

- STORYLINE -



A European Comenius School Project 2006 - 2009





Storyline

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FOREWORD

When I first heard of the Comenius Project **Stars Project** using the Storyline approach I was enthusiastic. Having worked with Storyline for almost 30 years I was convinced that this educational design would prove to be suitable for learning groups from different nations. When I was informed that all the pupils were children with special learning needs I became a bit sceptic though. Would it be possible to work with pupils who seemed to have a number of learning difficulties had no language in common? How would they communicate with the teachers, if – apart from the Irish group – none of the children spoke English well enough to understand simple key-questions? On the other hand I knew from experience that any group of participants – young or old, well educated or not – responds well to a learning environment based on mutual respect, activity, and learning by discovery to name only a few traits of Storyline. So I was very keen to find out how the cooperation was going to work.

In September 2008 I was invited to Cuxhaven where the children and their teachers met for their penultimate meeting. In preparation I was sent the outline of the Comenius Stardust Storyline. So I knew what the pupils had already done and what they planned to work on in Cuxhaven. As the idea is described in the article written by Jens and Björn I am not going to explain it here in detail. But I was convinced that it was certainly a big challenge.

When I came into the classroom I was surprised by the somewhat casual working atmosphere. There was no sign of fear or stress but rather of concern and expectation. It seemed the children were already used to working in such an international setting.

My task was to advance the Storyline a bit further. So I started inquiring about the characters the pupils had made in their home countries. This was when I first experienced the language chain: Question in English – translation into Estonian, French, Danish, German or Hungarian by the teacher – answer by the pupil in his/her mother tongue - translation by the teacher into English. It was amazing how little time this needed and how well it worked.

Then we started to plan for the three-dimensional model of the stage. The groups of children were given cardboard boxes and all sorts of other material. When I started to give some instructions in English all the teachers translated simultaneously into their mother tongues and immediately the pupils started to work. The results can be seen on the photographs in this booklet. I was fascinated by the quality of the outcome.

FOREWORD

The Estonian group for instance had invented a curtain that could be lifted with a cleverly designed mechanism, the Danish group produced the model of a fanciful pink stage, and all the others were equally imaginative. Within just one hour each group presented a model of unique quality and aesthetic charm. To me even more impressive than the outcome was the cooperation of the pupils. From the workshop atmosphere one could get the impression of watching professionals in an advertising agency, not children at school.

The afternoon was dedicated to the exchange of ideas between the teachers. This meeting proved to be equally fruitful. The discussion about the different experiences with Storyline in the countries involved provided a number of insights. It is certainly not exaggerated to speak of a „community of practise“ emerging from the cooperation on this Comenius project.

As a Storyline consultant who has participated in many international trainings and conferences I have to compliment the teachers on their efforts. I am convinced that the aim to share and experience the Storyline approach for children with varied learning needs was fulfilled in a way that is of advantage for both – children and teachers – who undertook this challenging enterprise.

March 2009, Ulf Schwänke



Ulf Schwänke
European Association for Educational Design
www.schwaenke.de

WHAT IS STORYLINE?

1. What is Storyline?

Although the intention of this publication is not to give you a detailed description of the Storyline method of teaching, we would like to, at this point, provide you with a general introduction.

The **Storyline** method was developed at Jordanhill College of Education in Glasgow, Scotland around 1970 by Steve Bell, Sallie Harkness and Fred Rendell.

The methodology proclaims to "recognise the value of the existing knowledge of the learner. Through key questioning the pupils are encouraged to construct their own models of what is being studied, their hypothesis, before testing this with real evidence and research. The key questions are used in a sequence that creates a context or setting within the framework of a story. Together, learner and teacher create a scenario through visualisation – the making of collages, friezes (three dimensional models) and pictures employing a variety of art/craft techniques [*source: www.storyline-scotland.com*]". For more in depth information we have added some web links etc. in chapter 7.

Due to the fact that all the partner schools of this Comenius Project work with children with special needs (see chapter 2) coupled with the reality that there is a lack of literature available on working in this area, we found that the most interesting question requiring an answer was:

Is Storyline an appropriate teaching method for children with special needs?

Of course this question cannot be answered with a simple yes or no, therefore based on our experiences throughout the duration of the Comenius Project, we would like to outline the problems, limitations and challenges that we faced as well as the successes and positive elements of using the Storyline method as a learning tool for children with special needs. This we have summarised in chapter 6.

We will also take you through the development of the project, and the experiences of pupils and teachers from six different European countries working together (chapter 3, 4 and 5).

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

2. Participating schools

2.1. Belgium: Ecole maternelle et primaire d'enseignement spécialisé, Tournai



Our school was built in 1970 for pupils with learning disabilities. There are 18 classrooms. Pupils are streamed by their abilities and autonomy. Situated in Kain near Tournai, Belgium it is in close proximity to France, which has resulted in 35% of our pupils being French. The school day starts at 8.50 and finishes at 15.30, but the school itself is open from 8.10 to 16.15. The children use many methods of transport to get to school, from buses to taxis to special medical vehicles. The average number of pupils per classroom is 10, but we also have 3 classrooms, which cater specifically for children with autism, and these classes average 5-6 pupils. The "TEACCH" method is used with these pupils. When the pupils reach the age of 13, the staff has a meeting regarding the future of the child in question and ascertain which secondary school would best suited to them, this could be a special secondary school or technical secondary school, where the emphasis is on manual subjects.

Ecole maternelle et primaire d'enseignement spécialisé, Rue de Breuze, 9b, 7540 Tournai, Belgium

2.2. Denmark: Storebæltskolen, Korsør

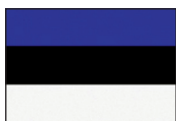


Storebaeltskolen is a school for pupils with special learning needs. There are about 110 pupils and 68 staff working together in a positive atmosphere. The pupils live at home or in institutions. There are classes from preschool to 10th grade (ages 6 to 17 years). The pupils are divided in classes according to their age and not handicap. The school day starts at 8am when the pupils arrive by bus, and finishes between 11.55 and 13.40. Most of the pupils go from the school to "Solsikken", where they stay until 4pm, at which time they are collected to go home by bus.

Storebæltskolen, Storebælts Erhvervsark 1, 4220 Korsør, Denmark

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

2.3. Estonia: Tartu Hiie Kool, Tartu



Tartu Hiie Kool is a school for children with special needs in hearing and speech and is attended by children from all over Estonia. The national 9-year curriculum is lengthened by 1 year for children with speech problems, and by 2 years for those with hearing difficulties. The average number of pupils per class is 12-14.

One third of our 300 pupils are hearing impaired, the remaining two thirds experience problems with speech. We have twice as many boys as girls and a staff of 100, of which 54 are teachers. Tartu Hiie School has been involved in several Comenius and e.Twinning projects.

Tartu Hiie Kool, Hiie 11, Tartu 51006, Estonia

2.4. Germany: Schule am Meer, Cuxhaven



Schule am Meer is a school for 7-20 year old children and young adults with special learning needs. The building is located in the North West of Cuxhaven, a town, which lies on Germany's North Sea coast and has a population of over 50,000. The school consists of around 40 pupils, 10 teachers and 10 assistants - part time and full time - plus a physiotherapist, caretaker, secretary and a cleaner.

We teach our pupils in six classes from 08:00 to 15:00, Monday to Thursday, and 08:00 to 12:30 on Fridays. Friday is also the day when we teach in mixed project groups where pupils from different classes work together in one team.

Schule am Meer, Döser Feldweg 190, 27476 Cuxhaven, Germany

PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

2.5. Hungary: The Bárczi Gusztáv Special School, Debrecen



The Bárczi Gusztáv Special School was founded in 1908 to facilitate the education of children with learning and mental disabilities. It is maintained by the local government. We have 330 pupils with learning disabilities, 111 with mental disabilities and a total of 124 pupils live on site. We have a staff of 152 to run the school. We provide 10 grades for children with a learning disability which includes 8 years of primary school and 2 years preparation for vocational school. There is also a Prolonged Teaching Period included in the first grade. A 12-year program is in place for pupils who have a moderate mental disability. This also consists of 8 years of primary school education with the addition of 4 years skills development. We integrate Montessori Teaching Methods for these pupils. We also have an integrated workplace training program.

Barczi Gusztav Special School, 2 Budai Ezsaias Street, Debrecen, Hungary 4024

2.6. Ireland: St. Nicholas Montessori School, Dun Laoghaire



St. Nicholas Montessori School in Dun Laoghaire, Dublin, Ireland occupies a section of the building that also houses St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland – a teacher-training institute for Montessori teachers. Dun Laoghaire, (pronounced Dun Leery), is a pleasant coastal town about 12 km from Dublin city. The building is almost 150 years old and preserves what was once a schoolroom for children of the sailors and maritime community attached to the nearby church (now the National Maritime Museum).

The present school is a private (non-state aided) primary and pre-school for children from 3 to 12 years. There are about 80 pupils at present in 5 classes. The classes are grouped by age (3-6 years; 6-9 years; 9-12 years) and these groupings contain children with a range of varied learning needs. Some children in each grouping have special educational needs. Each class group has a qualified Montessori teacher and a Montessori assistant.



PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS

The Montessori Method places great emphasis on creating an appropriate prepared learning environment so that individual children can select, explore and learn from activities and materials that enrich their knowledge of language, mathematics, science and culture. The state primary school curriculum is taught in St. Nicholas Montessori School but adapted and developed by means of the Montessori Method. St. Nicholas Montessori School is an inclusive supportive community in which learning and development to the highest potential are nurtured at every level.

St. Nicholas Montessori College Ireland, 16 Adelaide Street, Dun Laoghaire, Co. Dublin, Ireland



OVERVIEW OF THE STARS PROJECT

3. Overview of the STARS Project

3.1. How the STARS project began

The European Union initiated a lifelong learning program called **Comenius** in order to develop knowledge and understanding among young people and educational staff of the diversity of European cultures and also to develop partnerships between schools. Many projects have materialised under the umbrella of Comenius, in this case six countries joined forces in order to explore a method of teaching called **Storyline**. During discussions with a view to the goals of this project, certain keywords repeatedly came up such as **Storyline**, **Teaching**, **Aims**, **Results**, **Success** and this was how the **STARS** logo came about.

3.2. Short Overview of our meetings

The first meeting took place in October 2006 in Korsoer, Denmark. The teachers came together to take part in a workshop concerning the principals of the Storyline method. We learned the theoretical background of Storyline and put this knowledge into practical use by creating our own storyboard, characters and frieze. Armed with this experience, we were able to create goals that we hoped to achieve with the project.

In April 2007 we met again in Debrecen, Hungary, this time with pupils. We attended a workshop in which we were instructed on acting and body language, as these abilities can be important in Storyline to present results. In addition, we formed multinational groups so that the children had their first experience of working with Storyline.

The next time we came together was in November 2007 in Tournai, Belgium, this time without the children. We used this meeting to evaluate our experience with Storyline in our schools and to develop ideas for future storyboards. We also cultivated the idea of publishing a booklet about our encounter with Storyline and our international cooperation.

In April 2008, we gathered in Tartu, Estonia, again accompanied by our pupils. In small groups of mixed internationality, we worked on a Storyboard, which had been agreed upon in Tournai.

The last meeting with pupils took place in September 2008 in Cuxhaven, Germany. Again, we worked on a storyboard that we had planned together beforehand.

OVERVIEW OF THE STARS PROJECT

Apart from that we took the time to exchange our individual experiences, both negative and positive, regarding the use of the Storyline method in our schools. (See chapter 5).

The final meeting took place in Dublin, Ireland where we discussed and evaluated our project. Each country had felt that their experience with the STARS project was such a positive one that we developed ideas for new projects that we might work together on in the future.

3.3 Description of how our meetings developed

When we sat together at our first meeting in Denmark we had to discuss and plan the following five visits. We decided to arrange two different sorts of meetings: meetings with teachers only and meetings with a group of 3-6 pupils from each participating country accompanying the teachers. The idea behind this was on one hand to be able to focus on more abstract but necessary activities (evaluation, discussions about the experience in the schools, finding inspiration through listening to reports of other schools) when there are no children around and on the other hand to do more practically orientated workshops, which were more suitable to our pupils.



teachers developing ideas

OVERVIEW OF THE STARS PROJECT

When we had the first workshop with our pupils we tried to encourage them to work together in groups of mixed internationality. We soon found out that most of the children had difficulty in approaching one another and therefore decided that each group should consist of two children from two counties along with at least one of their own teachers. This enabled the children to feel more comfortable and confident. It was only a matter of time before they started communicating with each other by using sign language and bits and pieces of English. It was great to see how quickly they warmed up.



pupils of mixed nationality working together

A very important overall experience for us was to see how each host country presented and explained not only their school system but also their culture, folklore and way of life by organizing sight seeing trips, playing activities, etc. This gave everybody an insight into the lives of peoples that they might never have met before, and but for this project might never have been afforded the opportunity to do so.

OVERVIEW OF THE STARS PROJECT



sightseeing

It became evident after our meetings in Hungary and Estonia that time limitations were preventing us from creating a storyboard and seeing it through to its conclusion. At each of these meetings, we found ourselves having to present our work up to the point where we had managed to reach along with ideas of where it might go from there.

It was therefore the general consensus that we would like to work on a storyboard, which we could finish, together, at what was to be our final gathering that would include children, and take place in Cuxhaven, Germany. With this in mind we agreed upon a storyboard that was authorised by our friend and Storyline expert Ulf Schwänke (see chapter 4.2), who would lead the German meeting. Each country then worked in their respective schools on the early stages of the storyboard, following the principles that we had learned so far, in order to ensure that the storyboards were at a similar stage when we would finally meet. It was very impressive to see how different, creative and brilliant the results, which were presented in Cuxhaven, were.

OVERVIEW OF THE STARS PROJECT

Naturally, an ongoing topic for discussion at the meetings was the use of the Storyline method in our schools. Each school gave an update on their experiences; what they had achieved so far, the level of interest shown by other colleagues in the method etc. This turned out to be an important exercise as it enabled us to learn from each other's experiences, and to both give and receive inspiration.



exchanging international experiences

After having worked together during the day, the late afternoons and evenings were times for more social activities. These included sight seeing trips, visiting cultural events, playing games together, or simply sitting and having a chat with each other in a restaurant or bar. This was also a very important element of the project as it developed and strengthened our communications within the group and in some cases laid the ground for friendships that will continue for years to come.



a well deserved treat after a hard day's work

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

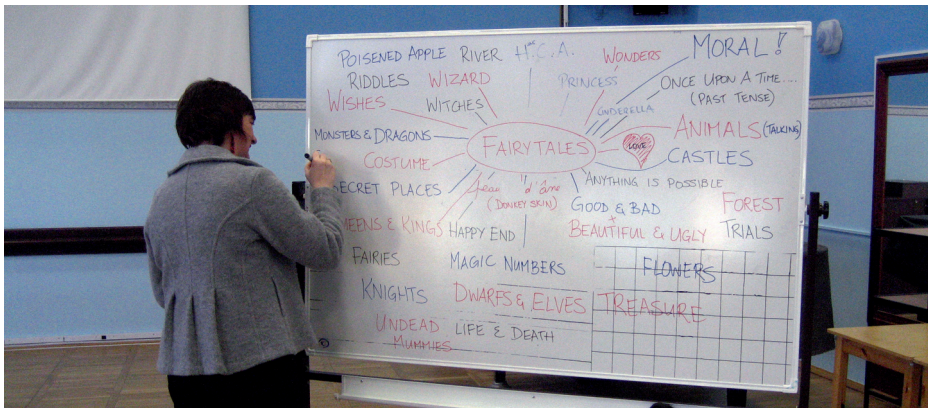
4. Storyline Examples

4.1. Fairy Tales

For the Estonian meeting in April, it was planned to use **fairy tales** as the topic for our storyboard. Fairy tales was chosen as a subject, because we believed that children and teachers from all internationalities could easily relate to it. In preparation, the teachers from each country need to ensure that the participating children had a general idea of what fairytales are and to possibly even know a few. With their minds thus stimulated, it was easier for the children to delve into the practical part of the workshop. It was exciting to see the amalgamation of fairytale cultures coming together and how the children were able to fuse their ideas, imagination and knowledge to create a fairytale all of their own.



a new storyboard begins - collecting ideas about fairy tales



all these suggestions came from the children - an impressive result of collective brainstorming

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

Near the conclusion of this meeting the teachers discussed and evaluated their work *with* the pupils as well as the work *between* pupils from the different countries.

Three questions arose:

a) Which challenges/problems arose during the working process?

b) Which aspects of the Storyline method were successful?

c) What effect did international cooperation have socially on students?

a) Even though for most of the children a trip to a foreign country was very exciting – in fact the first such journey for some of them - the strangeness of a different culture and so many new faces meant that it was not that easy for the nervous and excited pupils to concentrate on their work. There was of course the language barrier that left the children needed a lot of support from their teachers, especially when working in groups of mixed nationality where they had to communicate ideas and thoughts.



sometimes it's difficult to concentrate

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

b) According to the quote in chapter 1 of this publication you could say that working with the Storyline method allows you to incorporate the individual knowledge of each pupil. This proved to be the case when our pupils worked together in mixed groups. Each pupil was able to contribute something to the working process and the final result. This contribution depended on his or her pre-knowledge and individual skills. Nationality, cultural or social backgrounds were of no relevance to the outcome. Because Storyline encourages pupils to work with their hands as well as their minds, it could be observed that the language barrier proved to be less of a barrier as feared, as the children communicated through body language. They could relate to each other their ideas and thoughts by physically showing what materials or fabrics etc. they felt were appropriate. In the same way they were able to help each other with the various tasks with which they were faced.



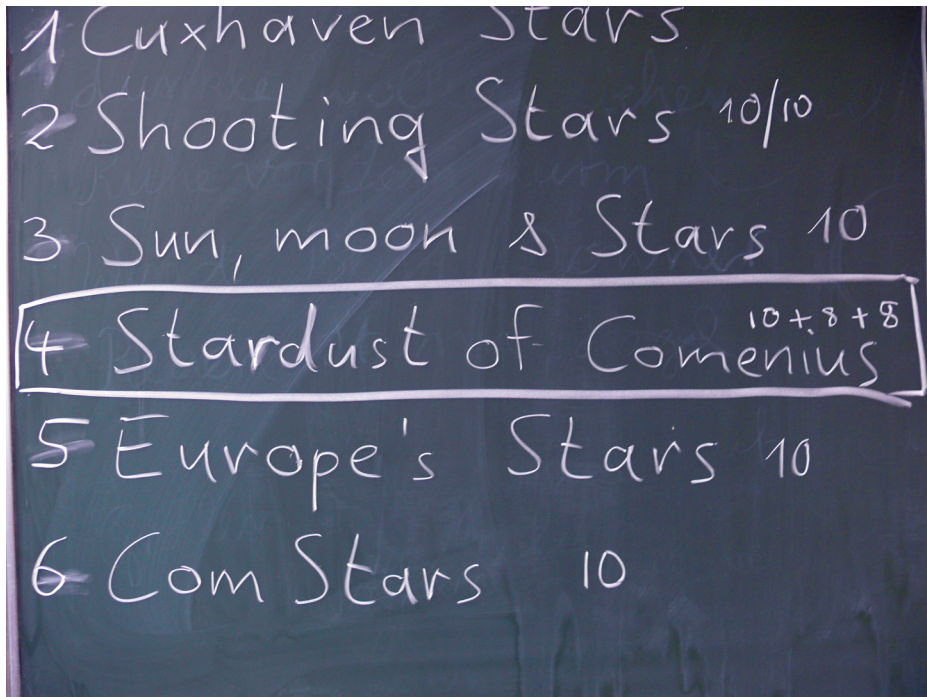
communicating through body language between German and Belgian children

c) Coming together and working with foreign people in a strange land had a visible effect on our pupils. It resulted in the children developing their awareness of life in other parts of Europe. It was also an important lesson on communicating and working together with strangers and on learning to trust and depend on said strangers.

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

4.2. Stardust of Comenius

As mentioned in the previous chapter, a theme was adopted in advance of the meeting in Germany. The theme chosen was a song contest, a mini Eurovision if you will. In German, everybody participated in putting forward ideas as to what the Storyline should be called, each country suggested two names and then we had a vote, the winning title was Stardust of Comenius.



result of the election

In preparation, the pupils of each country had to develop their characters and background before the meeting, so that we could continue the story from there with Ulf Schwänke. The countries communicated via the Internet to draw up a storyboard for the approval of Ulf. Approval was received and we have included the storyboard for you on pages 22-25.

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

At our first workshop with the children, they introduced their characters. It was amazing to witness the diversity of ideas and imagination. We had singers and musicians – all to be expected – but in addition, we had song writers, managers, dancers roadies and spouses!



imaginative character

The Danish children had even created passports for their characters to travel to Germany. This is just one example of how Storyline can meander in different directions in order for the children to learn. In creating a passport, the pupils learned why it was necessary to have such a document, what information should be on it etc. etc. Each group had also prepared a song for the competition, so following the introductions of the characters Ulf asked each group to construct a stage on which their characters might perform. Again we saw incredible inventiveness, some of which Ulf has already mentioned in his foreword.

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

The following day, the children were sitting proudly next to their magnificent creations when Ulf hit them with a bombshell – there was a fire during the night and the entire building was burned down – where would the song contest take place? The room was instantly filled with a lively buzz as pupils animatedly fires possibilities at their teachers. They came up with another treasure trove of ideas, from simply holding the contest outdoors to using local schools. The main point is, they were in a situation where they were very comfortable and settled, then they were jostled out of that comfort zone and faced with a huge dilemma and they found their own solution to the problem.

On the final day of the meeting, the children performed the songs which they had prepared prior to the gathering. One group took into account the idea that there had been a fire and made instruments out of buckets, boxes, brushes etc. The performance was a joy. Each group of children, some of them incredibly nervous, gave 100% to this activity. Again we saw very different ideas coming to the fore. We had groups who danced to a song of their choosing, then others mimed to a track, some actually sang to a backing track, and we even had a group who with the aid of an overhead projector, translated the song through mime. For most of these children, it was the first time that they were ever on a stage in front a fairly large and very foreign audience, this alone was a huge achievement for them, but coupled with their successful performances, they probably reached a plateau of exhilaration they had never experienced before.

Then came the results, and of course each country received the infamous “douze points”, because in storyline, everybody is a winner!



the Stardust of Comenius finalists

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

STARDUST OF COMENIUS STORYBOARD

Storyline	Key Question	Activities	Organization	Materials	Objectives /Results
Start	Have you heard of the Eurovision...?	Students talk about their own TV-experiences, ...	Entire class		
Information through teacher	Do you know that at the next Eurovision in Cuxhaven, young people will be allowed to perform as a support act?				
Forming of the Team	Which tasks have to be covered in order to perform at the Eurovision...?	Students gather and discuss ideas (necessity of musicians, dancers, managers, roadies, etc.)	Entire class		Group decision making; knowledge of the working principles of the music business
	What might these people look like? What trade did they learn? What are their living circumstances like?	Each student creates one character and makes a figure. Each student writes a short biography of his or her character and introduces it to the class. Teacher asks further questions.	Students work on their own Entire class		

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

STARDUST OF COMENIUS STORYBOARD

Storyline	Key Question	Activities	Organisation	Materials	Objectives /Results
Choosing the song	Which criteria should we consider when choosing a song? What would the audiences at home and abroad like?	Students discuss advantages and disadvantages of criteria such as melody, rhythm, volume, lyrics, ...	Entire class	Board or flip chart, CD-Player	Using musical knowledge and experience
		Songs will be suggested and introduced by students and pros and cons will be discussed in the group; finally everybody votes.	Entire class	CD-Player	Learning basic elements of democracy (accepting majorities even if it's against own vote)
Practising	How shall we organise our rehearsals?	Students develop and discuss ideas (learning from a CD? Finding a musician to practise with us? Use of costumes?)	Entire class or in small groups of 4/5	CD-Player, material, scissors, microphones	Creativity, experience public performances, self confidence
	How can we test if our piece will be liked by the public?	Students develop ideas of who they could perform the song to (fellow students? parents?)			

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

STARDUST OF COMENIUS STORYBOARD

Storyline	Key Question	Activities	Organization	Materials	Objectives /Results
Advertisement	How do we inform the public of our activities?	Students collect ideas (making posters, writing articles, recording a radio spot, etc.) Making of PR-Media	Entire class Working alone, in pairs or in groups of 4/5	Paper, Computer, Recording device	Knowledge of public relations, creativity
Planning the route	How will we get to the venue? What shall we take with us? What to we need?	Developing and discussing ideas (pros and cons)	Entire class or small groups	Media (atlas, Google maps, weather forecast, etc.)	Learning how to discuss in groups, practical knowledge (how to pack your personal suitcase, ...)
At this stage a twist will be introduced to the story in Cuxhaven					

STORYLINE EXAMPLES

STARDUST OF COMENIUS STORYBOARD

Storyline	Key Question	Activities	Organization	Materials	Objectives /Results
The concert		Performance of the song	Groups in front of fellow school mates		Self confidence, pride, joy, achievement
Analysis	What did we learn? How did we feel during our performance?	Individual feedback (now I know how the professionals work! I was proud of myself! ...)	Entire class		Sharing feelings in the group, finding motivation for further ideas in artistic or musical fields

5. Individual International Reflections

5.1. Belgium



As it is rare to discover new ways of teaching children with special needs, we greeted with open arms the chance to be part of this project. We looked forward to exchanging ideas, results and generally working with teachers from other countries, not to mention the opportunity for our pupils to meet people of different cultures and negotiate the language difficulties that would ensue.

Three years later and the opinion of all the teachers in our school who had the opportunity of working with storyline is unanimous – it is a tool which successfully involves the use of several disciplines in the teaching of children.

Here are some of the observations we have made:

- We found that this method, whereby the teacher introduced key questions in order for the pupils to create their storyline, resulted in the children learning from being in a situation where they had to question themselves, find the answers to those questions and find the solutions to any difficulties they experienced along the way. We also found it possible to include children with autism in this method of teaching, as their input came from their world, their imagination.
- Occasionally the children's imagination was limited and they found it difficult to detach themselves from their own life story.
- They also found it difficult at times to find the right words to express themselves.
- For the teachers it was challenging to let the children make the decisions. They are used to arriving to school with lessons pre-prepared and pass on that information to the pupils, but this format doesn't work with Storyline.

INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

It was a huge opportunity for children in our school, many who come from disadvantaged backgrounds or are institutionalised, to have a break from their difficult circumstances and at the same time learn about other nations, cultures and people. They had the chance to work with children who spoke different languages and had to learn to cope with this challenge. We were proud of their achievements.

In conclusion, we felt that we had good support from the other schools involved and were received very warmly by each country. We did our best to receive them with the same warmth. There has certainly been great respect shown by everyone involved. We shared a lot of memorable moments, which will stay with us for a long time.

Before the project we knew nothing about Storyline, during the project we learned about it and after the project it will be up to us to pass it on...

5.2. Denmark



Storebæltskolen has been involved in different Comenius projects before with positive results, so we decided to participate again. We attended a couple of Comenius seminars in Denmark, and there we heard about the possibility of working on this project with other schools on an international basis.

The Stars Project started in Denmark with a storyline course for the teachers from each participating country. It was very important and necessary for the future of the project that we all started at the same point. We also had some social activities as a group, which was good for the development and integration of the participants.

The project involved schools from six countries who must communicate between meetings by Internet. It was difficult to communicate successfully when not in the same room as our fellow project members, but we found that we worked very effectively together at our meetings in the various countries. It was very interesting to exchange experiences and to see the different schools and learn about their education systems. In addition, just visiting each other's countries and experiencing their culture was an education in itself. It was very necessary that we as a group could communicate in one language; the chosen tongue was English.

INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

In Denmark we tried to involve as many teachers as possible, we achieved this by having several of our teachers attend the workshop in Denmark, and by sending different teachers to take part in the meetings in other countries. It has been our experience that all the teachers who attended the various workshops tend to become very absorbed in the Storyline Method. We also involved different pupils on each of the trips, 13 pupils in total, so almost every second class of our school has been involved. When a group of pupils returned from a meeting, they presented their experiences to the rest of the school. Our pupils say that it was great - great to make new friends, exiting to go to another country, to taste different food, to work together and to communicate with foreigners.

Everyone can profit by Storyline no matter what their handicap. No wrong answers. Get involved with their character, and their own story. The teacher can involve different subjects: maths, history etc. the teacher can make the story go in different directions by using key questions.

It takes some time to make the characters and the place where they live. Some of our pupils have problems with using their hands, so sometimes the character doesn't look the way they wanted it to. But we think they always are very happy and proud with their product.

5.3. Estonia



Comments from teacher Kersti:

I liked the STARS project very much. Cooperation amongst students is very important and prior to the introduction of Storyline we many problems with student communications and relations in our class. Working with the storyline greatly helped the pupils in the following areas:

- Cooperate with each other
- Take other pupils into consideration
- Compare and match ideas with each other
- Planning
- Using own initiative

INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Comments on the STARS project by pupils:

- I liked communicating with foreigners. It was difficult at first – I was too scared and couldn't remember any words, but when the guests left, I would have wanted to talk more. For several days after the workshop we thought of how to say things in English.
- We managed to communicate without talking.
- I liked all the crafting activities, making things. Thinking out the story was interesting too although more difficult. It is easier to think together than alone. Listening to other people's ideas gave me more ideas of my own.
- Foreigners made different things.
- I liked finding information on the Internet and from books about other countries and I got to know new things.
- We could all be together at the disco and go hiking.

During the course of the project the students were very fixed on their goal and as the months passed, free time was being filled with more meaningful activities. The relationships between pupils became noticeably better, some of them even taking the initiative to form their own groups in order to work together.

5.4. Germany



What was our motivation to join the project?

First of all our school was already involved in several Comenius-projects which we all enjoyed very much, so we were happy to have another go with a different project. Apart from that we were interested in the subject of "Storyline" because we were curious to find out if this teaching method is suitable for our children with special learning needs.

What aspects of the Storyline method were successful for us?

- The use of open key questions was a great way to encourage pupils to train their sense of imagination and creativity, because it is not possible to give a wrong answer.

INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

- Many pupils were able to identify themselves as an important part of the story they all invented together, so they showed a higher level of motivation. Even students who don't usually like making things enjoyed creating and making their own characters.
- through the process of having made things initially by drawing on their own imagination (eg. models of a chocolate factory), the children were able to ask competent questions while visiting the real factory.
- After the students presented their results they experienced a feeling of pride, which was a huge boost to their self confidence and also a sense of relieve that they had executed this very difficult task.

What kind of challenges/problems/limitations arose?

- Sometimes it was difficult for the pupils to invent an independent storyline character, which was not related to their own personality. Their ability of abstraction wasn't developed enough.
- Other times the children were so motivated in inventing and creating their models during the first steps of their storyline, that it was easy for them to get lost which in turn made it very difficult for them to come to an end of that phase.

Which social learning experiences could we see [both teachers and students]?

- Teachers: The teachers learned how difficult it is to stand back and to accept the fact that their students have different ways to make a product or to create a story. It was wonderful to discover unexpected and surprising abilities in some of the pupils.
- Teachers: It was nice to see how the teachers encouraged each other to try out this learning method, how they helped each other and how more and more of them became interested in storyline. (An elementary step was the excellent storyline workshop the entire staff of Schule Am Meer were privileged enough to have with author and storyline expert Ulf Schwänke.)
- Students: All participating pupils experienced how motivating it was to create a story without hearing "no" from the teacher. They became more confident and inventive.
- Students: They experienced being an important member of the group, because their contribution to the story was as important as any other persons. They experienced how to work as a team rather than for themselves.
- Teachers & Students: While developing the storyline teachers and children cooperated on a level playing field. This allowed a relationship of mutual trust which influenced the over all atmosphere in the class quite positively.

5.5. Hungary



From the beginning of the project, both teachers and pupils of Gusztáv Special School were open to learning the storyline method of teaching, and we were very positive about the project. The teachers did however find it difficult to teach the required elements of our curriculum using storyline, but eventually some teachers managed to find a way to combine both standard and storyline methods. For example on learning about WW II, the children learned the actual curriculum material and then used storyline to create stories and characters that may have lived at that time. We were also able to invent a game, which helped the children learn more about the topic.

We found that children who were interested in learning this way achieved a 5 – 14% increase in their exam results, while the children who were not motivated to work in this way saw a drop of 23 – 46% in their results. As the pupils in our school are over 14 years old, we think that it might be better to start this teaching method with younger children.

This method of teaching requires a lot of planning, preparation and improvisation in comparison to classical methods. We found that storyline is particularly suited to children who have tendencies toward hyper motility as they had the chance to develop their psychomotor skill during lessons. The acting element was particularly well received!

Pupil's comments on Storyline:

- *It's fun!*
- *We can be proud of ourselves.*
- *It's easier to learn something this way than by repeating it over and over again.*
- *It's like polytechnic.*
- *It's difficult to speak.*
- *It's difficult to us the books that are needed.*

INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

Teacher's comments on Storyline:

- *It helps to avoid burnout syndrome.*
- *Even we gather new information.*
- *We experienced less behavioural problems with the pupils during the lessons.*
- *Financial support is important.*
- *It lacks discipline.*
- *It's difficult to keep up with the curriculum using this method.*

Despite the barriers we experienced, we would recommend the storyline method of teaching, especially to those looking for a challenge and / or wanting to find a way to improve the social skills of the pupil.

5.6. Ireland



The experience of Storyline for the Irish contingent was different from other countries in two important ways. Firstly we did not bring children with us. Secondly, as teacher-trainers, rather than teachers, working in St Nicholas Montessori College Ireland, Sean Griffin and I had fewer opportunities to experience Storyline with children. We did, however, manage to spread the word about Storyline among our colleagues and students, and we had some useful sessions with children in the oldest class of the school with which our college is associated, St Nicholas Montessori School. What follows is a description of our experience in the various locations, since October 2006.

Three of us went to Korsøer, Denmark in October 2006: Sean Griffin, Michael O'Connor and Sylvia Sloane, a teacher in St Nicholas Montessori School. Here, we got our first instruction in Storyline from Anne Marie Schaeffer. It was a little bit disconcerting to find that we were to learn about Storyline by doing it, and not just by listening to a lecture. But Anne Marie was a wonderful teacher, and led us throughout the week in experiencing the challenges and the fun of Storyline. There were also important business meetings, planning the direction of the project for the next three years.



INDIVIDUAL INTERNATIONAL REFLECTIONS

In April 2007, we went to Debrecen, Hungary. This time, Sean Griffin and Michael O'Connor were accompanied by Linda O'Connor, another lecturer from the college, who also had more recent experience of teaching children. Our understanding of Storyline was deepened through our participation in the workshop sessions with the children. We also had several business meetings, which clarified our aims and the direction of the project. One of the highlights of our work in Debrecen was the performance at the end of the week by each country group.

Meetings in Belgium (November 2007), Estonia (April 2008) and Germany (September 2008) followed and all were a combination of workshops, with and without children, business meetings and cultural outings.

In general, the benefits of this Comenius Project for the Irish participants have been enormous. Firstly, we learned about Storyline, its theory and its practice. From our experience in the workshops at all the above locations, and in the classroom at our school, it became obvious to us that Storyline works. With its emphasis on children's initiative, on hands-on activity and on cooperation among children, the method complements the Montessori method, which would also value these elements. We were struck, time and time again, by the energy and excitement that Storyline releases, where children's thoughts and ideas are coming so fast that they can hardly speak. But they do speak, and they learn to communicate and implement their ideas. They learn to cooperate with each other, and they take great pride in owning what they have achieved. They enjoy also, the process of recording progress from day to day, using cameras, camcorders and paper and pencil.

Secondly, as participants without children, we observed our wonderful colleagues who had brought children with them and we learned about the quality of teacher/pupil relationships in environments far from the classroom. The 24 hour commitment of the teachers to every child was remarkable, and it seemed to be based on respect for the individuality of each child. In the workshops, however, we sometimes felt that the adults did too much, both in terms of deciding what would happen and in putting the ideas into practice. Of course, everybody wants an excellent product at the end, but if Storyline is to be owned by the children, the product should be theirs, with a little help from the adults, even if the end product is less than perfect.

Thirdly, the cultural and social activities in each country were excellent. We developed wonderful relationships with all the participants and it was good to remake acquaintances every six months or so. We also got a deep insight into the culture and the beauty of each country. Tourism in each country will benefit from these exchanges in the long term.

STORYLINE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS – YES OR NO?

6. Storyline for Children with Special Needs – Yes or No?

We return now to a question posed in chapter 1: is Storyline a suitable teaching method for children with special learning needs? In our opinion it is. The reasons for our findings are as follows:

- Storyline offers a variety of ways of learning. Because of this it is possible for pupils of different social backgrounds, different levels of knowledge and spontaneity, various handicaps both physically and mentally to work together on the same topic, regardless of their special needs.



constructive working atmosphere

- Storyline can help to build a bridge between the pupils' imagination and real life facts, thus building on their comprehension in general.
- Storyline is quite motivating for pupils with special needs, as they feel actively involved in something that they themselves have created. Problems of motivation and discipline are therefore greatly reduced.



a pupil introducing his frog "Froggle"

STORYLINE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS - YES OR NO?

- Storyline offers the chance for the pupils to identify more with their own work. This in turn results in pupils being more conscious of their work and achievements.



the fanciful pink stage mentioned by Ulf in his foreword

- Storyline focuses not only on the pupils' cognitive abilities, but also on their social abilities and their emotions, developing their awareness of same.



pupils proudly present their story

STORYLINE FOR CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS - YES OR NO?

- Storyline can create a special teacher-pupil relationship where the pupils feel that they are on a more similar playing field level to their teachers. This often results in a more relaxed working atmosphere within the classroom.



teachers and pupils work positively on an equal footing

To those of you who may be interested in working with Storyline we would both encourage and recommend you to do so!



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translating

transporting visitors between hotels, schools and venues

preparing tasty meals

waving a magic wand over floors, which at the end of a day's work were strewn with paper, glitter, thread and numerous other crafting materials, ensuring that we had a clean tidy room to work in the next day

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