

# Erasmus+ project „The Children of Sheherazade“

## Denmark – 1 (2021–22) – Storyteller’s Report

**School:** Øster Åby Friskole, Denmark

**Facilitator (Storyteller):** Maria Junghans

As with many a first time, there are many lessons to be learnt.

### **1. Routine is great!**

The year was in general marked by lots of changes in staff and setting. The class teacher fell ill for longer periods, and there were three or four different stand-ins for her. COVID-19 also had an impact in February, both with most of the class at home with the virus, and I also had to stay at home for a week. Adding to this theme weeks, school holidays, school trips, all the many public holidays in spring time etc. made it sometimes difficult to find a routine.

In the beginning I tried different ways as to how the children could/should be seated, if they could have or not have their teddy bear while I told the stories, but found out that the best solution was to have the children placed either sitting or laying on the floor in a semi-circle around me, no teddies allowed.

And it was very clear that the children benefited when there were two or even three weeks in a row where all the surrounding circumstances were the same.

Small things make a great difference. For instance: That I bring the paper, their folders, and the good pencils, so the paper they draw on is the same every time, enhances focus.

### **2. iPads are time thieves**

Using iPads to find a motif to draw from was not a good idea. The children would spend the most of the drawing time on the internet looking for “the right” cat, house, horse etc. and some of the children with most experience on the internet also looked up things completely unrelated to the story. Hence no iPads allowed in my storytelling sessions.

Instead I brought wonderful books with me “The Artist Anatomy of Animals”, “Architecture around the Globe” or they could ask me, and I would draw it on the white board, and more children could look at the same drawing for inspiration.

## The development of the children

We started out with a class of 22 children, with relatively similar backgrounds and divided more or less 50 % in girls and boys. All children completed the year. Both the support and enthusiasm from parents, teachers and administration were high.

### During the storytelling

In the beginning a small group of the children had difficulties paying attention to the story, moving around, interrupting, asking question, trying to act “cool” and make others go along with their game.

I too was uncertain of how to tackle this, if I should just let them play around, because it might be their way of listening, or if I should make them sit down and quiet down and pay attention, and how to do this in a good, supportive and respectful way, and not entering the “teachers field”.

After a few times the children began to relax and feel comfortable, knowing what was going to happen.

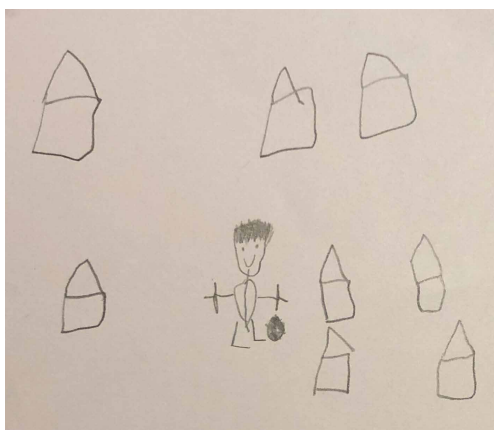
As we established how to sit, and a structure in telling - first Good morning! Then which country or part of Denmark we were “travelling” to, and if anyone had relatives there, then the story and at the end everyone “and they lived happily ever after”. This last thing was something that the children spontaneously started doing and established as a part of the routine. As this structure came into place, these few students also became more focused and their ability to concentrate grew considerably. In general all the students love these hours of storytelling, and look forward to them during the week.

Every morning as I take my daughter to school, the children ask: “When is it Wednesday?” “When are you telling again?”

So from the beginning to the end a very positive experience for all of us.

### During the movements

As I worked out a structure with the same two or three movements at the beginning and at the end, and then a few related to the story in the middle – the movement part became very good. We start out forming a circle, close our eyes holding hands sending a hand shake from one to the other until it reaches me once more. Then we “weave”, “pick apples”, then the story of the day related movements, and then we run two times around the building and into the class room. In the same direction, to avoid accidents.



## **During the drawing sessions**

I misunderstood the instructions at the beginning so the first three times they drew whatever they wanted. From then on they drew whatever they wanted – from the story of the day. This change made an important difference related to the concentration of the children.

Some are very quickly done, some use the full 40 minutes. This however cannot be related to the level of detail in the drawings.

One boy uses only black and white and a bit of colour, but makes the most remarkable stick figure graphic tales out of the stories.

Another boy always had guns and blood in the drawings, but by the very end of the year these disappeared and the drawings had a different focus.

One girl had a serious creative block at the beginning - crying saying "I cannot draw!" To help her get out of this I asked her what she would draw from the story. And drew it very simply. She would then colour it. Next time we would do the same, but she might want to draw some detail too. The first 6-9 times she would end up in tears or say she could not draw. At the end she said "I think I can manage this," and "I really like the way the girl looks" and smiled. I asked her parents to buy new and good colour pencils for her, and they did.

Instead of using the iPads we have used the white board and then I have drawn what they wanted to know what looked like or the could look in my books. We also used the teachers as models if we wanted to know what it looks like when someone does this or the other.

In general the children's ability and confidence to dive into their own imagination grew. And also to value their own and others drawings, and the differences.

## **The favourite tales of the children**

Guinaruen og den forældreløse pige – The Guinaru and the Orphan Girl  
Snehvid og Rosenrød – Snow White and Rose Red