and an ending in the same book. There is another book for a different story. I like that.*

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*(Cypriot boy)*

It has been observed that almost all the books they choose to read are books that have become movie adaptations for the cinema, such as 'Harry Potter', 'The Hobbit', etc., or are associated with video games they play e.g., 'Assassin's Creed'. Older boys are already starting to engage with young adult fiction and longer books, such as *The Hunger Games* or *Lord of the Rings* by J.R. R. Tolkien. Nonetheless, there was not a consensus on this category of books. Some of the reluctant readers indicated that they would like to read a book after having seen the movie that was based on that book while two avid readers who had read the book first and then watched the movie were disappointed. All the reluctant readers would prefer to watch the movie in a cosy environment instead of reading the book as the movie takes only two hours whereas the book takes more time and effort.

*I first read the book and then saw the movie and I got very disappointed. In my imagination was different.*  
*(Cypriot avid reader)*

*I like Harry Potter, I've seen the films, but the books have more details.*  
*(Portuguese boy)*

*You only need two hours concentration to watch the movie and that's it. The book takes 200 days and more to finish it.* *(Cypriot reluctant reader)*

*Yes, seeing the movie, I would be tempted to read the book then, because maybe it's more in the book than in the movie.*  
*(Romanian boy)*

In many cases, a principal criterion boys use for selecting books is the size. They prefer books with fewer pages. Younger boys prefer children's books with fewer words and simpler plots.

*Ok, if it's a biiiig book I wouldn't touch it!* *(Cypriot boy)*

They also prefer illustrated books to non-illustrated ones. They don't like only-text books since they believe that images are useful to understand the meaning of the book. Cypriot reluctant readers mentioned that books without images are for adults. As a result, in the





11-13 year age range, many Greek boys choose to borrow English (graded) readers in place of longer books in their native language (Greek).

*I read primarily (books written by) foreign authors. I believe that these books make you stretch your imagination. This is why I like science fiction, because I would like to create a world that I like.*

*(Greek boy)*

Additionally, comics, books with humor and graphic novels are high on their list of preferences. A Cypriot student has shown high interest in reading manga comics translated in English.

*I read comics. Particularly, Japanese comics that are translated in English. The story interests me. There are many kinds of manga and I really like fantastic stories.*

*I have a large number of comic books about Zagor (comment: Italian comic book about western character living in a forest named Darkwood.*

*(Croatian boy)*

Boys would also choose encyclopedias and books with interesting topics such as sports, cars, technology, animals and famous people. A minority of boys in Cyprus and Croatia mentioned history books that have action and adventure (e.g. for WW2 or the history of their country).

*I read a big history book for World Wide War II with photographs of the protagonist. The photographs showed the battle field.*

Reluctant readers show greater diversity in ways in which they are finding reading materials that fits their reading needs.

*I like to read about famous people... I read I book about Zlatan Ibrahimović.... I found out that he had a hard life, lots of his family members died and he started to play soccer when he was quite young.*

*(Croatian boy)*

All the boys give great importance to the cover (it should be colorful, dynamic) and the description of the book. Books with fascinating, colourful cover or captive title attract boys. It was also noticed that boys hardly remembered the names of the authors and were both, national and worldwide known. The fact that boys could name titles and





authors, proves that they are reluctant readers or that they don't pay too much attention to reading.

Books with interesting topics such as sports, their favourite football team etc. Reluctant readers reported that in this case they would like to read everything about it.

*(...) I like books about cars... I buy them on my own and once I am done with reading I forward them to my friend. (Croatian boy)*

*If the book was about the history of my football team I would have read! (...) I would have read all the volumes. (Cypriot boy)*

*I get a subscription to 'National Geographic' at home. (Portuguese boy)*

Croatian avid-readers expressed their reading preferences in the books of the obligatory reading list and are appealing to readers due to their topic/genre (young adult literature about friendships and growing up).

*Three boys in Trnje' is my favourite book... it is a book about friendship, it is a story about boys which are trying to find their lost friend (comment: the book is on the obligatory school reading list).*

Hence, boys choose books for young people or teenagers that refer to their life at that time period. For example, if the hero of the book is a boy, they find it more attractive as they put themselves in his shoes and they pretend to act like him.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that the majority of reluctant readers consider electronic devices as a more appealing media for reading.

*I like to read about golden retrievers... I find information about them on Wikipedia. (Croatian boy)*

*I prefer reading an article posted on Facebook if it looks interesting to me. (Greek boy)*

On the contrary, avid readers from Poland and reluctant readers from Romania and Cyprus were not very enthusiastic about digital reading. Polish and Romanian boys read more traditional, paper books and comics than electronic ones. They mentioned that they





don't use digital books since reading on tablets, laptops or smartphones is very inconvenient.

*I read books on paper. I once tried to read a book on the computer, but my eyes got tired 2 times faster!*  
(Romanian boy)

Students stated the major drawback of reading on a tablet that relates to vision problems. Cypriot reluctant boys agreed that reading a digital text on a tablet, computer or smartphone would be tiring. They prefer reading sports newspaper to get updated on their football team news instead of visiting the web.

*For example, I prefer to read the news about my football team on a newspaper instead of the web ...because I don't like scroll down. I get bored.*

Boys in Portugal also prefer reading printed books to digital books, because they like feeling the paper and sitting at ease with a book. Some of them have never read digital books or books online. One of them refers he also likes digital books, because they are cool and he can select what he likes to show his friends. Polish reluctant readers, are also willing to join text with elements of audio / video - they get easily tired while reading and they cannot remain focused.

Cypriot avid readers also prefer reading a digital book on a tablet because it is cheaper and easy to be reached with just a click on the web. The possibility of reading online a chapter for free and then deciding whether to buy or not the entire book is an option to vote for digital books.

*We prefer downloading books on the ipad. Or we could buy them. But it's cheap and easy to be found instead of searching to find a book.*

In the list below there are the some books titles that boys have recently read:

- The Chase of the Golden Meteor
- The Lord of the Rings
- Harry Potter series
- The Hobbit



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- The Diary of a Wimpy Kid
- 20,000 Leagues Under the Sea
- Five Weeks in a Balloon
- The Return of the King
- Amintiri din copilărie / "Memories from Childhood" by I. Creangă
- Hunger Games
- The Game of Thrones
- White Fang by Jack London
- Romanian boys also read "Poems" by T. Arghezi

## Factors they consider in choosing books to read

Genre, size, popularity, recommendation and book cover were identified as the most important factors boys of both groups consider in choosing books.

The genres that interest them have to do with adventure, science fiction and detective books. Most of these genres are series. Fantasy and adventure books are popular among boys as they include supernatural or magic features such as dragons. Emphasis is given on the cover of the book; it should be eye-catching. That type of cover can be found in the new editions of fantasy books.

*I prefer modern literature to classical. I read Jules Verne when I was younger. In general, I like foreign authors the most.*

*(Greek boy)*

*About dragons, one of my cousins read one of those books one day, it's about two brothers who moved to the world of dragons.*

*(Portuguese boy)*

Boys consider classical literature boring and not worth their time. Greek and Cypriot boys frequently responded to the books their teacher's recommended by saying that "they are boring." However, in Croatia, avid readers' book choices are aligned with the obligatory school reading list, but also like to read books that have movie adaptations for the cinema

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(avid readers tend to watch movie and read a book after having seen the movie). When asked about books beyond the obligatory school list, they usually mention books of jokes or encyclopedias.

Size is important. Some are put off by thick books because they think they cannot handle that much reading, or that it will take them too long to read. Some others said they read part of a book and then put it aside. Thick books are rather discouraging for boys. Reluctant readers would also choose for books with more pictures over text and a topic related to their interests.

*I choose a book from the bookstore or library based on how it could help me and obviously it has to be tiny. I choose also by title.*

*(Romanian avid reader)*

*I like internet sources.... they tend to have more graphics than text... I do read text, I look for the graphics and if graphics are interesting than I partially read the text.*

*(Croatian boy)*

Many said that they prefer watching the movie version because “It saves time.” “When I read, I read adventures and detective stories, but I’d rather watch a movie on TV or at the cinema.”

Recommendations and popularity of the book motivates boys to read. Books with positive reviews from other children are more possible to be chosen by boys. Some boys willingly recommend books to others and even discuss it with them. Moreover, if a book is recommended by someone they admire or respect, boys would like to read it even if he is reluctant reader.

*I select encyclopaedias about space and about dinosaurs, this is a topic that I can talk about with my friends, everybody likes that topic.*

*(Croatian boy)*

*If Neymar was about to come to our school and present 4 books that he has read I would definitely look for these books and read them all. I am a football fan and since he’s my idol I would follow his steps.*

*(Cypriot boy)*

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## How do they use the Library?

### Home

All the boys interviewed reported that there is a library in their house. However, the library as such, it is used by Croatian, Portuguese and Romanian avid readers.

For Croatian avid readers, home library is their favourite choice for book selection. They emphasize that they have large number of books at home and that they could read the same book several times whereas reluctant readers admitted that the books are used by other members of the family.

*I have six shelves of books at home... all kinds of books... even storybooks.*

*I have variety of encyclopaedia at home.... I saw my younger brother browsing through them... [grin].*

Portuguese boys choose by author and by title. They also like to read within a collection or series. Boys choose from what they have at home and if they start reading, but they don't like it, they don't go on.

*I only read on if I like it, even if adults push me to read something that doesn't interest me, I suggest a different title.*

Cypriot and Greek boys do not use the library as they do not feel the need to read and because their parents' book collection is not interesting.

*We definitely have books at home. Is there someone who doesn't have? (..) I don't feel the need to read a book. There's no motivation.*

Although, some Greek boys referred to their own collection and said that they would gladly read a book from their own collection a second time. Boys in Grade 6 were hesitant about doing a book exchange with peers because they were possessive of their reading material and even thought of selling the series they were collecting down the line. In another school, they were willing to swap books. They mentioned that they trust their friends and they have similar interests.

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Polish avid readers referred merely to the bookstores where they go and buy books. There was not any reference to their house libraries.

## Classroom

It was clear that the majority of the boys' classrooms do not have a library. Sometimes, though, the teacher has a small collection of books in the classroom but these books are not available as rental ones. Some teachers could provide students with additional reading list for the students who are interested in reading.

*Our English teacher introduced us to the additional reading materials... she provides us with the text and reading guidelines... we are reading it and are making comments.*  
(Croatian boy)

If they wish to borrow books they have to visit the central school library. In fact, in Greece, it was mentioned that the only grades where they had classroom libraries were in the primary school but having a library in classroom is not considered necessary.

Nevertheless, in Romania boys declared there is have a small library in the classroom but the school and home library have more books. Reluctant Romanian readers seemed to be not interested in the classroom library as they referred only to the school and house library.

## School

All the schools have a library which students mostly use as a reading place, to sit and relax or to find information. The school or the teachers might arrange library visits but students do not visit the library on their own will. For example, in Croatia, boys use the library when they need to borrow a book from the obligator school reading list or when they don't have class.

*I use it for the books which I have to read for my language and literature class, all other books I select from my home library.*

*We come here when we do not have class... we sit and talk and listen to the music.*





Portuguese boys reported that they visit the school library to borrow books to read home and when they have free time in class. Romanian boys, similarly, use the school library to borrow books but they admitted they do not have too much access to the school library, as it's almost always closed.

In Cyprus, all the students have to visit the library during the Book Exhibition. Some reluctant readers claimed that they wouldn't visit the school library even if they were given the chance to do since it is not attractive. Avid readers as well agreed that school's library has no appealing, very old books with not interesting topics (e.g. music, cooking etc.). Greek boys also supported this view. The drawback to books teachers recommend is that they have their own specifications and recommend books from the time they were in school. They feel that librarians are more in tune than the teachers with recommending interesting reading material for adolescent boys.

In Poland, students visit school library to do their homework or to relax. The library has books related to school curriculum. Similarly, in Greece, boys at the age of 11-15 years, use the library to check out books, in order to complete projects. Some said they prefer to study in the library, if there is time and if their program allows for this. The boys said that they are very busy with schoolwork or with their extra-curricular involvement with sports and, therefore, spend little time reading books. It is worth mentioning that most boys who visit the library, spend some time browsing through the magazine section. They can often be seen reading a particular article that interests them.

Students in Greece, are interested in the school library if only a top author comes to visit their school. As the boys grow older (Grade 10) they feel they have outgrown the library and that there's nothing in it for them. They also admitted that they are not aware of the possibilities the library has to offer them. Whether the existing 'libraries' will be made available to a class or not depends on a specific teacher's initiative. One boy said that when he went to the school library once and asked for a specific title which they didn't have, he never went back. There is also inadequate number of books in the school library

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and limited space for reading. Because of the economic crisis, there are no funds to run a proper library with a librarian and to purchase books.

The majority of the boys indicated the necessity of having a school library.

## Reading for information acquisition

It seems that boys do read to get information by reading books, magazines and visiting the web, though it is not included in their daily tasks.

Reading for information is commonly associated with school and school reading in Poland. Croatian avid readers have also noted the impact on their grades while reading books from the obligatory school list to find information.

*School grades in the language and literature imply that you are good reader.... the way in which I discuss books from the obligatory school list with friends is by comparing answers on the test.*

Portuguese boys when questioned about the relationship between reading and academic performance, they noted as well that it is important. Romanian boys admitted that reading books improves speech, enriches the vocabulary and opens students' horizon. Thus, reading for information acquisition has a positive impact in school performance and undoubtedly cultivates the mind.

*Yes, I really think that it helps us having good results and grades for the school but also for our general culture.*

*(Romanian boy)*

In Cyprus, the majority of the boys interviewed think that reading books has a positive impact in enhancing their vocabulary and cultivating the oral discourse.

*When you read books you can learn new vocabulary.*

However, there is the belief that reading books is time consuming and distracts them from studying their school homework, having thus, a negative impact in school performance.





*I think that reading books has negative impact in some subjects' grades because it is time consuming and we get distracted easily from studying our school homework.*

With regard to the means used for finding information, often boys visit webpages that have short answers and they can find easily everything. Polish reluctant readers have clear idea about topics and information they are looking for. They are buying magazines with information on topic of their interest (e.g., cars) or look for the information on the Internet. They do not hesitate to read sources in English language and use these sources both for school purposes and for their leisure time activities.

*I read daily news on the internet portal called '24hours'*

*I read Wikipedia in English if explanation in Croatian is not available... I do that for my leisure time activities.*

Several boys said they will read interesting links on Facebook especially if they know it's been recommended by a peer.

*I read about things I like, like about a profession or for entertainment.*

*(Greek boy)*

An avid reader from Cyprus reads topics related to medicine that are hard to be found in books. He explains that the web has a massive variety of interesting topics and he can find exactly what he wants.

*I like to read texts with medical content. I try to find on the web about our body, the sexual intercourse and I like to learn. On the web I can find exactly what I want and not open 20 books.*

Two boys from Greece also responded that they subscribe to magazines. The one was 'National Geographic' and the other, 'Logicomix'. Croatian boys referred to the Guinness book of records as a good book to find information.





## Reading books for pleasure

Boys read for pleasure books of their interest. The genres fall into four main categories: fantasy books, adventures, comics and detective stories; reluctant readers prefer more fiction and action. Books in series is a preferable choice too. They like the fact that they can establish a 'relationship' with the main characters at the onset, and then not have to get to know new main characters from the beginning. They like this type of familiarity which allows them to get involved in the plot.

Reading a book a second time could with few books if only the book was great and the reader has forgotten some parts of it. In terms of the pace of reading, if the book is interesting, boys mentioned that reading is fast while reading books from the obligatory school reading list is slow.

The top titles in the different genres according to Greek boys are as follows:

### Science Fiction

'The Hunger Games' by Suzanne Collins

'Lorien Legacies' by Pittacus Lore

'TimeRiders' by Alex Scarrow

### Fantasy

'Harry Potter' by J.K. Rowling

'Inheritance Cycle' by Christopher Paolini

'Assassin's Creed' by Oliver Bowden (includes fantasy, historical fiction)

### Graphic novels

'Diary of a Wimpy Kid' by Jeff Kinney

### Detective stories

'Sherlock Holmes' by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle

### Adventures

'The 39 Clues' by a collaboration of about 11 authors including Rick Riordan, Gordon Korman, Peter Lerangis and Jude Watson.

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'Blood of Olympus' by Rick Riordan and Percy Jackson (a combination of fantasy and mythology)

'The Kane Chronicles' by Rick Riordan

Portuguese boys added Cartoon stories, including The Astérix series and the Tintin series and the *Lucky Luke* series. *Harry Potter series*, *The Hunger Games* and *the Diary of a Wimpy Kid* were the most common among the boys interviewed.

In general, boys are not extremely committed to reading books but they are not completely against them either. Despite of school's compulsory reading based on books recommended by teachers or the school curriculum, boys gradually discover the pleasure of reading while focusing on topics they are interested in such as animals, cars, comics, technology, nature, science, adventure.

## Role-models for promoting boys reading and support from adults

Parents and teachers and yet, librarians could be the major role-models in promoting boys' reading.

*Last summer I chose to read some books that my mother has... Lord of the Rings and Hobbit... last month mother asked us to select books which we are not using any more, we kept National Geographic on our shelves... I am borrowing some books from my aunt. (Croatian boy)*

*Yes, I ask the teacher librarian for advice, sometimes when we have no lessons I go to the library. (Portuguese boy)*

In Romania, it was noticed that reluctant readers were encouraged to read in a more 'sterile' manner, explaining their attitude to reading.

*Oh yeah, especially my Mommy!", "Daddy turns off my TV and obliges me to read.*

*Teachers quarrel with me if I do not read. Especially, Mrs. Cătălina, the lady teacher of Romanian language asks me to read. (Romanian boy)*



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In the families of Cypriot avid readers, the people who read are particularly mothers, fathers and grandfathers. The mothers of all the the reluctant readers read books at home. Some of them exchange books with other members of the family of female gender as well (such as aunts, cousins). Despite their mothers' effort to influence their sons this is not feasible. Boys are not interested in the books that their mothers read because as they say, they are boring. As a consequence, having those 'boring' books in their home deters boys from engaging in reading.

*My mom reads a lot, my aunts and cousins too. When they finish reading they exchange books. But their books are very boring so I don't get influenced.*

Croatian reluctant readers recognize that their parents and other family members are reading books and comment on that. Although, they are willing to read.

*My father is reading... comic books, different books... when he goes on a ship he takes books with him so that he is not bored... my brother likes to read... he is younger than me... he likes books about space and dinosaurs... I play on the PlayStation with him... [grin]*

Sometimes though, parents cannot stand as a role-model due to the busy job schedule, the low educational background, reduced financial resources or even because of the lack of reading habits.

Nevertheless, Polish respondents admitted that teachers recommend them books to read (outside reading lists), but none of the children benefited from this recommendation, not even remembered titles or authors. The problem is that teacher is mostly associated with the process of teaching, evaluating and school readings and discourages boys to read. According to Cypriot reluctant students' opinion, teachers are not interested whether students read books or not.

Boys from Greece were asked how they could help boys that don't read. They felt that the boys who don't read, don't want to read, but they haven't been given a fair chance to read, either. They thought it would be beneficial to hear a summary of a book to draw





their attention to it, but that this summary and recommendation would come from the students themselves, not the teacher.

With regards to Kokkevi *et al* (2010), the majority of the boys said that the source of their motivation to read is themselves (71%). It appears that peers, family and school play a secondary role. However, 48.8% of the boys said their parents motivate them to read, with the mothers having twice the influence of the fathers (33.3% vs 15.5%) Only 25.1% take the advice of their teachers at school. The rest of the factors were insignificant: siblings account for 2.4%, friends for 9.2% and grandparents for 1.9%.

A Cypriot student was also prompted to read by his scouts' chief. After having read the book followed a discussion on the content, the characters etc.

*With my chief we discuss about different Mangas, what we liked the most, what will be next...*

Hence, the motivation for reading can be stimulated in different ways but it has to be internalized. People who have a great influence on boys such as parents, sisters or brothers, teachers and friends could facilitate this process and trigger the boys' interest for reading.

## Other

Some general comments regarding the reasons that boys avoid reading were mainly problems with concentration, eye fatigue while reading large amounts of text, boredom and not appealing or 'girly' texts.

*They (girls) are reading Marley and Me (by John Grogan). Only the girls read it and they say they cry a lot while reading. (Portuguese boy)*

Boys consider that technology development has a negative impact in reading books. In the past where tablets and smartphones did not exist, boys were more engaged in reading books. The general impression is that boys are less interested in reading and so avid readers do not discuss with their peers about the books they read.

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*Compared to the old days, now we have ipad, playstation, computers.. We prefer these technologies to books. (Cypriot boy)*

*In the class we do not talk about books, because my colleagues play and talk on mobiles phones. (...)*

*They watch news on Show Biz channel. (Romanian boy)*

Despite their preference in digital reading, when Cypriot boys were questioned whether they would like to implement new technologies in completing tasks for the “Reading Hub”, still it wouldn’t motivate them to read books. Completing tasks after book reading using the new technologies is not a desirable activity due to time shortage and work overload. Using the computer in other ways other than doing school schoolwork would be ideal.

*No! With or without technologies it’s still a school activity.*

Boys from Greece agreed on that, stating their preference in printed books. Electronic games with written scenarios could be a good idea. The issue that boys claimed is that these games do not exist in Greek and the translation was bad.

*We do not want to read from e-Books. We want the printed copy, to feel the book in our hands.*

*These exist but not in Greek. Anything they’ve tried to translate, has been a bad translation. For me, it’s better if they don’t bother with the translation.*

Polish boys, though, suggested an alternative way of using printed books focusing on combining with audio, video so as to avoid large text.

## Recommendations

In regards to all the focus groups, the participants have concluded in suggesting ways in which we can deal with the problem: how to encourage boys reading.



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## Recommendations from boys

Regarding Greek and Cypriot boys, giving awards acts as a powerful motivation for boys to read whether they are avid or reluctant readers. Some boys would like a bookworm competition and think this would motivate more boys to read.

*I would like someone to commend me for reading. That's a good enough reward.  
(Greek boy)*

*Let's say that there were a lot of competitors, then I would read all day to win the competition. If you want to win you do your best! (Cypriot boy)*

Romanian boys admitted they would do the “sacrifice” of reading a book in order to win a computer game. Some rewards they mentioned: money, PlayStation, games, knowledge, to hear ‘Bravo’, and they recognise that you learn how to express yourself. Nonetheless, even if there is a reward, a boy reported that he would be still negative about reading.

*I don't read, even if I got a reward, I wouldn't read. It's boring. I don't like flipping pages. It's a whole procedure, whereas if I watch a movie, it's served ready-made and all I have to do is sit and watch. I need to try hard to read. I've tried to read many times but I haven't managed to do it even though I chose the book. I liked the book I chose but I couldn't continue because I found it difficult. But I had other interests. I like a lot of topics, but I can't concentrate. It only helps if I have an inspirational moment. Sometimes I do.*

When boys in Greece were questioned in case they had the chance to design a library only for boys or have a boys' corner in the library what books would they put in it, their answer was science-fiction, comics, and magazines. They would also like to have background music and have comfortable chairs.

## Recommendations from teachers, parents, librarians.

The partner from Greece, collected some recommendations according to the teachers, parents and librarians interviewed. It was identified the need to suggest interesting books to boys, to encourage boys to watch their peers read, to choose books that interest them,

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to have patience and willingness on the part of the teachers and parents to organize reading activities, to support boys' choices, to let the boys choose the books they want to read.

Sometimes family misunderstands teacher's advices to encourage their boy's reading. Hence, there is the need for parents to cooperate with teachers in order to solve this problem.

*Parents feel that there is something wrong if we recommend further reading to their boy compared to the rest of the class (they ask "Why? Mine is stupid?").  
(Romanian teacher)*

There were also the following suggestions:

- Choose books appropriate for their gender
- provide free books perhaps in the library
- ask them comprehension questions that they can only answer if they've read the book
- use pleasant, interactive books
- have a discussion; In fact, Portuguese interviewees said that Boys are more inquisitive about reading. They ask more questions about books than girls. If they have questions they ask them to adults, girls are shier, they don't feel comfortable asking the teacher or librarian.
- recommend electronic books
- visit bookshops and book exhibits
- introduce a reading schedule over the weekend
- get the boys to read for half an hour each day
- offer them rewards
- allow them to read whatever they're interested in; A Cypriot teacher suggested a new comic series release of Little Prince's adventures that boys might be interested in.
- talk to teachers about using more literature in school

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- equip home libraries with a broader selection of books
- get extra credit at school for reading, offer books as gifts
- present books in class and award the best presentation with a prize
- have boys watch their parents read
- make books available even if the child seems to be disinterested
- expose them to various genres

Finally, one parent said that boys should be left alone; they will start reading when they grow up.

As a reward for reading, the majority of Greek Parents (48.6%) responded that they would give their sons something they like (going out with friends, having extra holidays, more play/free time, buying things for their hobbies, more pocket money, more books). 25.7% do not believe there should be a reward. They believe reading fulfills an inner need. 11.42% believe verbal encouragement is sufficient. 2.9% believe their sons should discuss the book with them. 8.9% believe their sons will get better grades at school as a result of reading. However, a significant percentage of 56.7% of the Greek teachers said that they offer some kind of reward when boys read. They also recommend more ways to praise boys such commendation, recognition of their effort in front of the class, extra credit points for presenting a book to the class with or without an ensuing discussion, a free ticket to a sports event, publishing boy's articles in the newspaper, giving them a treat.

Teachers also suggested more frequent visits with students to the library or to bookstores and more suitable reading material to librarians. It would be a good idea to present books, magazines and comics that interest boys to the class and assign projects that interest boys. Romanian teachers indicated the need for more interaction between 11-15 year-old boys with their teachers to ask for guidance and advices.

Cultivate the love of reading from a very early age is vital. Teachers believe they have a role in creating boys' reading habit:





*The habit of reading needs to be created in 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> grades in order boys to be able to and to want to read in 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades! The educator should take boys to the library (...), to make them reading, to open their taste for reading.*

*(Romanian teacher)*

Parents should read stories and fairy tales to their boys. Introduce incentives/rewards (both moral and in grades) encourages boys to read. Choosing books based on thematic modules taught in school that would be familiar to boys. Activities such as having an occasional book exchange, reading short stories, playing word games, theatrical games based on books, introducing boys to authors and book critics at school, read interesting excerpts from books in the language subject and encourage boys to join literature and reading clubs.

Undoubtedly, reading provides the stimuli to develop critical and creative thinking. Despite boys' willingness to read, Cypriot teachers identified that boys succeed in completing creative activities. This finding was the reason for a teacher to argue about why boys should read if they are not willing to do it. Definitely, it is vital to find ways to encourage boys reading. However, as he suggested, finding alternative ways is as well essential.

*Books are valuable. Nevertheless, nowadays we must stop thinking merely how to encourage reading. We need to search for other ways to acquire language skills and develop critical and creative thinking.*

## Conclusion

The purpose of this compile report was to provide insights on the specific needs of teenage boys and their educators and therefore to present recommendations that will be useful for subsequent project outputs. By thoroughly examining the data collected in all individual research reports, it was concluded that education stakeholders, librarians and parents should be more inventive and find alternative ways to encourage boys reading according to boys' interests. Role-model to promote reading is also vital for the majority of the boys whether they are avid or reluctant readers. At this point it is important to

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mention several initiatives and recommendations that were mentioned could be considered while preparing the Boys Reading toolkit.



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## Appendix

Focus Group Reports from all Partners can be found under the Category: **O1-A2 Conducting a Focus Group in country partners** in ActiveCollab.



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