



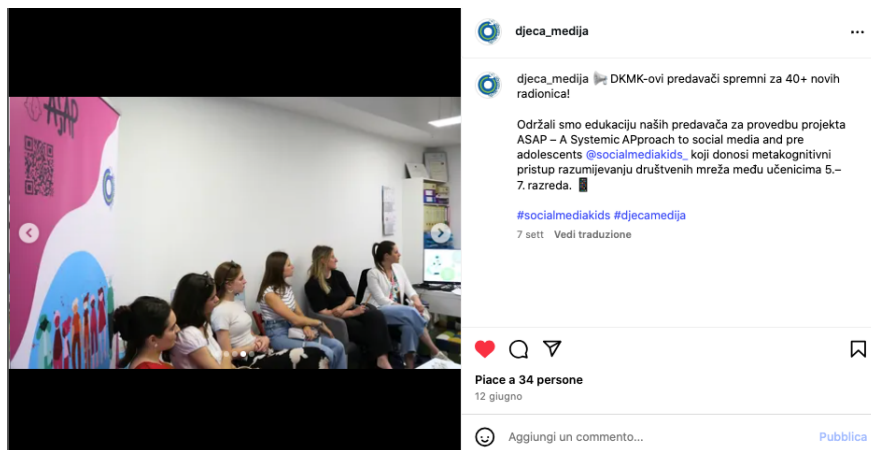
A Systemic Approach to social media and pre-adolescents through thinking skills education

News from Croatia



Most Croatian pre-teens own a smartphone long before age 10. They spend a significant amount of time online, especially on weekends, and are highly active on WhatsApp, YouTube, Snapchat, TikTok and Instagram. Many children create profiles without parental involvement.

Although they are frequently exposed to upsetting or inappropriate content, very few talk about it: only about 8% of students confide in their parents, and none report seeking advice from teachers or school staff. Parents set rules and use monitoring tools, yet there is often a lack of open conversation and emotional support.



Teachers believe students feel comfortable discussing their digital lives with them, but most children say they never approach teachers for help.

Social pressure also plays a role in early smartphone adoption; as one parent noted, “Everyone in the class already had a cell phone.”

[Read here the research report](#)

Piloting the ASAP Educational programme in Croatia

During the last school year we tested four dynamic ASAP learning units in Croatian schools. Each unit helps pre-teens reflect on their emotions, relationships and online lives. The units cover:

- Communication – listening actively, speaking assertively and building respectful dialogue.
- Emotions – recognising, naming and managing feelings.
- Role Models – reflecting on personal values and the influence of influencers.
- Authenticity and Onlife – understanding one’s online identity and balancing digital life.



Most teachers chose the Communication module, focusing on empathy and respectful dialogue. Students learned to express themselves without conflict and build stronger peer relationships.

Poor communication emerged as one of the biggest challenges; teachers observed that many pupils are not aware of how their words and actions affect others. By encouraging empathy, the workshops help lay the groundwork for healthier relationships and a more supportive learning environment.

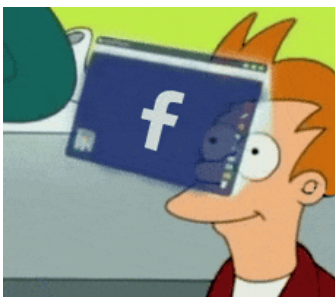


Role Models: a Croatian focus

The new Role Models unit invites students to think about the people they admire, both online and offline. Students explore their own values, examine the influence of social media personalities and compare them with traditional role models such as parents.

Teachers have found this lesson ideal for homeroom classes because it opens space for meaningful discussion and peer connection. Students appreciate learning about each other – something that rarely happens in regular lessons. As children enter early adolescence, the influence of online influencers grows, making it crucial to address this topic.

When discussing influencers, students often emphasise values such as beauty, wealth, fame and humour. These messages, delivered through curated content and idealised lifestyles, can shape perceptions of success and happiness. While some values may seem appealing, they can create unrealistic expectations and distract from deeper values like empathy, integrity and personal growth. Students are often willing to participate in viral challenges under the influence of popular influencers, which can expose them to physical, emotional or reputational risks. This lesson encourages critical thinking, discusses peer pressure and helps students weigh the real-life consequences of their online actions..



ASAP final event in Croatia

Our Croatian partner **DKMK** presented the ASAP project in **Zagreb, Pazin and Zadar**.

It was important to introduce the project and its educational materials not only to decision-makers and education professionals, but also to the wider public. These events created meaningful opportunities for dialogue, sharing experiences and raising awareness about the importance of supporting students' emotional development and digital wellbeing.



A laugh from the ASAP classroom in Croatia

One of the most memorable moments of our ASAP journey in Croatia came during a workshop in which students role-played as parents facing “digital dilemmas.” Acting as concerned mums and dads, they debated screen-time limits, online friends and privacy rules.

The scene was both hilarious and eye-opening: while they laughed at each other’s performances, the students began to appreciate how difficult it is for adults to set boundaries and protect them online. The activity fully engaged them and gave them a new perspective on their own behaviour.

We can’t wait to repeat it with parents and children together, where the exchange promises to be even more powerful – and just as entertaining!!

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