

# **Erasmus+ project „The Children of Sheherazade“**

## **Greece – Year 1 (2021–22) – Storyteller’s Report**

**School:**

**ELIX (organization of non formal education support for refugee and migrant children)**

**Storytelling organization:**

**Centre for the study and Dissemination of Myths and Folktales-Mythos**

**Facilitator (Storyteller): Maria Vrachionidou**

### **1. What I noticed positively about the project**

The children in my group were mainly ones with great vulnerabilities, because of their traumatic personal stories and their environment and with big language, behavioral and socializing difficulties; thus, I was very anxious and doubtful in the beginning how the project could work for them (or, how I would be able to handle all these difficulties so that the children could get maximum benefit from the project). It turned out that especially such groups of refugee children, who have rarely stimuli for cultural and other project involvement, could benefit maximum by the project. The children liked it a lot and they were waiting for “the day of storytelling”. Even, one of the children who was usually absent at the school, told their teacher that he tries though “to come every Wednesday because he doesn’t want to miss the storytelling session”!

The stable structure of the folk wonder tales helped children to gain gradually stability in their mind and expression as well. They learned that there is a structured way the story develops and this made them feel sure and stressless. They also could gradually identify themselves with the heroes and heroines of the tales, especially when a tale came from one’s country, and it was very smoothing and encouraging for them that the hero always “lives happily ever after”, no matter how many difficulties and adventures he/she has to face. Similar positive results had the creation of a special space in the classroom when telling the story with the use of the named “tale pillows”.

I remarked that the children gradually reacted and participated energetically in the tale: They asked questions about the heroes and their actions, they gradually started express themselves more openly, they shared likes and dislikes. They also gradually expressed more openly through drawings (some of these drawings, I think, are really a mirror of their souls ...)

Another positive point was the games: As far as the story could not be, with this group, too long (no more than 15 –18’ max.), I introduced a lot of “warming” or “closing” games, which turned to play a much more important than “warming” and “closing” role. The children liked these games very much (some simple games had, to my surprise, unexpected success but also good results for the pupils). These games helped them express themselves (i.e. the game with a red plastic heart-shaped ball which one should hold and answer to a given, positive orientated, question, helped them a) to express themselves b) to built positive futures for themselves c) to be tolerant and cooperative.)

Moreover, in some cases, the told stories and the subsequent conversation impressed also some adult refugee persons who were present at the classroom (i.e. a young Afghan male translator).

## **2. What I noticed negatively about the project**

The most negative aspect in the implementation of the project was the instability of the participating pupils' number. Some children left the project unexpectedly, as their families moved to other countries; some others moved in distant houses (because the state house rent subsidy was suddenly cut) and it was impossible for them, afterwards, to come to the school; some others came on an unstable basis, because their parents were busy and couldn't lead them to the school :the courses at this support afternoon school are optional, not obligatory as the morning state school; subsequently, usually the children were very tired at that hour of the day and they had less concentration and patience.

The big language and social difficulties of the children were of course an obstacle too, but not as big as I believed in advance.

Sometimes other persons present in the classroom (teachers of other classes, translators, pupils who were not part of the project but were studying of doing something different) were distractive.

The collaboration with the school representatives had also faced me with some difficulties.

Finally, covid created problems too: many times the session was cancelled because some of the pupils or the personnel were tested positive with covid. Also, during the whole session, during the whole year, everyone, including me, had to wear a face mask; when I was telling the story I changed it with a transparent full face mask (which is even more annoying...), so that the children could see my mouth and face expressions.

## **3. How, from my perspective, the children with difficulties during class time profited from this project and how this was noticeable**

According to my impression, the project is beneficiary especially for the children who have difficulties and few opportunities to be part of such a project. Let me give some examples:

One participant, a girl who has a pathological problem of language articulation and who, because of this, was usually silent, liked so much the tales, that from the second month, she tried to forget her problem and started commenting on the story and on the hero's actions.

Another child, who has ADHD and at the first session could not stay still for more than 90 seconds, managed, after some sessions to stay still even for ten minutes!

Some children who were at first aggressive, managed, to some extent, through or at least during the project, to be polite, calm and friendly with their classmates.

Some children's drawings were very expressive and imprinting of their emotions or their vulnerabilities. For example, a boy at first always complained that he didn't know

what to draw; he copied his classmates' ideas and drew only at the very low part of the paper, very small figures and only with one or two colors, usually black ones. He started though, gradually and with my encouragement, to have some drawing ideas, to draw some figures also on the middle part of the paper and to use sometimes more colours.

Some children's creativity improved. For example they were inventive and suggested to put new elements in the games, to play them differently or to add some new rules.



Their language level improved. The repeated and easy vocabulary of the tales and of the games helped them a lot. Some of them started gradually to ask some unknown words of the tales. Others interrupted my telling to comment on the plot or to add a detail. Once a boy, usually very silent, got so excited by the story that he said he was ready to retell it!

The project also helped the children to build self trust and confidence and to find solutions in problems. Let me give an example: During the telling of the tale "Lotilko's wings" I was asking them questions about the plot or about their opinion and some of their answers were amazing. When I asked them "what do you think Lotilko should do now (Lotilko, the hero, had lost his wings and he was left far away from home) a boy, who usually has very low self esteem, answered: "Why doesn't he try to go home on foot?".

The sessions helped also a child who was not part of the project, a Ukrainian boy who appeared in the classroom in April, as he came to Greece with his mother trying to escape the sudden war. He usually didn't participate in the storytelling, because he didn't speak a word of Greek and for other reasons. But when, after some sessions, he understood that the group played an easy game which had only two Greek words, he jumped in the group and asked to play too.