



# ASSESSMENT OF CURRENT CULTURAL AWARENESS ACTIVITIES OF MYSTY SCHOOLS

MyStory: Digital Storytelling Toolbox for Diversity Training in Schools  
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The following short summary is produced out of the materials of the schools taking part in the MYSTY project. MYSTY is the abbreviation of the Erasmus+ two-year cooperation project of the four schools called MyStory: Digital Storytelling Toolbox for Diversity Training in Schools. This summary will serve as a professional basis for the future cooperation of the four schools:

The Baross School from Hungary

The Regina Margherita Secondary School from Italy

The Graz International Bilingual School from Austria and

The St. Edward's School from UK.

We introduce the schools comparing their geographical and social environment, size and goals. All of them, of course, have some history and activities in dealing with cultural awareness – the main topic of the project.

## 1. BACKGROUND OF SCHOOLS

As for the geographical environment, the four schools are not largely different. A capital city and three relatively big towns site the schools. This means that all of them basically serve urban families.

There is one more important similarity: all schools work in a multicultural environment.

- the Austrians with up to 20% international families,
- the Hungarians with students from neighbouring countries and with a number of migrants,
- the English and Italian with some students from all over the world or with families born in the country but coming from different origins.

The English and the Hungarian schools have ethnic minority families as well, while the Austrian is a bilingual school. This may be the reason why language teaching has a prior interest in all the schools, English is taught everywhere with success.

At the same time the socio – economic situation of the schools are not so similar at all.

Three out of the four are public schools, whereas the English school has charitable status and a board of trustees that oversees major decisions and financial issues.

From a school with basic social and economic problems (HU) or very different economic environments (AT) to another with affluent middle-class background (UK), we find a diverse picture.

The size of the schools differs greatly. Regina Margherita school is the biggest with 2000 students and 88 classes, the others do not vary that much. They have 6 - 8 grades and 2 or 3 classes per grades. Class sizes are around 20-27, the Italian school has smaller classes too with 9 – 12 students. There are about 50 teachers working with students except Graz International Bilingual School, where there are 70 teachers.

Three out of the four schools have SEN kids – but in largely different ratio: the Italians have just 3% while the Hungarian school has 30% SEN children. The Italians teach a number of disabled pupils also.

As for technical facilities, the situation is again very varied. All schools have the technical apparatus for the project, but while in Britain almost half of the students have direct access to computers and they even have a 3D printer, the Hungarian school can provide only 1/3 of the classes with computers – in poor quality and only 1/3 of the classes have Wi-Fi access. There are IT labs or rooms in the schools and also tablets, which may be of help to the project.

Missions diverge too

- The Budapest school being a primary school put a lot of energy into basic skill building. Priority here is on primer subjects, PE and on personality development. With free time programs and after school activities they care a lot with talent building.
- The Cheltenham and Graz schools prepare for final exams, and both have a great deal of projects, and cross curricular subjects.
- The UK school has a good reputation with excellent results.
- One of the great characteristics of the AT school is the interest of the families in education that requires a high level of teaching.

As a whole, all schools seem to care a lot for the idea of diversity, cultural growth and ensure positive environment.

The structures are in correlation with the mission and size of the schools. The biggest Italian school has 9 departments and runs 5 courses and the independent British school has a fairly complicated hierarchy with six levels. On the other end of the scale, the Austrian school has no official hierarchy, it generates informal programs.

## 2. NETWORKING

Baross Gábor Primary School has a network that includes a number of institutions from local government to independent institutions such as a theatre and a cultural centre. The activities of these organizations range from family and child mental health, art based therapy and performances to lectures, trainings and informative programs. Previously they had lectures on Internet, drug prevention, educational and art therapy based project, conferences, summer programs and competitions for talented students.

The Graz International Bilingual School has connections with a University previously working with it on a number of Christian charity programs.

The Regina Margherita Secondary School works with a large network of NGOs from innovative educational strategies, programs for disadvantaged families and children, first aid centre for refugees to courses and conferences in schools to promote legality, an idea essentially coming from the presence of the Mafia. In their previous projects they have dealt a lot with social issues such as active citizenship, daily responsibilities and fighting social exclusion. As a methodology they often use art and games.

Among the four, The St. Edward's School is the only one that is totally financially reliant on fee income.

### 3. THE PREVIOUS PRACTICE REGARDING CULTURAL AWARENESS, TOLERANCE AND DIGITAL STORYTELLING

#### Baross School (Hungary)

In previous years the Baross Gábor Primary School spent a lot of time on projects tied to the diversity of nations and cultures. They worked with tales, music, dances, cuisine, traditions etc. of different cultures. They also had programs on some EQ topics, like self-awareness, tolerance and they also organized a number of competitions. In these projects, the school developed basically effective learning skills, the core competences like reading, communication, and social skills, like citizenship. Environmental issues and scientific competences also played an important part in the methodology.

Just like the number of lessons, the time spent with these activities varies from occasional to regular periods – some appear once or twice a year while others are repeated weekly. Many of them are topic or project based.

#### Graz International Bilingual School (Austria)

International thinking, cultural awareness and tolerance are the main criteria in this school's mission statement. They see these as underlying principles and attitudes of ALL their teaching. They feel free to include these issues in their everyday lessons. Especially the teachers of LANGUAGES, HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY and RELIGION design their lessons around current events and issues in society.

#### Regina Margherita Secondary School (Italy)

It is necessary to point out that Regina Margherita has been working in this field for many years. Language learning and its ties to the culture of the learnt language appears here too as a good means serving cultural awareness. Some of the projects aim at comparing verbal and non-verbal expressive forms of different cultures present in the area, which is a relevant and unique aspect. They have gone through several projects that try to help dropouts from different cultures and integrate them into work and society by using their cooking, sewing and handy skills.

#### St. Edward's School (UK)

The English school has numerous programmes where students can get into touch with or deepen their knowledge of different cultures. They also put a special emphasis on making British values known to students. For their students specialized in a subject or in a language, they have organized a great number of cultural awareness activities so far.

#### 4. PRECEDENTS HELPING MYSTY PROJECTS

No wonder these schools set the aim of fostering cultural awareness. From the data of their previous work we can see that all of them have a long story in organizing such projects.

They work with this underlying notion in all walks of school life. All of the schools have programs organized in **whole school level** such as school days, project themes and national and international projects. The Austrian school has a routine of organizing trips to the USA, to Tunisia, Spain, France and Russia and studies the countries from a new aspect each year. These international connections help pupils understand different points of view and experience and appreciate different cultures thus foster tolerance. The UK school has links with New York, Norway and Japan. The HU school has good links with schools from the neighbouring countries and all of them get in touch with migrant families.

The schools are also active in **department level** activities, such as age or study specific programmes. E.g. the UK school has special days each year when the students are able to learn more about the country whose language they learn (Spanish, French, German culture days).

Both at **school and department level**, the schools care about actual problems. They introduce key events in the wider world, considering their causes and their impacts and make pupils formulate opinions based on personal experience. The question of migration and human rights also appear on the palette of each school. This is quite natural – as mentioned above - international connections form an important part of the mission of our schools. Language learning and cultural learning are closely connected.

All schools have a social responsibility so lots of programs are organized on current affairs - civil rights, peacemaking efforts, ethnic groups, racism and stereotypes; they consider their causes and effects and our own actions. Whereas in all the schools, social issues get a special emphasis in the whole course of the school year, in the UK school a special attention is paid on questions around special issues also, like racial discrimination or e.g. understand the global impact of consumerism, or in Regina Margherita School, helping dropout women from different cultures to integrate in the new job reality by using their cooking, sewing and handy skills.

The UK school is especially specialized in **subject level** activities (e.g. languages). They also have Cultural topics e.g. Antigóné, Olympic Games, sports, but also history, art and crafts, poetry, ecology.

About **class level** programs, naturally we collected much fewer information, but just like the attitude of the schools, the teachers are also definitely active at this area too.

Although it is much easier to organize cultural programs for elder pupils, Baross School let the youngest ones also try themselves. Most programs here are for 8-14-year-old pupils. The Austrian school also gives more chances to the elder ones, whereas the Italian school organizes programs with no regard on age. The UK school offers most of the programmes on department level, so they care about the needs of their students this way, too.

As for the length of the programs the most varied is probably the British school, they have cultural programmes even for the summertime. The Italians also vary the length from two periods a week to two periods a day. The Austrians work with longer projects and the Hungarians plan more on an annual basis.

The question of methodology is very interesting. All schools use art especially drama, Italians adding to it the video, films, photo and handcrafts also. The UK school also gives chances for performances that give

a special flavour to the use of art. Oral work seems to be very popular, the Hungarians have a speaking circle each day, the British like having debates, discussions and presentations also just like the Italians who like having dance and music shows from different nations. Cooperative methods are characteristic for the Hungarian and the Austrian schools, while projects appear in the methodology of all the schools. Games appear in Budapest and Cheltenham, whereas laboratory work and research appear in Italy first of all. Conferences appear in Italy and UK, and experimental learning - like student exchange programs, visiting NGOs, making interviews with experts - is mainly relevant in Austria and the UK.

Digital technology appears as classified in UK and Austria Schools, but all of the schools do have the minimum for the projects.