

Erasmus+ project „The Children of Sheherazade“

Belgium – Year 3 (2023–24) – Storyteller’s Report

School: Städtische Grundschule Unterstadt Belgium

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In the third year of ‘The Children of Sheherazade’ project, I was initially faced with a huge task that instilled me with respect and immersed me in an intensive period of preparation.

The task was to get the children themselves to tell stories, to recognise and encourage their willingness to do so and to accompany them in their processes.

After a stormy and joyful welcome by the class in the new fourth school year with a new teacher, it turned out that two children with special educational needs had left the class. The children from the neighbouring school, who had always come to listen in the previous two years, no longer came. The task would probably have been too much for them.

I quickly realised that the storytelling had been a structuring element up to that point element that had also created a sense of calm in the classroom. The task was now much more difficult for me, as there was a lot of unrest in the class.

I asked the teacher to support me pedagogically. I was lucky to have Caroline Claesen at my side that year, because she recognised processes and actively encouraged them. With her calm and experienced manner, she often brought the calm and attention to the class group that our task required.

Firstly, I asked the children what they thought was involved in free storytelling.

They came up with some amazing and thoughtful terms such as **telling - writing - book - title - author - memory - imagination - finding words - learning - courage - concentration - rhythm - music - sounds.**

We also tried to find out what could be part of the craft of oral storytelling. We looked at the concepts of **facial expressions, gestures, speaking and voice.** We explored the role of the listener in conversation.

It was clear to me right from the start that I wanted to do theatre education exercises with the children this year. Our dedicated teacher made sure that we were allowed into the so-called movement room at a certain time every week. For the children, the theatre education exercises, which I will talk about later in my report, were something they really looked forward to every week.

From October 2023, the time had come. Some children were keen to tell their stories. The interest grew quickly and it seemed as if it was a privilege to stand in front of the class and class and tell a story of their own devising, a film or the content of a favourite radio play. of a favourite radio play. The challenge for every child who showed this great courage was clearly noticeable. However, over the course of weeks and months, it seemed to become established that speaking in front of the class group was somehow normal and was now part of school life.

The children sometimes told long stories, often daring to tell them in pairs and taking turns. There were even series with sequels.

Some children made up stories off the cuff.

Others prepared well at home and developed long and complicated storylines.

Sometimes a child would break off and say, 'I can't make it to the end.' There was always clapping, because it was the courage they now almost all knew that was applauded.

My small orchestra was at their disposal and they were able to incorporate islands of sound into their narrative flow.

The children narrated every week from October to December. Audio files now exist of many of the children's stories, as I recorded them – with their consent and that of the teacher.

It was important for the children to include their classmates in their story by name.

There were also situations in which they were disrespectful in the stories. Blood flowed at times. We talked about how to attract attention and I told them openly that I found some parts too bloodthirsty. I only said that once. From then on, blood only flowed when a protagonist accidentally pricked their finger. Death and destruction became injuries that were healed.

What really impressed me was that some of the children had internalised my narrative flow to such an extent that they spoke at a very calm pace. They took pauses, they modulated the tone. Some of the children became less nervous, but not all of them, of course.

The listeners were well aware of their responsibility. They sometimes managed to follow a very confusing and illogical story for a long time. Afterwards, however, there was a hail of questions.

After the children's story time, there were 30–40 minutes of theatre education exercises in the movement room.

To mention just a few examples:

1. walking in the room with changing guidelines:
like a tap - on ice - through water - through honey - like a happy child - like a very old person - like a boss etc.
2. passing around an imaginary object
3. combined with the fantasy language *Grommelo*
4. the pantomime representation of everyday actions
5. grimaces in masses and much more

Body awareness, concentration, imagination, breath, voice, body expression, facial expressions and group behaviour were trained here.

At the end of the movement unit, the children formed a lying circle, their feet met in the centre. By raising their upper bodies, they all formed a flower that opens and closes.

From January 2024, we approached our new task: the creation of a class story.

Here, too, I took small steps. Using the saga cards and the myth cards, I established work in groups: a group of about four children developed a storyline based on three pictures. It was up to the children whether and how much they wrote to record the storyline. There were always presentations of a short story afterwards.

This could be read aloud as well as told. Most of the children preferred to read out the previously written text.

The stories created here were of great psychological density and often dealt with fears, sometimes a higher power (e.g. a star) intervened to save them.

In February 2024, I started an exercise called 'The Street in Rome'.

It's about imagining places, things, people, animals and magical creatures.

Initially, the children created places: a museum, a pizzeria, a Vespa hire shop, a delicatessen, the Colosseum.

Groups were formed for the locations. The places were populated with people, the people were given a short biography. Then the groups intertwined – the protagonists of the places visited other places and actions were generated.

This process did not run smoothly. There were arguments and disagreements among the children, socio-emotional processes were fuelled, some left one group and moved to another. Some had to use a lot of force to motivate the other group members, while other children were too dominant and easily got angry when their ideas could not be implemented. The process was turbulent and exhausting. It felt like being in the blast furnace of creativity.

The result made us all proud.

'Life in Rome' is the title of the class story. It is illustrated with many expressive and humorous children's drawings. As far as possible, I left it in its original state. I put the children's texts into an easy-to-read form, assigned the appropriate pictures to them and had them bound. Each child in the class and the teacher received a copy.

The story exists as a pdf file.

Saying goodbye to the children was difficult and very emotional.

The children of Sheherazade showed me what wealth really is.