



Storytelling in international school projects

Introduction

The power of storytelling as an educational tool is widely recognised. Many aspects of storytelling are close to our daily life, to the way we think and (try to) understand the world. It is a powerful way to engage students as well as to foster the acquisition of key competences, like verbal and communication skills in the mother tongue, skills in a second or foreign language, imagination, creativity, learning to learn, intercultural understanding, digital skills etc. Teachers and trainers often see the benefits of the ‘technical competences’ tackled through storytelling but sometimes underestimate the social effects and the effect of the alternative thinking styles offered by storying content. It is very important to bring this into focus as well.

In TALES we deal with oral storytelling and digital storytelling. Pupils and students engage in projects involving research, group work, communication and cooperation leading to an oral or digital ‘narrative presentation’. Both approaches are ideal to be embedded in European school projects involving partner schools from abroad.

Erasmus+ is the name of the European education programme that – since January 2014 - succeeds the ‘Lifelong Learning’ programme. In this programme there are several strands offering funding opportunities or facilities for international cooperation between educational organisations, including schools. It will last till December 2020.

Two subprogrammes in Erasmus+ can be relevant for storytelling in the classroom:

- Key Action 1 (KA1), offering opportunities & funding for in-service training for teachers & staff
- Key Action 2 (KA2), offering opportunities & funding for pupils/students & teachers cooperating in international projects

Another European initiative that can be highly relevant for storytelling at school is E-Twinning. It facilitates international cooperation between schools via a dedicated online collaborative space.

On top of that the TALES initiative 1001Voices, an online digital story platform, also represents a major contribution to international storytelling projects at school.

The programmes and tools

Erasmus+

Key Action 1: Learning mobility for individuals

Mobility projects for school education staff



Key action 1 offers funding for schools looking to improve the professional development of their staff. This mobility project can comprise one or more of the following activities:

- teaching assignments: this activity allows teachers or other school education staff to teach at a partner school abroad;
- staff training: this activity supports the professional development of teachers, school leaders or other school education staff in the form of:
 - a) participation in structured courses or training events abroad;
 - b) a job shadowing/observation period abroad in a partner school or another relevant organisation active in the field of school education.

In order to get funded for a staff mobility project the school needs to apply with the Erasmus+ National Agency (NA) in its own country. Online list of NAs:

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/tools/national-agencies/index_en.htm

The school needs to create a 'European Development Plan' elaborating on the training needs of the staff, the training activities (courses abroad that are going to be attended by the staff) and the way the new competences of the staff involved are going to be implemented at school (impact). The application forms for a KA1 project can be downloaded from the NA website of each country.

A course on introducing storytelling in the classroom clearly fits in a number of European education priorities such as:

- new approaches to teaching
- more attractive education
- addressing the needs of special target groups
- dealing with multicultural contexts
- literacy priorities
- digital competences priorities
- etc.

Storytelling in education courses are on the market. TALES also plans to organize international teacher trainer courses on introducing storytelling in the classroom.

Key Action 2: Cooperation for innovation and the exchange of good practices

Strategic Partnerships in the field of education, training and youth;

Educational organisations can get funded to take part in international cooperation projects. These projects are called 'Strategic partnerships' and can involve educational organisations of all types (schools, colleges, teacher training organisations, universities. There are also 'school to school' projects involving only schools.

A KA2 project lasts 2 to 3 years. The objectives and activities must fit in the school's strategy plan and answer to the needs of the school development plan. It is also important that the



project fits into the European education priorities (Education and Training 2020 and the priorities of the Erasmus+ yearly call, see guidelines below).

A project involves 2 to 7 or 8 schools from different countries cooperating with each other on a common theme and approach. Project activities involve local research and activities by pupils and/or teachers and international exchange of data, results, products etc.

For the participating organisations, projects supported under this Key Action are intended to produce the following outcomes:

- innovative approaches for addressing their target groups, by providing for example:
 - more attractive education and training programmes, in line with individual needs and expectations;
 - use of participatory approaches and ICT based methodologies;
 - new or improved practices to cater for the needs of disadvantaged groups;
 - new approaches to address social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity;
 - recognition of excellence in language learning or teaching through the European Language Label;

- positive impact on participating individuals such as:
 - increased sense of initiative and entrepreneurship;
 - increased competence in foreign languages;
 - increased level of digital competence;
 - greater understanding and responsiveness to social, ethnic, linguistic and cultural diversity;
 - the need to promote social, civic and intercultural competences, intercultural dialogue, democratic values and fundamental rights, social inclusion, non-discrimination and active citizenship,
 - critical thinking and media literacy.
 - more strategic and integrated use of ICTs and open educational resources (OER) in education, training and youth systems;
 - increased motivation for language learning through innovative teaching methods

The eTwinning platform (see below) also functions as an international partner finding platform for schools.

More info in the official Erasmus+ programme guidelines:

http://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/documents/erasmus-plus-programme-guide_en.pdf

eTwinning, the community for schools in Europe

eTwinning is an international web platform exclusively created for schools. It offers publishing tools, networking opportunities, communication tools for staff and pupils. In each 'eTwinning



country' there is a promotion and support unit offering training for teachers willing to join the activities on the platform.

“ eTwinning offers a platform for staff (teachers, head teachers, librarians, etc.), working in a school in one of the European countries involved, to communicate, collaborate, develop projects, share and, in short, feel and be part of the most exciting learning community in Europe. The eTwinning action promotes school collaboration in Europe through the use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) by providing support, tools and services for schools.

The eTwinning Portal (www.etwinning.net) is the main meeting point and workspace for the action. Available in twenty-eight languages, the eTwinning Portal now has the involvement of nearly 230 277 members and over 5462 projects* between two or more schools across Europe. The Portal provides online tools for teachers to find partners, set up projects, share ideas, exchange best practice and start working together, immediately using various customised tools available on the eTwinning platform.

1001Voices

In order to allow students from all over Europe to create and share multimedia stories, an **authoring tool, 1001voices**, has been developed within the frame of the TALEs project. The tool supports the creation of **interactive multimedia (combining text, audio, images and video), multilingual stories**.

Collaborative Digital storytelling is an effective way for having students gain substantial educational benefits of various kinds. First of all, students get cognitive benefits in terms of enhanced curiosity towards the subject-matter, capacity of reformulating knowledge and deeper understanding. Students also improve their social skills: they learn how to work in groups, to take initiative and to negotiate with their peers. Third and very important, creating a digital story is a communication exercise with new technologies that dramatically increases the students' media literacy: they learn how to organize a multimedia, interactive artifact, how to combine audio and images, how to blend music and videos, how to envisage an interactive fruition of their work by a final “reader”. And much more can be achieved!

Roughly speaking, the main steps to collaboratively create a digital story are: (1) Choice of the topic; (2) Content gathering; (3) Story organization; (4) (Multimedia) content creation; (5) Content upload in the tool and (6) Evaluation. Typically, classes are split into groups after step 3, i.e. once the story organization (into chapters and possibly sub-chapters) is settled: each group is charged with a specific part of the story. Groups can provide mutual help and the final evaluation is done together. The teacher supervises the whole work.

This platform is free for use and can be accessed after registration at storiesforlearning@gmail.com

Figures 1 to 6 exemplify some of the above steps.



Fig. 1 Planning the visual communication (pre-school)



Fig. 2 If needed, images can be scanned (pre-school)



Fig. 3: audio recording (junior high-school)



Fig. 4 Students deal with technical issues (primary school)



Fig. 5. Final evaluation (pre-school)



Fig. 6. Final evaluation (high-school)

Examples

In the TALES project we collected examples of good practice of how to use storytelling in the classroom. Some of these good practices were also part of the activities in an international project or developed in a European context:



Storytelling Festival in Primary School – UCLL – Belgium (international course)

Every year the UCLL Hasselt organizes a Creative Spring Module (CREOS) in which teacher trainees from all over Europe take part. This module includes an international storytelling festival in a primary school. The students attend the annual storytelling festival in Alden Biesen and take a storytelling workshop. Every student chooses a folktale of his/her own region/country. They present their folktales to each other and decide which folktales will be told to the 10-12 year old primary school children. The students are divided in 6 groups, as there are 2 carrousel of 3 stories each. All stories are told in English. Prior to their performance the students introduce themselves and connect with the children. After the story is told, the children participate actively in the follow-up activities and learn more about the storytellers' background. Finally the students reflect on their performance and on the use of stories as a didactic tool.

Through this storytelling festival, the teacher trainees and/or children acquire several key competences: communication skills in a foreign language (English); learning to learn; social and civic competences; digital competence (PowerPoints to illustrate place of action, clarify notions); sense of initiative; cultural awareness and expression.

Of Cuberdons, Belgian Waffles, Beer and Meatballs from Liege – UCLL – Belgium (Grundtvig project L2LByTe)

The Cuberdons together with Belgian Waffles, a Belgian beer and Meatballs from Liege are short stories teacher trainees created to co-construct a whodunit. They used food to introduce aspects of Belgian culture to the partners of the Grundtvig project Learning to Learn By Teaching (L2LByTe, 2012-2014) Although they were adult students they developed a concept for pupils between the ages of 12-14.

We researched the following topics: how do nations present their culture through traditions, food& drinks, dance& music; how do teachers use knowledge clips, social media and e-learning platforms in their teaching praxis? We tinkered with Popplet lite, Total recall, Simple mind+, Google search, Quizcast, Twitter, Screenshot, Toontastic, Fotobabble, Prezi, voice-over in PowerPoint, iMovie, MovieMaker, Facebook groups.

We brainstormed possible scenarios of widened learning.

We created a story frame

We gathered visuals from the Internet

We discussed and tried story coherence

We performed the story in our Facebook group

We presented it to the other partner countries who created their own stories following our story

We reflected on the learning outcomes

We reflected on the (changing) teacher identities



Objectives

- To increase their fluency in English as a foreign language
- To understand different cultures
- To become digitally literate
- To explore new ways of teaching

Legend of the White Lady – Estonia

This activity was part of a Comenius School Partnership project called From Fantasy to Reality: A Voyage of Discovery. The children set out on a journey of discovery from Fantasy (discovering myths and legends across Europe) to Reality (comparing European Culture and the Environment). In the first year all schools went on a journey of discovery (FANTASY), with the theme “Myths and Legends”. The children researched traditional myths in their own countries using drama, and ICT. They visited the local castle and got to know about the legend of The White Lady. Then they acted the play. They reviewed the story, using photos from the play and a PowerPoint presentation. Finally they told their own story or a new modern version of The White Lady.

Under the Same Sky: My Food Is Your Food – POLIMI – Italy (international storytelling competition)

The work presented here was the result of a cooperation between two primary schools, one located in Italy and one in a refugee camp in Somalia. In Italy two classes were involved (primary school, second year), in Somalia a group of students of different ages but comparable to the Italians in terms of performances. The Italian classes counted 44 students on the whole; most were quite high attainers. 5 were children with learning disabilities and 6 were children with certified special needs. The Somali group was composed of children of different ages from a refugee camp; most were orphans and in great need of being engaged in some meaningful educational activity. Due to the extremely difficult situation in Somalia, it may happen that children aged 12 and more are not yet able to read nor write, and therefore they sit in the same “class” with younger students.

The digital storytelling activity was framed into a larger programme of intercultural exchange between Italy and Somalia, the goal of which was to create a book comparing the different traditions of the two countries. One of the “chapters” had to be about food, so the material fitted perfectly into the competition on the EXPO2015 themes (“Feeding the planet, energy for life”).

The teacher organised the Italian students (aged 8, from two different classes of the same institute) into groups. Each group was in charge of a specific “chapter” of the multimedia story and they started writing the texts. When it came to images, groups were remixed so that the right “competences” could be present in each of them. Some students who were more technically-minded than the others took a leading role. Generally speaking, the work was organized with heterogeneous groups (i.e. groups putting together high and low performing



students): in this way, even the pupils with some form of difficulty (learning disabilities) found a role and participated with enthusiasm. **Inclusion** of problematic pupils was guaranteed by the high level of engagement.

When texts and images were ready, audios were recorded: by each student, in front of the whole class. Eventually all the materials were introduced into an authoring tool provided by HOC-LAB of Politecnico di Milano (organiser of the competition). The story can be seen at this address: <http://www.1001storia.polimi.it/generate/INTERNATIONAL/1620/>

Polish-French Dragon Hunt – Poland (bilateral project)

During the school years 2012/13 and 2013/14 cooperation between a primary school in Czuryły and a primary school in Coutouvre (France) was established. Many activities were performed during the cooperation (correspondence in English, mails, postcards, preparing little handmade gifts, sharing information about Polish and French cultures) including a performance based on the picture book.

The English teachers from Poland and France agreed to prepare a play in English based on the English picture book “We’re going on a bear hunt”. Students were acquainted with a story: the vocabulary was introduced and the teacher read it aloud showing illustrations as a visual aid. After completing post-reading activities children started to work on the scenario. The text of the storybook was adjusted: it was shortened, some parts were deleted, and due to lack of costumes ‘bear’ was changed into ‘dragon’.

The play included both individual speeches and choral ones. This fact made it possible to involve all students according to their English skills.

The kids had to memorise their parts and afterwards several rehearsals were conducted. Finally the plays were recorded and sent to both partner schools.

The children could watch their peers’ work result.

Objectives

- develop children’s imagination
- enable and improve their communication in a foreign language
- make them aware of cultural diversity
- evoke interests in foreign cultures
- enjoy the stories
- motivate to learn English
- broaden horizons

European Tales Day – Poland (Multilateral School Partnership Comenius)

The primary School in Czuryły (Poland) took part in a Multilateral School Partnership Comenius (years 2011-2013). One part of the project was to present a folktale that is popular in a given



country or known and liked by children there. The Polish school chose to present “Little Red Riding Hood”. After five months, the results of work of all partner schools (from Spain, Turkey, the UK, Bulgaria and Romania) were summed up during “European Tales Day”.

Students who were to take part and perform in the project (12-13 year-olds) were acquainted with the aims concerning tale presentation. They prepared and made a survey aimed at choosing the most popular tale in our local area. Students, teachers and students’ families were surveyed and on the base of the answers the most popular tale was chosen (Little red Riding Hood).

The story was to be prepared in a form of a storybook (PDF file) and theatre play. During 5 months (September 2011- January 2012), the students (divided into teams) together with a teacher prepared Polish and English texts of the story, illustrations, worked on play scenario, costumes and decorations – as a result all of them according to their interests and skills were involved in the project (17 students). Additionally, a group of 6 students aged 8 was invited to take part in a play as a choir (singing songs in English)

The story was printed in PDF format and spread in the partner schools.

The play was performed several times: for students of our school during European Tales Day, for teachers and students from partner schools visiting the school in Czuryły and for parents. During European Tales Day, apart from presenting the Polish tale, students could watch the presentations and movies sent by partner schools as well as look at the printed storybooks prepared by them. As all schools prepared their stories both in English and in their native language, students could see/hear different European languages.

For younger students (6-9 of age) they were told with the help of the English teacher.

Objectives

- provide partner schools’ educational communities with a variety of traditional tales
- show that these deep roots of European culture prove that European countries are different but in fact the same.
- develop children’s imagination
- enable and improve their communication in a foreign language
- make them aware of cultural diversity
- evoke interests in foreign cultures
- enjoy the stories

Time Capsule –Spain (Multilateral Comenius project: Voices: The European Teacher)

This project involved four countries, the Czech Republic, Spain, Portugal and Belgium. The pupils were between 11 and 15 years old. The aim of the project was to create a personal identity for the project ‘Voices: The European Teacher’.

It consisted of the following activities:



- making a time capsule box
- making a file with their names, a picture of themselves, the word that described them with a little explanation, favourite object + picture;
- making another file with the picture of the children, name and age, a picture of their favourite job and what they wanted be in the future;
- an appointment in ten years to see what has happened; meanwhile they are exchanging their pictures with their European friends.

Objectives

- mother tongue: to create identity
- English: to communicate with the other schools (send the activities to other students through mail and blog).
- digital competence: use computers to make word files, insert pictures played with different frames.
- cultural awareness: life during Christmas, talk about the most famous festivities in Catalonia: TIO, different timetables
- learning to learn: look for information on the Internet, work independently and in groups
- entrepreneurship: we began with a model and then we dropped it and allowed the children to create their own; the title is the only thing in common.
- civic: find common things between all the children of the world and themselves
- no mathematics but ICT.

"**Strip to Identity**" is a secondary Erasmus+ school-to-school project, using comic books software (www.pixton.com), language, IT and other subjects to create a comic book collection compiled by pupils from many different countries all over Europe (and Asia). All comic books will be based on local picaresque or traditional characters.

The broader project scope is literacy, i.e. the importance of reading skills, the pleasure of reading, solutions to possible reading difficulties and eventually new opportunities to secondary school pupils to study in the interesting, inspiring and motivating environment of an Erasmus+ school partnership. Starting in September 2014, we first organised a preparatory conference to make all teachers who are involved in the comic book project how to use the comic book software. Together with this technical workshop, we shared each other's views on how to assess project work and soft skills like social skills, enthusiasm, eagerness to learn, the ability to reflect ...

In the second project year, pupils will translate their comic book, written in their native or traditional languages into English and start making supporting pedagogical files to explain crucial social, religious, political, historical and other information in order to fully understand and grasp the content of the comic book.

In the third year, we give room to creativity to those partners who are inspired to write their own comic book from scratch, with new ideas, new approaches and even a personal design.



Near the end of the project, the comic book collection will be compiled, containing 8 comic books from each partner school. These comic books will be presented at a press conference in May 2017, during which also the comic book dispenser will be presented and inaugurated.

Spread among the 3 project years, the long and short-term teaching and training mobilities will be the binding agent of all activities. <http://www.striptideidentity.eu/>

Seven countries, eight stories

This Comenius partnership is a storytelling project. It is published on eTwinning. We think that stories stimulate our pupils to develop their fantasy, imagination and creativity. They can learn how to find solutions to difficulties and problems and realize how things can be seen by others. Stories are a bridge between people of different cultures. Over the two years we listened to and discussed traditional stories and traditions from the countries in the project. Each time these stories were exchanged we learned about the country it came from as well as the school. We created a special place in our libraries to read these stories sitting around a big armchair which is decorated with items from the other partners. We worked with these stories in different ways and we increased our knowledge about the characters that appear in them. In Finland and Belgium we found out about the magic of nature with fairies, elves and gnomes; in the United Kingdom about the rich fantasy, in the East the mystery in their stories and in the South, stories about every day-life with good natured and mischievous characters. An interesting mosaic for our pupils to discover that we have a common European history and tradition. Finally we wrote a common story using all these characters around Puss in Boots.

<http://new-twinspace.etwinning.net/web/p16694/welcome>

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