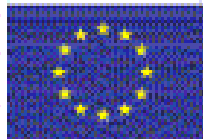


## Documentation “Stay or get away” 2001 - 2003

On this pages you can find some impressions from our project: some pictures, some fragments of documents, some method of how we worked, to prepare the text of the theater play “John’s Story” which was the summary of three years of work. The real and most important fruits of our activity stayed in the memory of the people who actively took part in the project and those who were the audience. Now it is time to say thank you to those who did it and those who let us doing it.



Bildung und Kultur

**Sokrates**  
Comenius

**interkunst**

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## **Steps on the way to “Stay or get away”**

### **Step no. 1: The idea**

The idea is to use the theatre as a learning method. Where the theatre is not a main aim to teach but a medium. The main subject should be common for all and generally known. In our case it was different kinds of violence. Pupils were supposed to research it using interviews and later to transform this knowledge into theatrical form. During this transformation they were changing the position from passive receivers of the information to active rolls of somebody who passes it on. In this moment an emotional process of learning happens to those who play and to those who watch it. Others aspects are positive side effects of the main process: cultural exchange, getting to know journalistic and theatre work as well as improving language abilities.

### **Step no. 2: Choosing the schools**

People who are taking part in the project should come from different countries, school models and not the same social background. More differences make bigger curiosity. To support this variety, the number of the partners must be larger than two.

### **Step no. 3: Meeting with the teachers–coordinators.**

Teachers and organizers who are coordinating the project meet together to speak about the main idea and method as well as about technical solutions and timetable. It is important to analyze the differences of the interior school's organization of every partner.

### **Step no. 4: The teachers inform the pupils and build the groups**

Teachers inform the pupils about the possibility of taking part in the project. Participation must be voluntary and absolutely not only limited to those students who have theatre interests and skills.

### **Step no. 5: The groups inform the schools about their activities**

The community of every school must be informed about the project. The form of doing it depends on the groups. It can be for example some events which are connected with the subject, board bulletin, etc.

### **Step no. 6: Beginning of contacts between the groups, by Internet**

The main communication between the groups happens by Internet on the web page specially arranged for it. There are placed general information about the project and about each groups as well as results of work. The web cam can also be a tool of the communication.

### **Step no. 7: Interviews**

With the help of interviews students can collect direct necessary information concerning the subject of the project, in our case - with victims of violence and aggressors. Students are going to be professionally prepared to make the interviews. The method and the person who does this should be the same for all groups.

### **Step no. 8: Theatre work on the collected material**

Interviews will be analyzed. The material in it is the base for theatre improvisation. The same director for all groups coordinates the work. This person is going to visit all groups a few times leading the rehearsals, giving advice and tasks for further work on improvisations, new interviews, new questionnaires.

**Step no. 9: First meeting of all groups, rehearsals for the performance**

After few months of work in groups the representatives of them meet for a first time in a neutral place to prepare the performance which is also going to be played there. It should be made in a few days and be composed from scenes which are brought by every group and from new improvisations. It is important not to limit the spontaneity of young people by strong interference from the director's side, who is supposed to organize the action, leaving the creation to the students.

**Step no. 10: Evaluation of the past period and plans for the future**

During the first meeting teachers- coordinators meet too, one of each group. They use the time to evaluate the passed period in the form of a protocol and to speak about plans for the future.

**Step no. 11: Continuation of the work**

After the first meeting groups continue the work as they did before, individually in the places. The new element is the preparation for the tour. To this belongs making the publicity by contacting local medias, preparing the place of performance and the program of staying.

**Step no. 12: The tour**

The tour is a second meeting and a closing element of the project. During this time the performance is going to be shown in all places where the groups come from. The audience are students from the same school, parents, teachers and other guests too. Our goal was to play also in the places and for the audience which allegedly has nothing to do with the group, but with the subject. In our case it was a prison in Germany and in Poland.

**Step no. 13: The questioner for audience who saw the performance and the analyze**

The aim of the questioner is to check the effect which had the performance and the discussion on the audience, with division of students and adults. It can be carried out few months after the performance in this way to see how much stayed in the memory of the audience. The statistic analysis compares the results between different schools, countries, etc.

## **The method in the practice**

The pattern of the work was clear and the same for every partner. In some steps we wanted to achieve a result in the form of the theatre performance. It was in turn: formation of the groups, the training concerning Interviews and the realization of them. This was supposed to create the base for theatre work. Everyone would get the help to be able to go on with the work on his own. This process was designed for finding new ways of learning. Indeed, while realizing this plan all of us learned a lot about the subject of the project, but also about solving many problems which the reality brings. We learned about ourselves, about each other and from each other.

The method was the same but the people were different. Anyway we wanted to have this diversity of countries, schools, social backgrounds, ages. This contradiction was not making the work easier, but the effects of it were richer. Now we also knew that it was very important to do it together. The first contacts when we were visiting the places made strong and clear impressions. We got to know with whom we would have to do.

In Trotha Gymnasium Halle waited a big group of pupils from grammar school for us. They were easy to contact, bright, self-confident, and loud. They had own opinions, we discussed a lot. They had different motivation to do the project. Some of them were interested in theater the others didn't want to play but the journalistic work was for them a challenge, there were some who wanted to take part in the organization. Representatives from Halle took one more duty although in the school they had a lot of them.

The other German partner comes from Wittenberg, but it was different there. First of all, it was quiet. We knew that it was a school with a lower level, with younger children, that here the social worker (multiplicator) built this group from some outsiders. So we were prepared, but anyway this silence and even avoiding the eye contact were bothering. Slowly we started to speak, it was almost impossible in English. After some time, it was easier, then they showed the first improvisations. In this moment all of us who were watching this were amazed by what they showed and how they showed it. That was simply great and it was not the last time when they surprised us with their creativity and courage.

The group in Poland was the biggest one. They were very curious about what was going to happen and ready to start immediately to work. On the way stood one problem which was the communication. First of all, it was their opinion, but in a few hours, during the first meeting they changed their mind. They just started to speak, "I speak English, I can't believe it" said someone. At last they learn it in the school and to start to use it was only a question of "believing". In Braniewo the subject of our project was the most visible, what doesn't mean that in other places problems do not exist, we discovered it later. Alcoholism, unemployment, the frontier town situation were main things we spoke about. Most of the pupils had the personal experience concerning to it, but being in this situation they managed to keep good mood and to stay enthusiastic.

For the fourth partner who was the Munkebjergskolen in Odense in Denmark the problems from Poland were almost unknown, that's what they said on the beginning. It's true it looked quite different there, more safe, at least the economical situation of

them. After they found some more elements in common with the others and also some new. Coming almost one year later to the project, they had a bit more difficult situation. Nevertheless, they made up for the lost time. The special sensitivity they brought could be a result from discovering the problems around them which they never saw before or understanding the position of the others.

This young people made up our group. They got support from specialists and their teachers who had to learn also how to continue the work. The first phase with Frank was teaching how to make interviews and how to analyse them. The base of the method was the same for all partners with some adaptations to the local situations. Schools in Germany and Denmark could collect more material about the situation of foreigners in their countries, in Braniewo the number of foreigners was minimal, but there they could research other aspects of the subject. The experiences from different school were exchanged afterwards in the Internet.

In the moment when we started to try to involve the theatre method in to it, we paid attention to not “translate” it literally, but rather to let be inspirited by the stories of other people. We didn’t want to do something abstract. Everything was supposed to stay in the reality, but another one. In this way the pupils created the world of John and the “John’s story”. For us it was important to let them do it by themselves, sometimes giving advices or even to provoke them. We wanted to be surprised by their creativity. We didn’t want to make this mistake which happens often in youth or school theatres when adult directors try to realize their ideas and ambition using for it young people. Sometimes the effect of such work looks like a small child who is dressed by the parents in old-fashioned closes for adults. This we want to avoid. The director should adapt himself to the youth, not in the other way. Our group managed to create this imaginary and in the same moment “real” world even without any costumes or stage design. It was enough that they were consciously on the stage sharing this what they learned with almost one thousand people in the audience and after speaking about it.

The discussion after every performance provoked the audience to exchange the opinions with us. We spoke first in small groups, there people were talking very openly, sometimes about very personal experiences. After this part all together were summing up this what happened in small groups. Unfortunately, in this open forum many things were going lost. Sometimes we heard something opposite. Using the questionnaires, we collected the opinions of the audience and checked how much stayed in the memory. A computer program – „publiQuest“ specially prepared for it, systematized the results.

What the young people, who took part in the project, learned is very important and we can divide it on few aspects. Which are the knowledge about new disciplines like theatre, journalism, they proofed language skills, learned how to work with the people from different countries. They learned this without test and exams system which they know from the school, it was an emotionally way of learning an exchanging of information. The teachers observed the whole process and actively took part in it. This happened in this project that was a part of life for all during three years. Let us hope that this experience will be useful also after this time.

## Elements of good practice

In this project we made young people from different countries meet who have different social backgrounds and not the same age. This heterogeneous group didn't come together immediately. The meeting was preceded by a long preparation process they had to do in their own towns. Every one of these groups was mostly larger at the beginning of this process, but not every person wanted to wait to the final of the project which was common preparation of the performance and the tour.

There was demanded a lot of engagement. Of course, together with the teachers we were watching over this that it was not happening at the expense of learning at the school. The activity in "Stay or get away" was even stimulating students to make bigger progress than they usually did. One of the examples was speaking English. Already during the preparation, they had to use this language much more than usually. For some of them it was the first time to use it in practice and to evaluate how important it can be in real life. When they met, the process of learning and breaking the psychological borders was rapid. Those who at the very beginning refused even try to speak English managed after a short time, to communicate. It happened because of the huge curiosity about each other and also because of very intensive theatre work where communication is necessary. The young people activated themselves in many others fields. First of all, through some events which they organized in their own schools, they informed their friends and teachers about the projects, often asking the question concerning the subject of the project, trying to research the local situation. This and methodically conducted interviews with victims of violence and aggressors had to be translated in theatre language and expressed in forms of short scenes which after were the base for the preparation of the final performance. This mixture of researching, journalism and theatre was a new experience how to learn more about their own surroundings and problems connected with it and how to face it.

It was also demanded a lot of courage to stand on the stage and to say something to the audience, in the performance where there was no chance to hide behind a costume or some decoration. There was only the stage, often very fast arranged in "real" not decorated places and the young people how they really are. They made this performance democratically deciding what should be in it and how to show it. "There was a lot of fun to do it, but also a lot of work", we often heard from members of the project, that's why the public could enjoy the performance, sometimes laughing, sometimes becoming sad and never staying indifferent.

After the performance there was always time for discussion with the audience. There we spoke about what had just happened on the stage and what we experienced in real life. Teachers who saw the performance learned to use more practical examples to interest the pupils in the problems that violence creates, to use acting more often, to be busier with this subject in the school and at home, to have more patience.

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## Summing-up

In this project we made young people from different countries meet who have different social backgrounds and not the same age. This heterogeneous group didn't come together immediately. The meeting was preceded by a long preparation process they had to do in their own towns. Every one of these groups was mostly larger at the beginning of this process, but not every person wanted to wait to the final of the project which was common preparation of the performance and the tour.

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This aspect of the knowledge of English knowledge's was only a kind of a side effect. The young people activated themselves in many others fields. First of all, through some events which they organized in their own schools, they informed their friends and teachers about the projects, often asking the question concerning the subject of the project, trying to research the local situation. This and methodically conducted interviews with victims of violence and aggressors had to be translated in theatre language and expressed in forms of short scenes which after were the base for the preparation of the final performance. This mixture of researching, journalism and theatre was a new experience how to learn more about their own surroundings and problems connected with it and how to face it.

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After the tour, which ended the whole project, most of the students did not stop their activity. They went on doing things of their own on local ground using the experience from Stay or get away. The public saw that the young people could express their own opinion in original form trying in this way to solve the problems which are around them.

## **Impressions from the tour “Stay or get away”, 27 March - 4 April 2003**

We had very good performances in Halle and Wittenberg. All these parents, teachers, friends gave a lot of adrenalin for the actors. I had to find ways to structure the discussion. In Wittenberg morning we had 180 pupils sitting in 10 groups (classes), together with their teachers. The whole space was full of circles with chairs, very loud, very crazy. At the end one of each group stand up on his chair to say the resume. It was like a performance: Having fear to speak in English to all the audience they learned by doing immediately to enjoy speaking free to all the people, one made a rap song about the resume of his group. In one group was a teacher who was not agreed. She told me several times that it is nonsense to give a resume at the end. I forgot to separate the teachers from the pupils during the discussion.

To play in the prison in Raßnitz was for everybody impressive. All 90 prisoners were attentive during the whole performance. In the discussions, divided in houses, came a lot of stuff up. One of the group of the hardest boys told that they expected to see a performance against racism and they were prepared to disturb and to argue against. But now they saw crime and violence, things that everybody from them knows very well. The director of the prison was very happy too. Before leaving he hold a speech for us, telling that he saw how important this project was for his guys, that he is happy to use all these stories in the daily social work with them.

The performance went down when we played it in the morning in Odense. Everybody was lazy, played short, nearly no music between the scenes possible. We discussed this situation two hour before the evening performance; the polish assumed that the Germans don't feel to play good anymore, outside of Germany, without their parents and teachers. Arek had a long speech, he explained the importance why and how to behave on stage, it was an impressive circle. The performance in the evening went to be very sad. Some people from the audience cried, most of them were adults.

The performance in the Humlehavekolen in Odense was an extremely good experience. The kids were loud, curious and attentive. They reacted much more emotional in comparison to the Danish kids the day before. The teachers had young age, were like friends of the pupils. We had a great performance and some of the discussion groups got deep into the theme.

Both performances in Braniewo went very well, the followed discussions showed a lot; about to be ashamed to speak about problems, parents got to learn a lot about education, listening to the youth, to be more proud on them.

In the audience in the prison in Braniewo next day were sitting 40 prisoners, on the wall standing 6 guards and 8 from us. Everybody had his exact plays. The performance went fantastic, the discussion too. One said there is no need to show such a performance in a prison, it is better to show in schools. Another said the opposite. They discussed openly about prevention, about violence. After they left, we were informed by the prison stuff, that they made an experiment; first time they brought together murders and sexual abusers in one room.

Everybody from the group was happy to perform in Olsztyn on a real stage. It worked very well, still rehearsals were needed. In the discussion the social workers asked about the therapeutic effect for the actors. One female social worker was sure that a woman wrote the play; she could not understand that the group wrote the play with the help of a “male” director. She still could not believe.

I asked them if they know similar problems of violence in their own town, institutions, homes – but nobody answered.