



ASSESSMENT OF NATIONAL AND SCHOOL CURRICULUM ON CULTURAL AWARENESS IN FOUR COUNTRIES

MyStory: Digital Storytelling Toolbox for Diversity Training in Schools
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MYSTY Consortium
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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 ear cooperation project of the four schools named as 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 form Hungary

The Regina Margherita Secondary School from Italy

The Graz International Bilingual School from Austria and

The St. Edward's School form UK.

We studied the National Curriculum of the countries, where there is one at all. Also we had a look at the schools' own curricula studying the similarities and differences of the central or local regulations. Of course, all the schools put cultural awareness into the focus of their activities, but the factual realization may differ greatly.

1. NATIONAL CURRICULA

Three of the four countries have a compulsory National Curriculum for state schools. In England non state schools do not have to follow this regulation. Italian regulation just sets the subjects as compulsory and a non-state institution – with projects and materials - may help Italian teachers to deal with diversity at school and with the overcoming potential barriers which are built around it. The Curricula everywhere set the goals, have a content regulation and also give hints on the pedagogical attitude and didactic principles though these are thought to be rather an orientation. There are assessment test in all four countries, in UK at 2nd and 6th grade, in [Austria at grade 4th and 8th](#), in Hungary at 4-6-8-10 grades. Italians have a test at the end of elementary school (5th grade), another at the end of scuola media (8th grade) that are compulsory, and another at the end of secondary school.

In most schools the NC cares deeply about the question of cultural awareness. Literature, History, Geography, Languages, Arts always are included among the subject areas where soft skills are dealt with.

An interesting characteristic feature of the Hungarian Curriculum is that it does not speak about subjects, rather divides material into subject areas. Most of these directly or indirectly deal with the

notion we focus on here. At the same time another compulsory regulation, the Frame Curriculum sets factual data to share with students on different stages.

The Hungarian National Curriculum conveys the cultures of domestic nationalities, transmits the universal culture and marks the moral value for intellectual and emotional sensibility. In it an important role is given to the Hungarian national traditions, It develops the national self-awareness including the Hungarian nationalities. It also enhances our European values. The document gives heed to the extensive questions which affect the world, mainly focusing on the sustainability and our responsibility.

Cultural diversity is mentioned in several parts of the Austrian curriculum also. Already among the goals we find the development of an open-minded attitude, respect and acceptance of cultural and personal differences. The curriculum calls for respectful communication and problem solving skills without any cultural, racial, political or other prejudices. Cultural and linguistic differences and multilingualism are seen as an asset rather than a problem. The experiences of students of different cultural, social and linguistic backgrounds offer rich opportunities for dealing with important issues in society. The religious-ethical-philosophical dimension of the curriculum focuses on the students' search for a meaningful life in a humane future to be supported in the schools. Students should develop judgement- and reasoning competences that will help them lead a meaningful life and master difficult situations. and encouraged to develop independent and socially responsible attitudes. Mutual understanding and respect of individuals and their personal choices in life are to be fostered on the basis of democratic values. All school subjects contribute to developing these goals in cross-curricular projects and activities, too.

In Italy cultural awareness, empathy, tolerance and national identity are all cross goals included directly in compulsory subjects, since they are considered fundamental for the education of the citizens of the world. Due to the increasing number of immigrants, the Minister of Education has developed the so called BES (special educational needs) aiming at reducing social, cultural and economic disadvantage.

Cultural awareness in subject areas

As for the subjects cultural awareness appears at all points. UK regulation on cultural awareness focuses on giving factual data organized in school subject, others include this notion as an overall attitude formation.

History gives a chance to develop a historical and political awareness leading to an understanding of different cultural values and a positive attitude towards other choices and ways of life present in society. This general phrasing can be made more factual e.g. in the UK curriculum: Racial discrimination, Nazi persecution of Jews. Civil Rights movement in the USA are all points to be taught.

In the UK Curriculum, Geography also enters into the game intensively. Case studies from around the world, the question of high and low income or the awareness of challenges faced by differing standards of living could be good examples.

Teaching languages is closely tied to teaching facts and feelings about cultures. Not just facts but feelings also. Understanding cultural stereotypes, or finding a common core of values and behaviours can be a daily routine. Awareness of current affairs is particularly promoted in the upper year grades.

Art conveys the thoughts and feelings with great intensity. All schools take the chance to convey the notions through moving, simulation, theatre forms, or thoughts through studying ancient drama e.g. Antigone.

Empathy, national identity, tolerance

While e.g. the notion of empathy appears in the UK curriculum under the subjects, in the Hungarian Curriculum it is mentioned among the overall goals and is subject to be used in all possible moments in school life. With the UK logic empathy is noted in History lessons e.g. sensitive handling of morally abhorrent periods of history, like holocaust or repugnant practices e.g. sacrifice in the Roman arena. At the same time, Hungarian history lessons also deal with these topics but the Curriculum does not mention literally empathy in connection with these historical moments. The same happens in other subjects too, like Geography, or religious studies. It is essential that an understanding of

empathy is central to seeing the world from the perspective of diverse religions or from the perspective of various cultures and the use of different languages.

In the Hungarian Curriculum there are passages phrasing a requirement to make students be able to collaborate, feel empathy and practice assistance. The requirement to know how to make connection with others at his age and possesses proper cooperative skills is at a stake. The National Curriculum sets targets for societal sensitivity towards underprivileged and disabled, forms helping behaviour of those who get acquainted with these groups and their lives through personal experience learning.

In the Austrian regulation there is general reference to these notions as well. They state that the dignity, freedom and equality are important pillars and general educational aims in Austrian schools. Students are to be encouraged to critically challenge social inequality regardless of their social, religious and cultural background. Self-respect and respect for different ways of life should be tackled as well. They put a lot of practical skills into language lessons stating that the choice of topics in language learning should help foster open-mindedness and understanding social contexts. Important goals of foreign language classes are conflict management, problem solving skills and peace. They are ready to react to the diversity of students and talents by trying to discover the learners' potentials and help develop talents regardless of the social background of students. The Austrian History curriculum aims at developing critical attitudes of tolerance and respect towards different ideologies as well as the will for peace as requirements political action.

Digital skills

Digital skills in the UK get a special importance. They are integrated in all of the major subjects mainly in project work, or the use of multimedia in the lessons, independent research, ICT projects or digital based controlled assessment. Language lessons gives chance to use digital skills in e.g. producing responses to texts and situations and presenting ideas and information.

In Hungary the societal role of the media and Internet, its operation and develop the critical media consciousness is emphasized. Digital competence involves the technologies and their assertive, critical and ethical usage.

In Austria it is stated that the innovative technologies and ICT as well as mass media are becoming more and more important in everyday life. Students should use ICT to produce independent, age-

appropriate learning products. The learners should be encouraged to use ICT to explore appropriate methods searching information in various databases and online sources. Learners should develop independent strategies for searching information in reference books and databases.

In Italy digital skills are compulsory for students 11 year and above. The level of deepening depends on the type of school. Anyway the Minister of Education in Italy is trying to improve digital skills by financing courses and giving funds - when available- to replace obsolete technologies.

2. SCHOOL CURRICULA

School curricula are built on the National Curriculum and cultural awareness appear accordingly.

All school focus on cultural awareness questions, so in the school curriculum everywhere there is abundant data collected in the different subjects. St Edward's found a way to integrate the topics in a number of separate subjects, whereas the in Gratz they rather collected the aspects in a non-subject way. They use for instance the phrase Critical Thinking for finding constructive ways of criticism of themselves and the world at large.

There are two subjects that all schools cultivate in this aspect enthusiastically: Art and History. Art, of course, covers a wide range, from singing other nations' songs to constructing a still life from cultural objects – well, the chances are endless. History at the same time gives direct links to this topic: students are supposed to compare different lifestyles, ideas, values and relational styles and learn acceptance and tolerance from the comparison.

In History lessons kids are faced with the fact how cultures change through time. Studying ancient traditions and rituals of the Roman and Greek cultures or the Anglo Saxon Normans give as much chance to think over the similarities and differences among cultures as studying the religious practices, treatment of prisoners of war of our days. This process encourages the respect for cultural diversity and so kids may become open to their own culture and that of others.



Foreign languages play an important part in this issue in all the schools. In the lessons, meeting the traditions or understanding the lyrics of songs help to be constantly aware of cultural diversity and discuss this whenever relevant – just to mention two of the possible techniques.

Though under different names, all schools have something similar: a subject that is dedicated to some sort of social studies that ferments social responsibility, personal experience – autonomy, team skills, dealing with current affairs and social awareness.

Empathy

If we want to foster tolerance, empathy has essential importance. In the world of personal relationships understanding moral and ethical categories develop orientation and promote other's acceptance. An understanding of empathy is central to seeing the world from the perspective of diverse religions. Empathy - whether personal or cultural - is central to many of the teaching materials e.g. in History morally challenging issues like the persecution of heretics may all be as important than the contemporary issues of facing refugees and migrants.

National Identity

The question of national identity appears directly in the description of the British and the Hungarian school. It is important as a notion that help make kids understand the nationalities who live in the given country. Introducing traditions and celebrations of the minorities and support their acceptance help understanding other peoples' culture and traditions. Understanding the language is important for the Hungarian national community, just as much as the language for other communities.

Tolerance

To develop tolerance students should recognize social exclusion and its forms, racial theory and reject them as they see their consequences. In art lessons, exposed to views and visual ideas from other cultures, or in Geography lessons, exposed to views and opinions from a range of nationalities and backgrounds. Understanding others opinion, accept and confront them, observe similarities and

differences lead to the respect to others and develop the social sensitivity and personal responsibility too. These notions appear in all schools' programmes.

Digital skills

Students use digital mediums in every subject and use the modern IT technologies efficiently in all schools. We can work on recognizing manipulation in mass media texts and improve the skills to manage them. We can use Internet and learn how to cope with dangers of virtual communities, develop the creative and critical Internet usage and increase Internet security in different activities. ICT may help in using data models to simulate real life situations. We must help students to detect risks online (e.g. cyberbullying, grooming, radicalization) as well as problematic content (e.g. violence and obscenity). While developing the ability to communicate and collaborate with others using digital technologies and media, we should pay attention to grow the ability to understand and uphold personal and legal rights, including the rights to privacy, intellectual property, freedom of speech and protection from hate speech. All this is phrased in all school curricula.

Other relevant skills

We should support the European identity and enhance it, as the Hungarian Curriculum states. Debating skills widely used and encouraged within and outside the classroom – says the UK school curricula. In the Italian school's idea of the citizenship and the growth of responsible consumers can also be listed here.

There is a definite will on the sides of the four school to cover the development goals the most independently from the subject areas. They all challenge students through the most different contents to fulfil the requirements of the affective objectives and that of the national curriculum at the same time. Some create special lessons for it e.g. the Baross School speaking circle, others have lots of cross-curriculum occasions like the Italians.

3. MYSTY CHALLENGES

Regarding the possible threats and weaknesses in using digital storytelling in schools, all MYSTY countries filled out the MYSTY Challenges questionnaire. This questionnaire consisted of twelve questions about the problems schools may face with: difficulties regarding the school curriculum, the available digital tools, the teachers' attitude, the dynamics between pupils, etc. First partners marked each question from 1 to 5 representing how big challenge the given topic means for the schools in a certain country (1 not at all; 2 a little; 3 medium; 4 quite; 5 very much), and after they could describe the problem as detailed as they wanted.

According to the results each country has some difficulties connected with the teachers' digital skills (Italy, Austria) or their attitude towards digital technology (Hungary, England). Therefore in each school there can be some teachers who don't want to use this method, because the usage of digital tools is too complicated, uncomfortable or strange for them. In most of the cases they are elderly pedagogues who are used to using traditional methods in their daily work. Additionally, Austria noticed that sometimes neither the curriculum nor the school leadership supported the new kinds of initiatives, experiential learning methods, because it is assumed to need too much energy and coordination. In Hungary children can have difficulties with the usage of modern technology too, but fortunately they are really glad to have the opportunity to gather new knowledge in this field. On the other hand, usually there are some other teachers in each school who are more than happy to discover new methods, teach with digital tools and ready to help their colleagues if needed – as Italians and Hungarians highlighted. In England it is essential to ensure an IT technician to be available to assist in these lessons.

An additional problem in Austria and Hungary that their schools don't have as many IT devices as they would need and/or they don't have the proper software. This lack makes the organization of the work harder. In Italy, in England and in Hungary it also requires extra effort from the teachers side to find enough time for project tasks because of the strictness of the curriculum. Despite these suboptimal circumstances teachers always find a way to have their dreams come true: in some cases they can form smaller working groups within pupils, or (for example in Hungary) MYSTY project runs as an out of class activity within the whole-day-long schooling system.

The third group of the Mysty's challenges is related to children's feelings: pupils are not always happy to share their personal stories with peers and also sharing a deeply personal story may bring up a lot of emotions. England wrote that during the video making process a lot of questions and

emotions had raised on migration and multiculturalism – quite hot topics nowadays. Austria noticed that the sharing was emotionally painful for those pupils who experienced violence or particularly sad happenings in their life. In Hungary teachers had to face with similar situations. All partners agreed that the teacher had a role to play in meditating when sensitiveness emerge. The cooperation of the teacher group can help those who have emotional or cultural disapproval. Stories can generate conflicts and this has to be considered as part of the learning process. The proper attitude and the knowledge of the teachers can built a safe atmosphere where children can listen each other with empathy and can share as much as they would like.

To sum up the findings, schools may face with physical, material challenges (lack of time, place, tools), with general pedagogical issues (national and school curriculum, the attitude towards the new ways of learning,) and with personal pedagogical challenges (how to deal with the emotions and conflicts, how to build a safe ambience). To introduce digital storytelling into a school requires investment, openness and self-reflection and at the same time it provides a lot of possibilities to experience new ways of teaching and learning and improvement in the pedagogical approach.