# IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE

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Here we are at the end of our journey in the marvel(lous) world of comics. We have seen together how language teachers, trainers and educators can use these wonderful tools in their class activities to enhance English language learning in a creative and innovative way.

Now, it is high time that we shared with you, our resourceful readers, several examples of good practices, experiences and opinions of both the partners who worked with enthusiasm and commitment inside this project and of the teachers involved in the field tests together with their students.

## Our stories in a nutshell

YuzuPulse, the 'EdComix' project's coordinator from France, provides solutions to the problems and challenges which arise when creating comics, especially for learners with SLDs. If you tackle everything with a positive mindset and you are open to innovation, you will see that comics can become reliable allies and trusted friends in language classes.

Areadne's first story comes from Greece in the form of a witty reflective journal of an English teacher's experience while creating comic-based activities for 24 lower secondary school students to engage them in the language class. The second journal is written by a language trainer who tailored a creative course for 10 teachers focusing on comics creation and shared with us this experience.

Babel Idiomas used comics in online learning to teach English to young learners with a special focus on students with dyslexia. The Spanish students from both groups developed communicative and social skills, together with reading, writing and thinking. They really enjoyed creating comics and would like to repeat this activity more often.

Citizens in Power (CIP) has promoted the digital module for English teachers who enthusiastically appreciated this learning resource for its accessibility and effectiveness. The story about innovatively teaching English with comics in Cypriot classes and the challenges encountered by either the teacher or the students involved in the workshops. All in all, a great experience!

LogoPsyCom, the Belgian partner, interviewed two experts in speech therapy with different background and experiences. They offer important advice and ready-to-use information for educators who wish to use comics as an inclusive pedagogical tool. Read these interviews to find guidance if you work with children with learning difficulties, they are very inspiring.

'Mihai Băcescu' Technical College involved in the lessons and workshops many Romanian students coming from disadvantaged groups or with special learning needs, who were encouraged to actively participate in the comic-based activities. Find out about how enthusiastic teachers and students were when they interacted with and created their own comics.

In a word, a collection of lively and inspiring stories about creating, testing and sharing the project creations with their local and international audiences.

## Creating comics for language education: practice makes perfect

Whenever we try something new, it is not surprising to start with baby steps, and to meet a few challenges and make a few mistakes along the way. It is even truer when dealing with innovative approaches and with creative endeavours. In this story, the partners of 'EdComix' would like to share some of these challenges and clumsiness we made when creating our first comics to provide teachers who try to create comic strips with shortcuts to reach better results sooner.

Before diving into these recommendations, we would like to point out that they apply to pedagogical comics with an inclusive design for learners with SLDs. In that sense, they might not be applicable to regular comics, as they do not serve the same purpose. This is why you are not likely to encounter these recommendations in regular comics creation tutorials.

However, regardless of the type of comic to create, aiming for clarity for the reader will always improve quality, so it is a good goal to keep in mind.

To learn more about the guidelines for creating inclusive comics, read our Digital Comics Creation Guide.

- **Less is more**

In shorter forms of comics, it gets difficult to include a lot of text, context or background elements. If you do need to include several pieces of text, a good practice is to divide the text into smaller chunks, for instance with double bubbles or with several bubbles. This supports the readers' understanding and attention.
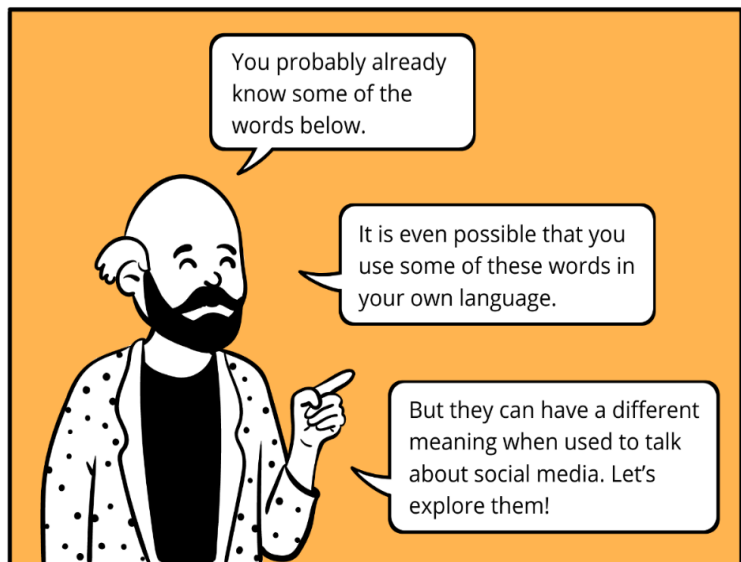


Social media - A2

- **No more than 2 horizontal panels on an A4 page**

When you apply adaptation guidelines for readers with SLDs, text can take much more space than you might have planned. During the review phase of our lessons, to make sure that the final layout 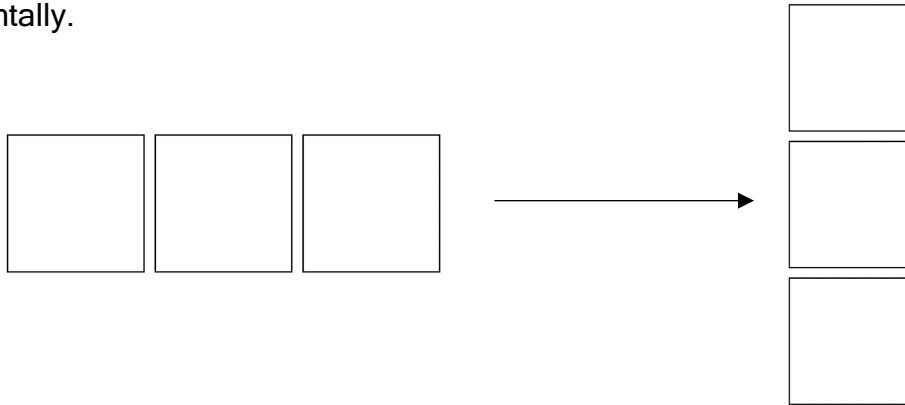would keep the characters big enough for all learners to read, we had to limit the number of panels on one tier (line) to 2.

Therefore, for 3-panel strips, we would recommend you to display them vertically rather than horizontally.

Similarly, for 6 panel-strips, we would recommend to choose a layout of 3 tiers of 2 panels rather than 2 tiers of 3 panels.

- **Insert text first, then illustrations**

As mentioned above, it is difficult to evaluate the space that text will take before seeing it: therefore, one of the first steps when creating a comic strip is to place all the text elements before the images. Then, test that the size of the text will be legible, because if printed within a lesson which is on A4 paper it will look different than on screen. Once you have made sure the text is legible for all, you can insert the bubbles, characters and images and do the fine tuning.

- **Mix and match creation tools**

All comics creation tools offer different opportunities and have their limits. For instance, while the BDNF software might be easier for creating a full-page layout than it is in Canva, it requires to first find image resources, something that is more available on Canva or other platforms. Similarly, Canva can be a better tool to do finer text layout and formatting than StoryboardThat: in this case, it can be a good idea to create a strip on StoryboardThat with empty bubbles and place the final formatted text on Canva. Do not hesitate to find the best uses of each tool for your own needs to create the workflow most adapted to your creative process!

- **Find ways around the limits of each tool**

To continue on this point, each tool will have different functions, user interfaces and may offer different possibilities. The most challenging limit in all the tools is often finding the right bubble shape, especially regarding the tail of the bubbles, for specific cases. The good news is that

there are several tricks that you can apply to overcome these obstacles: for instance, you can often draw a white oval shape without a line, and then insert an arrow behind the oval, which will in practice create a new bubble shape and tail tailored for the needs of your specific comic.
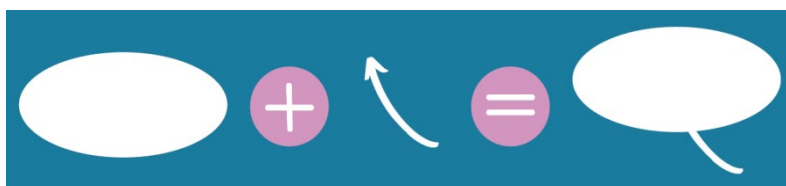


Therefore, if you find that the tool you are using has limitations, try to think about other ways to reach the result you want!

- **Vary the graphic design**

If you always use the exact same graphic design in all your comics, your students might get bored as the novelty might wear off quickly. In addition, if some of your students do not like a particular graphic design, they might not feel engaged with the material you created. This is why we encourage you to use different graphic designs and varying "feels" of your creation, for instance going from cartoony, to minimalist, or to more modern designs.

This is likely to come naturally if you use even just 2 comics creation tools.

- **Proofread yourself with a checklist**

When you create a comic strip with a comic creation tool, you bypass comics creation processes that usually take a lot of time when creating a regular comic, and that generally involves people with different areas of expertise. As the pre-production process of comics usually takes a lot of time and involves several pairs of eyes, it is normal not to reach your ideal goal when creating a strip on your own, with a tool that formats what you create.

This is why taking a break after creating the first draft of a strip can be a good practice. Not only will it allow you to refresh your brain, but you will also be able to come back with a new look on what you created. It is the perfect opportunity to use a checklist to see if there are any areas that you might want to improve. To do so, we would recommend you to take a look at the e-learning module, in particular Part 3, as it describes the comics creation process, including proofreading and troubleshooting, in a step-by-step approach.

Learning a new technique, especially in the case of a creative technique, can be tiring and appear as difficult in the first few steps that have been taken. Keeping on creating is sometimes even more of a challenge than starting. We hope that by sharing advice from our own experience, you will be able to avoid some traps and difficulties that can arise when creating pedagogical comics!

# A short beginner's guide to integrating comics into language lessons

During this project, the partners' team members, including several English teachers, researched how to use comics in the English classroom and created several forms of comic strips that are included in the lessons. In this story, we will focus on showcasing the different uses that partners made of the strips they created in their lessons.

We will share a few panels from the strips: do not hesitate to take a look at the lessons they are from to read the whole strips!

- **Filling the gaps**



Let's make an apple pie, Andy! What have we got in the kitchen?

OK, Anna, we've got _____ biscuits and _____ bananas.

Cooking – A2

Filling the gaps is a classic practice when teaching languages. What is nice is that when the text to be filled is in the form of a comic, it means that students are not just answering an exercise: they are taking part in a story!

In the example above, the characters break down the steps to make an apple pie, which is a good opportunity to focus on countable and uncountable determiners. The exercise requires students to write 'some', 'any', 'lots of' in the right place.

Here is another example to help students use the future tense.



Discuss the future - B1

- **For grammar exercises**

Providing a story to create context for a grammar exercise is also a good way to encourage students to better comprehend a language. In the example above, students are asked to identify the relative clause in each panel. As several panels follow the same structure and are part of the same conversation, this strip is a good starting point to encourage students to take time to understand this notion before trying to use it themselves.



Economics - B1

- **As a support for oral expression**
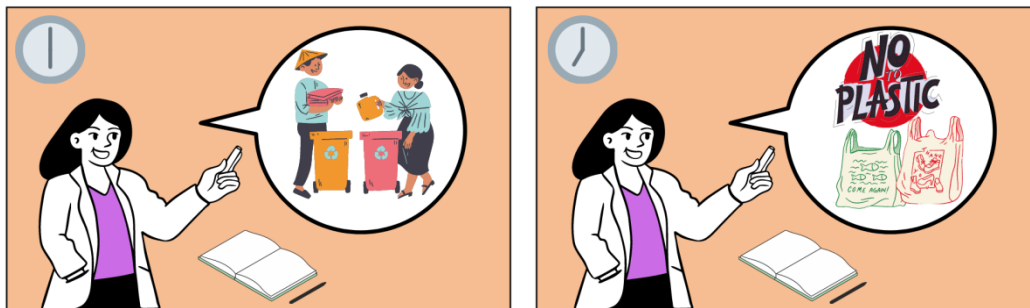


Environment - B1

Comics do not need to contain words. The example above can be a step up from comics in which students should fill gaps: they need to produce a whole sentence on their own.

Here, students should tell orally what advice or instruction the character is giving to protect the environment. As there is no suggested sentence structure, the student can try to use what they have learnt in their lesson by using phrases that they are comfortable with, rather than just reading a suggested sentence that they do not quite understand.

- **Filling bubbles to create a new story**



Direct and indirect speech - B1

By proposing a situation and elements of a story (including characters, attitude, etc.), a comic strip with blank bubbles can provide a useful structure for students' creative written or oral expression activities.

In the example above, the students are asked to rewrite a story told in the lesson in indirect speech, as spoken by the characters.

- **Giving instructions for exercises**



Music and films - B1

In this example, the instruction for a kinaesthetic activity is provided through a 2- panel strip. It makes the exercise stand out in the lesson and makes the instruction more visual to prompt students to move around.

- Telling a story to illustrate vocabulary
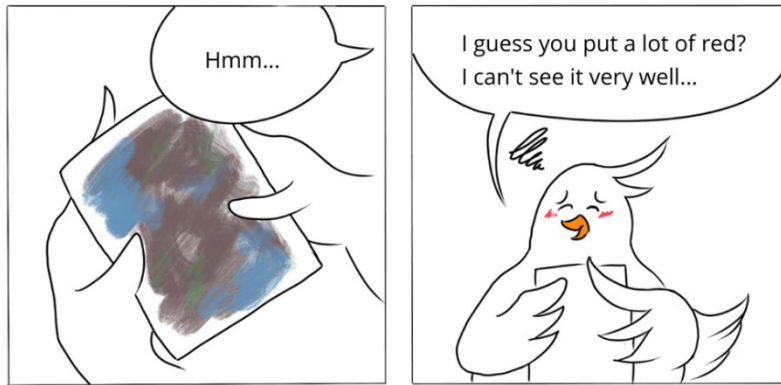


Colour idioms - A2

One of the main challenges in developing students' vocabulary is that long vocabulary lists can be difficult for them to handle. There is a lack of hierarchy between the words, and it can be more difficult for students to isolate the words they do not know at all from the words of which they might have some understanding.

The example above is used to illustrate the idiom 'colour blind' without actually using the word, to help students to understand its meaning first.

- Highlighting important vocabulary



Stories and Legends - B1

This example shows a good opportunity to study comparison degrees in an exercise that encourages students to understand vocabulary in the context of a story. Highlighting words or putting them in bold in a comic can support vocabulary acquisition by making words standout in a story, thus grounding them in a context that students are more likely to remember.

- **Explaining grammar**

Some grammar points can appear intimidating for students to understand and learn as they often come with several layers of information, starting with a basic explanation, exceptions or complications, and examples. Using a comic to summarise these explanations and provide a visual tool that students can quickly come back to and refer to can be a good tool to help them start using new grammar tools or to review their lessons.

# WISHING BLOBS



| To wish in English... | you use "I wish" and... | the past tense! |
| For example: I wish I was happier! | I wish I knew Italian! | I wish I had curly hair! |

Wishes - B1

These few pages just gave you an overview of practical and efficient uses of short comic strips from a pedagogical perspective. Do not hesitate to take inspiration from them or to adapt them to create your own comics for your lessons. We hope you will find them useful and that they will help you discover even more ways to include comics in your lessons!

## Learning to incorporate comics in my classroom: a reflective journal by an English language teacher

### The context

Over the course of two weeks I tried to experiment with using comics in a secondary education classroom.

I currently teach six classes in a rural Gymnasium (lower secondary education) near Kalamata. My classes are organized by level rather than age, which means that the classes feature students aged 13-15, but of a practically similar language level and, most importantly, attitudes towards language learning.

For this present project, and given that this would be my first attempt to try something like this in class, I chose to do it with my most advanced class believing that this would make it easier and less stressful for me.

The class chosen consists of 24 students. We have classes three times a week and there is a course book that we have to follow. I decided to try and create comic-based activities on the normal curriculum that we have to follow.

### The approach

Coming to comics-for-educational-purposes clean slate, I had to begin by going through the 'EdComix' material to see if using comics in the classroom was feasible first of all for me. Then, I would also think about my students.

So, at the beginning, I started, by going through the pedagogical guide. I found it easy to read and useful to understand why comics could be an important addition to my teaching tools. At first, I thought that comics-creation was something that would just spark my students' curiosity, but after I went through the guide, I realized that it could be a powerful tool for engaging some of my least motivated students.

It also got me thinking whether some of my students actually liked reading comics and what comics they might be reading. I then remembered my own childhood years and I started thinking whether the comics – and cartoons! – I used to read or watch, were still in circulation and how they looked like. I also googled a few comics and cartoons whose titles I could remember to get a few answers.

Generally, I found the Pedagogical Guide great for background knowledge and helping me realize what I wanted to achieve in the class.

Then, I went through the second resource, the Digital Comics Creation Guide. I liked the discussion/arguments of using ready-made comics versus creating your own in the class, although both of them are equally difficult but for different reasons, I think. I decided to try to/and have a go at both if possible.

When I reached the more practical parts of the guide, for example the parts on creating storyboards or using dedicated software, I started feeling the heat. It was certain at this point that this wasn't going to be easy, and I started thinking about not doing it - I actually called Areadne, the teacher-training centre that challenged us to have a go with comics in our classrooms, up and told them I couldn't do it, they needed more art-oriented people. How much time would it take me to prepare something like this? After sitting on it for a couple of days, I decided to do it as the people from Areadne told me: that I should not start big, start from creating one exercise for a lesson and then build it up if I and my students liked it, which, I think, worked in the end.

Then, I continued with the third resource, the e-learning module. That was the most interesting one I think, and it also led to a very useful certificate for my annual continuous professional development. It was easy to do and gave me a lot of insights. At this point I decided to use Canva to make my comics, at least to begin with. Then, I'd see…

Generally, a year round, certificate-giving, tutor-led training course on using comics in the classroom would be very popular I think.

Then, I went through the sample lessons. I was really impressed by the diversity of the lessons created. It is clear that this tool can really be used in a variety of settings – and obviously not only in language learning – to achieve a remarkable diverse set of educational and social goals, among others. The question that kept crossing my mind, however, was: can a teacher – and maybe the students too - actually reach a point where they can automatically create a comic-based activity, without having to do a ton of preparation beforehand?

Then, I proceeded with the comics co-creation workshop with students. I found this very useful too, but I do not think I have the time to try one of the workshops as they were presented. I will maybe try and break it into pieces, or do some short co-creation activity/ies with students over one or more sessions so I won't fall behind with my course book progress.

## The activities

First: Before I try anything on/with my students, I felt I had to know whether my students liked comics and what comics they liked. There was no guidance in the materials of this project on how to do that, so I got my class into groups and asked them to talk about it before reporting to class.

The first thing that struck me was that my students – and remember that this is one of my best performing classes – could not understand the difference between animated cartoons and comics. Although I thought I clearly asked them to talk about comics, they ended up talking about animated cartoons. Probably, the influence of the many existing comics, cartoons and physical objects – e.g. toys like Lego or Playmobil or other artefacts based on children's entertainment –,  have blurred the boundaries for them.

After getting things straight, I came to the conclusion that my students are certainly more interested in cartoons rather than in comics at this age. They could all talk about comics they read as younger children, but few read them now. None of them was able to name comics that had nothing to do with famous heroes like Marvel, etc. However, neither could I!

Regardless of the above results, they did like the idea of trying some comic-based activities for our lesson, and they were even more excited with comics creation. I tried to explain to them that they would not become comic experts after an English lesson, but they did not seem to understand it! Good luck to me!

Second: The first comic-based activity we tried was a simple exercise that I got from one of the lessons of the e-learning module and matched the grammar teaching requirements of the day: reported speech. At the same time, I got the time to teach some vocabulary (bubble, etc.) that had to do with the comics themselves. Then, we used the comics in question to teach the grammar, do some practice on it, and I gave the school-exercises as homework. We finished with a short discussion of whether the students liked it and liked to continue doing a few more things like this, which they did.

I also found this first experience easier than I thought.

Third: The second comic-based activity we tried was introducing comics from the market into our classroom. Not having – either me, or my students – experience as to which comics we could bring into the classroom, and in order to skip the ordeal of trying to read comics in order to see whether they were adequate for classroom use, and for what educational purpose they could be used, I used a chapter of a comic proposed by the project in the e-learning module American Born Chinese, by Gene Luen Yang. I used that comic to replace the text of the class course book – the course book text and accompanying exercises were given as homework – and talked about stereotypes (which was the topic of the day) using the Chinese character as an example. Actually, by replacing the ethnicities mentioned in the course book with the more far away ethnicity of the Chinese boy, my students expressed more openly their opinions about migration, something that made it easier for me to link their opinion to attitudes towards refugees and other migrants that they could see, hear, and read about around them.

The students enjoyed the activity overall and would like to repeat it. On the downside, the text from the comics proved to be a bit more difficult than anticipated which meant I had to do more pre-teaching than I had first thought.

Fourth: The third activity we tried was a co-creation one. There, building from the previous activity of stereotypes, we took the main storyline and tried to Greek-icize it, that is, bring protagonists from Greece (e.g. Albanian immigrants and Syrian refugees) to it, while using the same phrasal verbs to talk about "more Greek" daily life situations than the original US-Chinese ones.

To do that, students got into four groups of six students. They were given written instructions as to how to split roles – according to Comics Creation Workshop instructions – and worked independently to create their scripts and informal storyboards. The scripts and storyboards were given to me for feedback, and when everything was ready to a reasonable degree, we had a two-hour session with the IT teacher in her lab, where the students tried to develop their / part of their comics. The results were satisfying given the informal nature of the whole activity and process. Overall, it was fun for all of us at school and something that the students are proud of. Similar sessions will now take place with the other classes, since they felt "left-out"!

## The conclusions

First of all, although this project's material is very easy to read and use, even for a busy teacher like me, who does a lot of intra- but also extra-curricular teaching (unfortunately teachers in Greece are not paid that much), diverting from the handbook activities (in Greece secondary education ELT teachers are given a handbook or a selection of handbooks that they are required to use) comes at a cost: no time for preparation.

On the other hand, if a comic-based activity works the first time it is tried, then it's ready for replication, but what if it doesn't? It would be useful to have guidelines specifically on how to use comics with our textbooks, but I do understand that it is not possible.

Overall, it was a useful and fun exercise. I think that substituting parts of the lessons with comics is much easier and cost-effective than the co-creation activities. I do understand that it might be beneficial for students in a variety of ways, but maybe they are not suitable for a lesson like English as a foreign language that is taught only for three hours every week. Maybe Literature or another subject like that, which is taught for more hours and is normally taught by the same teacher that teaches history, language, etc. would be a more suitable and more cost-effective subject for co-creating comics.

# Training teachers to use comics in the classroom: a teacher trainer's reflective journal after trying to help 10 English as foreign language teachers incorporate comics in their classrooms

## Context

I currently teach an 80-hour long continuous professional development course for teachers of English as a foreign language in secondary state education in the region of Messinia, Greece.

The course consists of five six-hour long meetings on weekends, plus structured studying activities and short assignments for the remaining (non-contact) hours.

It is a self-financed course paid for by the teachers themselves, although most teachers do have part of the course reimbursed by their schools.

All participants are experienced English teachers, so the course does not focus on e.g. approaches to teaching grammar, but on more advanced topics. This specific course was entitled "Bring art in the ELT class" and focused on drama, literature and, for the first time, on comics.

## Approach

First of all, trainee expectations were surveyed. That was made possible through an initial questionnaire that, among other things, tried to measure the attitudes the trainees had towards comics, whether they thought that using them was useful, how they thought that that/it was useful, whether they had done it before, what their relationship with comics was in general, etc. Then, 5 two-hour sessions were conducted, while the 'EdComix' material was used as structured self-study. The course ended with a second questionnaire surveying how teacher overall attitudes towards using comics in the classroom had changed.

## The pre-course questionnaire

The results of the pre-course questionnaire were promising: no trainee thought that there was anything negative with bringing comics in the classroom, all of them found the topic intriguing, most of them thought that it would be a great tool for reading especially in more advanced classes, most of them worried about the availability of suitable comics in the school libraries, none of them thought possible that they could learn to draw in order to create them themselves, many thought that bringing them into class could interfere with class-management.

## Session 1

The purpose of the kick-off session was to introduce everyone to how that course would be conducted and what was expected of them. It also involved exploring various online resources of free and open access comics as well as bringing to the surface / to the trainer's attention previous knowledge and experience the trainees had with comics. The trainees were also introduced to the basic vocabulary of comics (bubbles, etc.), to the concept of storyboarding, and they all made a comic strip using Pixton.

Generally, I felt that the topic was well received although preparation time issues were raised. Unlike drama and creative writing, which are based on activities like reading, reciting, using your body, and writing, which are usually used in the language classroom anyway; most trainees felt-unprepared to deal with creating images in the classroom.

To a degree I can understand their resistance. At the end of the day, when you introduce something that you're not an expert in the class - and teachers are almost always better writers, readers and reciters than students - you face the fear of being ridiculed by students or parents who have more experience/expertise in this field.

However, I believe that software that enables the teacher to just pick and create comics from a library of ready-made images will help them overcome that fear. We will see in the following sessions I suppose!

## Session 2

Before the second session, trainees were asked to have gone through the Pedagogical Guide and the Digital Comics Creation Guide of the project.

The session started with a group reflection session discussing what they found interesting regarding the Pedagogical Guide and the Digital Comics Creation Guide.

Then, they got into groups and decided how they could use comics in the classroom. Most of them seemed eager to use comics for project, extra-curriculum reading activities for students, etc. Then, they were asked to choose one of these categories, e.g. project-based learning, and create a full activity based on comics of their choice. Then the activities were peer-reviewed.

Generally, although the second session went very well as well, the trainees did not seem eager to accept using comics in the classroom for day-to-day learning. That's why a relevant assignment was given to them. I hope that they will be a bit more positive next time.

## Session 3

Before the third session, trainees had to go through the material of the e-Learning Module, as well as think / research 10 ways of using comics to teach 10 different grammar topics.

The session started with a short discussion on the e-Learning Module experience, and it was followed by a presentation by everyone of the different ways comics could be used to teach different grammar topics. A lot of attention was given to making sure that these ways were not too time consuming in terms of preparation, and ways to cut preparation time were proposed.

Then, the trainees got into groups and turned the activities they had thought into lesson plans, making sure that preparation time was under control.

Generally, I did feel that by the end of this session trainees felt more at ease with using comics in the classroom for day-to-day teaching purposes rather than just a project for e.g. a national celebration.

## Session 4

Before this session, the trainees had to go through the Comic and Lesson Packages and pick one of these lessons to implement a micro-teaching activity based on one of the ready-made lessons.

The session started with a few of the micro-lessons prepared by the trainees. Peer-feedback was given to everyone.

Then a session from the Creation of Comics with Students guide was implemented with the trainees in the role of the students. The trainees worked in two groups and were asked to finish their comics at home.

Generally, this was a tiring session, but the trainees – and the trainer! -  enjoyed comics creation more than they initially expected.

## Session 5

The last session began with the remaining micro-sessions that were prepared before session 4.Then, a discussion of the Creation  of Comics with Students guide followed and the trainees were asked to make adjustments to it in accordance with what they thought would work best in their class.

The session finished with the post-course questionnaire. Generally, the atmosphere when we finished seemed to be much lighter and I do think that the trainees will actually try-out comics in their classroom. That is where the real test of the method will take place.

### The post-course questionnaire

The results of the post-course questionnaire seem very positive: all trainees think that bringing comics into the classroom will benefit their students, but also, all of them find the topic more intriguing than they initially thought. All of them think that it is a great tool for reading and for special projects; most of them think that it can also be used for day-to-day teaching occasionally. Most of them worry about the preparation time needed, all of them would like to see more suitable comics in the school libraries and some stated that they have already used comics in some of their classes. All of them state that they will use or use again comics in the classrooms right after the end of the course.

### Conclusions

All in all, this was a very positive, albeit tiring, experience for me, and I will certainly include comic-based teaching in future versions of my seminar. I do feel confident that the trainees will actually use comics in the classroom, although I do not think that they will be using it extensively for day-to-day teaching – but maybe that is not the point. However, if there are more projects like this, creating more material and making the method less unusual than what it is right now, I think that more teachers will follow. I also have to admit that making comics is as entertaining as using drama for teaching purposes. Once you get over the first technical difficulties (learning the software, etc.) it is very satisfying and easy to use.

## Using comics in online lessons to teach English to young learners with a special focus on students with dyslexia

Digital learning has now emerged as a key tool for education in schools all around the world.

Online teaching, as with most teaching methods, presents a set of positive and negative aspects. Creating a personal learning experience for our students is essential in order to maintain a high level of motivation in the classroom. Our story is based on the experience we've had during our online courses for young learners in Babel Idiomas, a language academy in Malaga, a city in the south of Spain.

For us, online teaching provides more advantages than disadvantages. We can honestly say that it is highly efficient as there is a wide range of tools which we can use in our online classroom, such as videos, presentations, interactive activities, games and many different platforms and websites. One of the tools we integrated into our lessons was the creation and use of comics.

Our feedback is based on two groups:

1.  A general English group formed of 6 students. Their level was A2 (Flyers) and their age was between 7-9 years old. This course lasted for 9 months from October to June and we used comic creation for 1 month.
2.  A group from our 'Dis is English' adapted language courses formed of 4 students. Their level was A2-B1 and their ages ranged from 9-14. This course lasted for 1 month.
The main websites used for comics creation were: MakeBeliefsComix and StoryBoardThat, but you can find more examples of digital tools and how to use them in the resources offered on the website of the EdComix project. ('Digital Comics Creation Guide' in chapter 'Online tools to create digital comics for education')

### Group 1:

With this group I used comics with a very specific objective: practising the vocabulary and grammar points my students were studying at that moment. To prepare them for the next lessons where I would ask them to create their own comic, I started to introduce the idea of comics into our classes. This way, they would become familiar with the concept and they would also be interested and motivated.

In the first class, I showed my students 6 pages from different popular comics. We discussed the main characters and the topic of each comic strip. Then we looked at the elements of a

comic. I'd created a Kahoot with screenshots of several parts of each page (panel, speech bubbles, etc.) and the students had to identify them. Then, each of them chose one of the pages and their homework was to read it and prepare a short summary for the following class.

In the second class, they presented their summaries and were very enthusiastic. This class served as an introduction to the world of comics.

In the third class, I used the lesson plan 'Going Out - A2' on hobbies and free time activities. We brainstormed popular leisure activities and learned the related expressions. We then used Task 2 to practise some speaking and to create 2 characters who are best friends and wanted to go to the cinema together. The students were very receptive to these activities and especially enjoyed the process of creating these characters. We gave them names, a backstory, wrote a description of their personalities and drew the first version on the whiteboard. I allowed them to draw their own version of each character on the whiteboard (on Zoom).

In the fourth class, I made a presentation of how to use the website Make Beliefs Comix at www.makebeliefscomix.com and I helped them to create an account. We tried to find a character similar to what we had previously designed. We then brainstormed ideas for the story which we would later transform into a comic strip. We wrote the script together, using the vocabulary and grammar previously studied.

In the fifth class, we started using the website and the students worked in groups to create their comics. I used the workshops and the information provided in the 'Digital comic creation workshops with students' (resources from  https://edcomix.eu/). I divided the students into breakout rooms on Zoom and I spent some time with each of them helping to add elements to their panels. Each group prepared one strip which they presented in the next class. In the sixth and last class the students had some time to finalise their strip before presenting it to the class. They were able to share the screen in their breakout room and work together.

Group 2:

The second class that used comics was a course for children with dyslexia. This was a one-month course (8 classes) during the summer and a part of the initiative 'Dis is English' which are classes oriented to dyslexic learnersoffered by Babel Idiomas.

Children aged from 9-14 participated and there were four students in the class. We kept the group smalldue to the special nature of the course - as it was based solely on comics - and aimed specifically at helping children with dyslexia and address their specific needs. Another special aspect of the course was the online setting, which allowed us to have students from all over the Spanish territory (Catalonia, Valencia, Navarra, etc.) and not only from Babel's home city of Málaga.

As a partner organization in the project, we already had access to all the material and, in fact, had created part of it, so we decided to put it to use. We created a content program for the course, aimed at lower-level students, as we knew that children with dyslexia usually struggle to achieve a good level of English at school. We combined the English grammar and vocabulary points with the structure and the creation process of a comic.

The first thing we needed to do was draw inspiration for our collective comic, so we took a look at the student's favourites. Following that, we held a brainstorming session from which we would figure out the outline of the story we wanted to tell, as well as the characters in it. It was decided that it would be about a boy who befriends a magical dog and travel to a magical world. There, the dog would be kidnapped and the boy would have an adventure and save it.

Next we learned how to describe people and clothing and we used our newly acquired knowledge to design the characters of the story. I taught them how to use the tools in Storyboardthat.com, which they learned right away, as the resource is very accessible and intuitive. Each student designed at least one character and then together we decided which ones we would use.

We then started to design the environment and backgrounds we would use to set the story, and at this point the students were so excited that a 6-panel comic wouldn't be enough, so we filled out one page and created a new one, where we imported the characters to continue with the story. Finally, we only needed to write the dialogues and our comic was ready!

The next step was for them to create their own comic and they went wild with it! They wrote about their daily lives, fantasy wars between heaven and hell, an alien invasion of Earth and even recreated classic fairy tales in their own style.

In the end, the students had a pleasant and exciting experience. Their parents were astonished with the change of attitude their children experienced, and they happily continued learning English with us, either in standard or more personalised courses. The knowledge and resources provided on the EdComix website were of great help throughout the entire process.

# Using comics to teach EFL to learners from 9 to 13 years old in a Spanish school

When teaching English to teenagers while using comics and technology, we may think it is something difficult to obtain. This story presents the experience of Marta and Cristina, two teachers from Babel Idiomas who have tested the'EdComix' Comic & Lesson Packages and Comic Creation phases on two different groups in a Spanish School in Málaga. The students' ages range from 9 to 13 years old. The students from one of the groups have A2 level (KET) and there are 12 students in total. The students from the other group have a B1.1 level and there are 14 students. It is important to mention that each classroom has a projector and the school also has two computer rooms and a good internet connection so we could easily test both phases.

First of all, we would like to highlight the importance of the 'EdComix' guide to develop Comic & Lesson Packages and Comic Creation satisfactorily. At the beginning, the idea of introducing comics into our lessons was surprising since we had never thought about comics as a didactic tool. However, thanks to the 'EdComix' resources, we could learn how to use comics and other visual materials to motivate our students to participate in the English class. We really recommend that all teachers who are beginners in terms of using comics and technology together should read the guide because it has been a useful tool for our learning and research progress.

The Testing of 'EdComix' Lessons

The 'EdComix' lessons were the first experience using comics to teach EFL so, at first, we were a little bit frightened because we did not know if it was going to work with our students or not. We decided to use the 'Animals and Pets' Lesson Plan (A2) and 'Free Time and Hobbies' (B1) for each of our groups since they were the ones that best fit our learning curriculum.

We did not set our expectations very high regarding the lesson plans and we did not know if the comics were going to work since our students are very discerning. But most of them loved the activities and the comics. They were so motivated to continue working on the activities that, even at the end of the class, they asked us if we were going to do more activities like that for the next classes. Even more, the level of each activity was correct and learners thought that they were neither too easy nor too difficult.

From our point of view, this part of the 'EdComix' project was not at all difficult for us to carry out. We were able to show all the exercises and comics to our learners using the projector and our laptops. Students were very motivated to participate and to complete the activities.

We noticed that students with lower levels were also very curious and they did their best to do the exercises. Sometimes we found it very hard to pay attention to diversity in our English classes but, since using comics is a very inclusive idea, it gives us the necessary tools to achieve it. The learners were able to collaborate and participate in groups. Finally, one of the most important aspects that we tried to achieve in every class is that the students had fun. And they did! They enjoyed the comic lessons very much.

When we finished testing the comic lesson plans, we directed our students to complete the questionnaires to obtain their opinion of the activities. Most of the students thought that the class material was interesting and easy. In addition, most of them would like to make a comic themselves and they would like more classes using comics. In conclusion, it was a tremendous success!

From our point of view, we both think that the language used in the activities was easy, the material was very inclusive and, of course, the material was very adaptable to our curriculum. However, we both think that the layout of the material could be more engaging. We believe that the lesson plans and the design were a little bit traditional and maybe if they were more interactive our students would have enjoyed them even more.

### Comic Creation Testing

Since we saw the big success of the comic lessons on our students, we were more than enthusiastic to try the comic creation part with our teenagers. We were aware of the difficulties of mixing computers and teenagers and, for that reason, we wanted to make sure that everything was established. We decided to first introduce our students to comic elements (panels, speech and thought bubbles…) and then venture into the challenging and fun part: the creation of their own comics. This photograph was taken during this phase.

Teacher Marta let her students use a picture of the meme they love the most. The only condition she established was that the meme should include elements from comics. Moreover, she also gave them the flexibility to create their own memes using StoryboardThat but in the end all of them preferred using MemeCreator for this task.

On the other hand, teacher Cristina thought that it would be a good idea for the students to create their own comics using familiar characters. For example: characters from Harry Potter or

Marvel because as well-known characters, they would feel more confident when making the comic strips. Therefore, she asked them to create the comic strips using the StoryboardThat website. The only stipulation that the teacher had was that the comic strips should have the same layout and structure seen in the previous class when developing the comic. Students in both groups felt very comfortable with the creation of comics because most of them really like doing activities apart from class material. Specifically, the B1.1 group is a very participative group and they feel very comfortable doing oral activities in the classroom such as role plays, speaking games, etc… and also working in groups. It is important to mention that in the B1.1 group only two students did not feel very happy to develop this activity because, at first, they thought that they needed previous knowledge about comics and they also believed that since they were not regular readers of comics, they would not be able to develop the activity correctly.

However, with the help of the 'EdComix' guide, teacher Cristina provided them with the explanations and the steps that they had to follow to create the comic strips. She also showed them several examples of comics in order to give them some ideas, because sometimes students need to have visual examples to put all the given information and explanations into a context. Therefore, the comic lesson plan and the comic creation phases were accomplished successfully.



Here is an example of the work of one of our students from the B1.1 group. This group has based the development of the comic on the Harry Potter novel:

In addition, another important fact to be considered is that when the students are doing an activity outside of the classroom some of them do not focus completely on the activity, so the computer can become a distraction for them. Therefore, it was a great challenge to maintain their concentration.

As we have mentioned before, when we finished testing the students and teachers who took part in the 'EdComix' project had to fill in a questionnaire in which they answered some

questions related to the development of the activity. It is important to highlight that the results were very successful because a high percentage of the students were very happy with the results of their own comics and most of them would even like to repeat the activity in the future. They had a lot of fun!

From our point of view, we both think that taking part in this project has been a great idea, not only in educational terms. The students really enjoyed it because they have been able to do more creative activities and, at the same time, they have also been able to put into practice specific grammatical and lexical contents. The feedback received in the questionnaire has been very positive as everyone has stated that they would like to repeat this activity in the future. It is important to mention that they felt very comfortable doing this activity and, in fact, at the end of the class many of them suggested to the teachers that they could repeat it on another occasion.

From an educational perspective, the students from both groups developed different skills, both communicative and social, since they had to work in groups and organize themselves in order to achieve every point proposed in the activity. Using this activity in class helped enrich reading, writing and thinking and they also developed composition techniques through visual-verbal connections.

To conclude, this project has been very successful not only because of the opinions reflected in the questionnaires but also because we have seen our students during the testing phase show interest and fulfil the proposed objectives. Above all, the most important thing for us, as teachers, is that they have enjoyed everything and, at the same time, they have been putting into practice all the content they have learnt.

As teachers, we both believe that this type of activity helps to enrich certain linguistic and cooperative learning skills, because the students use the English language and also develop their creativity in the classroom while being involved in activities based on comics.

## E-Learning Together! Experiences from Cypriot teachers during the digital course field test

On a sunny April day in 2021, the field test of the e-learning module in Cyprus was scheduled to occur. With the COVID-19 pandemic still in full force at that time, there was no other option but to hold the pilot testing online and provide training to teachers digitally. With protocols in schools saying that no visitors or out-of-school visits were allowed, we were doomed with using the pandemic's all-powerful ZOOM tool.



**Photo 1:** Field test participants meeting and sharing experiences

Our e-learning module was recently-published at the time, and we were looking for ways to make it even better and reach as many English teachers as possible.

The 'EdComix' online course consists of 4 main Parts and its goal is to help teachers self-train in creating inclusive comics for English language in secondary education. Part 1 of the course is an introduction to comics for language learning in terms of the skills needed, inclusion considerations, pedagogical benefits and advantages. Part 2 is about imagining comics for lessons based on different topics in accordance to students' levels. This entails achieving the learning objectives of A2 and B1 CEFR levels through the creation of comics for the two language levels. Part 3 is about creating comics – from ideation & storytelling, to creating one's first strip, and to storyboarding, using specific comics creation tools and software as well as considering the design aspects and receiving feedback from students and colleagues. Finally, Part 4 is about creating and going further – using more comics creation software, using one's own drawing and enriching comics to make them look more creative. The course also gives the

possibility to educators to earn a certificate worth 1 ECVET point if they successfully complete the final quiz at the end. The contents as well as the possibility of receiving an extra qualification was what attracted many of our field test participants to test these resources, according to the feedback received during our session.

During our online introductory training session, 6 language teachers attended to find out more about the project, hoping to make their classrooms more innovative spaces for creative learning. 5 of those were Cypriot nationals while 1 was a Palestinian refugee living in Cyprus for the past few years. The meeting was recorded and sent to those who could not make it many were teaching and could not attend.

Starting the meeting off, we felt a sense of excitement and anticipation coming from our attendees. They greatly wished to express their gratitude for the opportunity to become trained using the 'EdComix' methodologies and appreciated our efforts to walk them through the e-learning module and show them how it works, as it would save them some time and also give them the opportunity to ask questions.
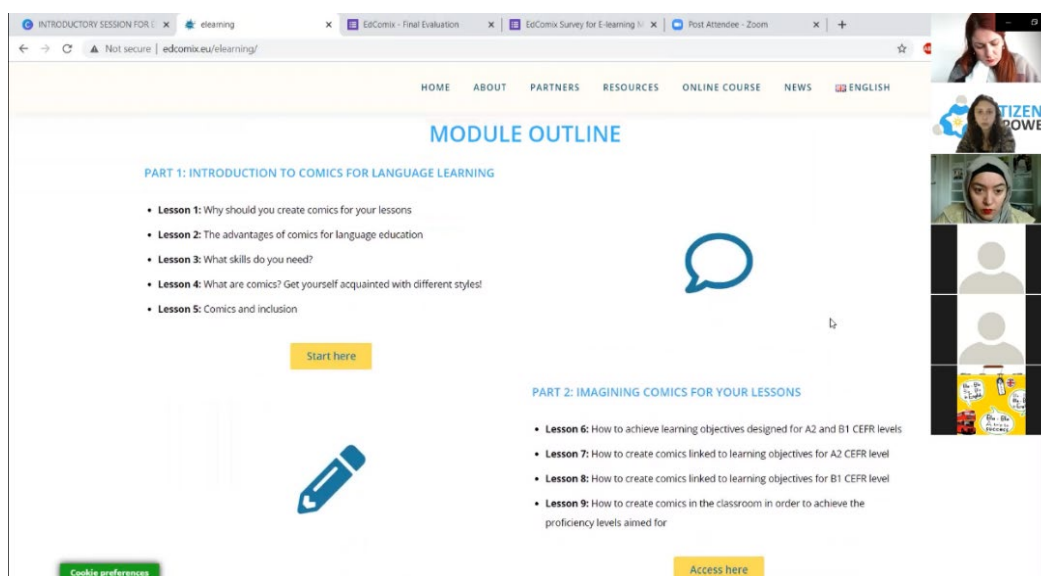


Eleni, an English teacher, introduced herself first. Eleni told us that she studied in England and her academic studies were actually the first contact she had ever had with comics. She remarked that the "way they [the British] were teaching English was completely different to how we [the Cypriots] were used to teaching and/or being taught the English language". Eleni was grateful that she was re-introduced to the use of comics for educational purposes in the field of language teaching, and loved the digital addition that was offered through our project. According to her, comics "make everything more interactive, more interesting, and above all, more engaging". Eleni went on to say that she really finds this methodology very useful for adults as well and could be used in a broader sense to reach wider parts of the population, not just

secondary school students & teachers. And she is right! Anyway that can make homework and teaching more interactive is the one that learners will remember best, whether young or old!

Apostolia, in turn, wanted to contribute to the discussion, saying that as a secondary school teacher in Nicosia (Cyprus), she found that learners became easily bored in the classroom. For her, one of the key class objectives is that "teaching remains interactive and engaging". In her classroom, she claims, she tries to avoid using books, especially conventional ones, and for her, "EdComix is perfect to support these endeavours!" Her excitement to becoming immersed in a new pedagogical methodology could not be hidden on her face, despite her exhaustion from the lockdown that was currently in place.

Then came Rema's turn to introduce herself. Being a Palestinian who taught English in Syria, Rema's background allowed her to experience diverse teaching methodologies from across the globe. Coming in Cyprus as a refugee seeking international protection, she remarked that: "When I moved to Cyprus, I thought to myself 'I only know how to be a teacher, here how will I survive?' Thank you for providing me with an opportunity to teach again!" Rema's statements were a testament to the importance of the use of these methodologies for the improvement of learning offers to include more people of diverse backgrounds/cultures.

Finally, a general remark coming from the English teachers who pilot tested the module was that lessons in the traditional learning curriculum might not be in line with students' interests many times and that is why more innovative methods are needed for tackling their growing disinterest. A very important comment made was that teachers were all very thankful towards the 'EdComix' partners for creating an e-learning module that does not need login access nor has any requirements for signing up as they have many accounts to different websites and tend to forget their details in the end. The loudest messages received, both from the participants attending our online sessions as well as those who tested the module by themselves and filled in the evaluation questionnaire, was a series of thank-yous: "Thank you for helping me develop my creativity skills", "Thank you for making this available to help us improve ourselves", "Thank you for providing guidance on inclusion for me and for my SLD learners". And one final remark that we often take for granted was "Who knew there were so many free tools to use in the classroom?"

What we have seen through this pilot testing is the teachers' willingness to learn, unlearn and re-learn which is both remarkable and admirable. We are thankful to these and many more teachers for going over and above what is currently being given to them at school, even though their time is limited and are not obliged to spend more time on innovative pedagogies for English language learning. Cypriot teachers are beginning to get involved in diverse methodologies and enhancing their skills to help language learners reach their full potential.

# Innovating in Cypriot classrooms – Testing Lesson Plans and Comics Creation Workshops

What happens when the use and creation of comics enters the English language classroom? Who is willing to try it out and who is not? Who likes it better and who less? And finally, what does the teacher have to say about it?

All these questions and more, have been answered during our pilot tests of all of 'EdComix's resources (apart from the e-learning module which was done separately), amongst students and teachers in Cyprus. The Cypriot story goes something like this:

On a rainy October day, Andry, the owner of an English language institute called "BlaBla in English" in Nicosia was contacted by C.I.P. Citizens in Power, and it is with great pleasure that she accepted, very excited, to be part of the 'EdComix' pilot tests to enhance her students' interest and participation in the classroom. Andry was given the 'EdComix' Pedagogical Guide, the Comics Creation Guide, 4 Lesson Plans & Comics Packages and the Comics Creation Workshops with Students Guide to integrate into her English classroom, for herself and her students, with a mission of giving us important feedback that would help us perfect our methodologies. Unfortunately, due to the government advice regarding the COVID-19 pandemic we were not allowed to be present in the classroom to field test the materials ourselves which was a great loss on our part, as couldn't experience the happy, and sometimes confused, faces of the students trying out comics creation and experiencing some of the lessons planned.

The feedback provided below is a result of testing the 'EdComix' resources with around 27 school students aged 9-16 years old who were being taught A2 and B1 CEFR language levels and one certified English teacher in Cyprus. A briefing session was then conducted between a member of our staff and the English teacher to ensure that feedback was collected properly, accurately and constructively so that we could, in turn, enforce the changes suggested and improve our material to the best of our abilities.

Thankfully, the feedback received was mostly technical and did not contain any worrying points. We will initially mention those aspects in need of improvement.

## Tick…tock: Time and timing

From the teacher's collection of comments that correspond to the ones made from her students during the pilot testing as well as her own, it seems that one of the most prevalent was the fact that the lesson plans, but mostly the comics creation workshops, were simply designed to last **too long.**Many comments included the fact that 3 1.5-hour workshop scenarios are indeed not very realistic within a typical school classroom as there is simply not enough time to implement them fully and effectively, at least in the Cypriot context. For this reason, the teacher tried to

break up one of the workshops in different days but explained that this caused confusion and did not help the students follow the tasks in a cohesive manner due to the gaps between each session. Andry said that, instead, she could use some of the exercises within the workshop scenarios as homework for the students but was worried that they might not have been able to complete everything by themselves, with no guidance. Additionally, the teacher felt like the lesson plans were a bit too long as well but, in this case, she felt more flexibility in using themas she could just pick out certain parts to use when she didn't have time to implement all of them.

## Digital…not for everyone?

Another concern raised by the use of the 'EdComix' methodologies was the digital aspect of comics creation. This brought in very mixed reviews according to Andry who field tested the material with her students. On the one hand, one of the challenges was the fact that she did not have a computer for every student in the room so that they could all work independently to create digital comics. In fact, she had none, only her own. She told us that some of the students had their own or their parents' device at home but were not enough to cover the classrooms'

needs and did not want to make any students feel uncomfortable for not owning one. To tackle this, she divided the students into small groups of 3 and 4 and gave them some time to work on the classroom computer to create a digital comic. However, this turned out to be too time-consuming and did not work very well. However, she found that students especially enjoyed the digital aspect of comics creation and use (through the lessons), as it was something different and had better visuals/colours than the ones they could have drawn.
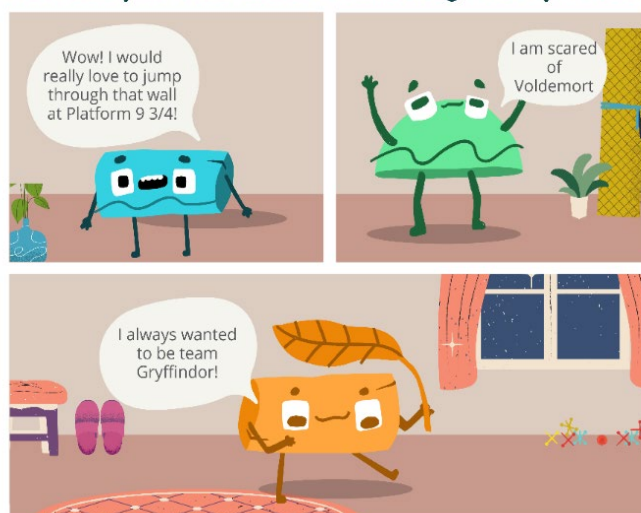


**Photo 1:** sample of comic strip created during workshops

A concern raised by Andry was that she felt very insecure with the use of digital technologies, especially new software, in the classroom, while students were more comfortable with it. That is because she never really had the time to learn these new methodologies and features that were offered. But practice makes perfect!

## Teenagers…

Older students within A2/B1 English classes seemed to least enjoy the material presented in the class, according to Andry. This was not because they specifically disliked the 'EdComix' resources but generally because anything at their age usually annoys them! However, a
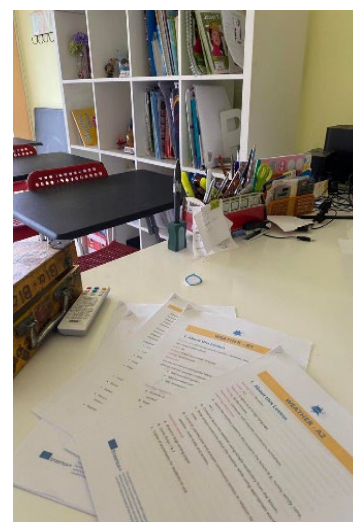
general comment received from the pilot testing was that some of the comics were perceived as slightly childish by some of the older students, especially those from B2 level.

## Inclusion

Comments for inclusion were generally very positive and the teacher was grateful to have been given material that is completely suitable to learners with SLDs. One small comment made was that in one of the comics tested the images were broken off into two pages which could have caused an issue, or that there was too much space between the exercise text. Overall, however, inclusion received excellent comments, including the software introduced, lesson plans and general 'EdComix' methodologies.

## A great success!

Despite the constructive comments for improvement, the positive comments were overwhelming. The students as well as the teacher were impressed with the work being put for all 'EdComix' resources, the depth of information provided, as well as the large pool of tools that are free and easy-to-use for someone who does not have a lot of time to self-train on a new skill or methodology. The educator was especially impressed with the precision of the content in response to each language level, the comic strips created as well as the thoroughness of the instructions in all the Guides. The comic strips contained humorous and very insightful statements which students found entertaining. Many of them also enjoyed being a part of the creation process and found it especially helpful when comics were used as exercises in the lesson, not just complementary items to enhance learning. Additionally, a remark made by the teacher was that many Cypriot teachers feel reluctant to add speaking exercises to their lessons due to the previous mindset that prevailed when they were students themselves, which in turn makes her very happy to see in new lesson plans as these kinds of exercises really help students become more confident in the study of a language.

Overall, the field tests could not have gone better. All that was observed was happy faces from both teacher and students testing the material.

**Accessibility and inclusion** are core elements for this project and the main reason why we decided to discuss with two experts in speech therapy to obtain their insights and recommendations on this topic. Cécile Dewolf and Lidia Gil González have different backgrounds and experiences, making their answers relevant and interesting to apply when using comics as an inclusive pedagogical tool.

Below, we will present the answers to five questions from Cécile Dewolf first and Lidia Gil González second.

## Cécile Dewolf's interview

- Could you introduce yourself? What's your background and tasks related to education?

My name is Cécile Dewolf, and I am a psychomotor and speech therapist. I am the director of a centre specialised in the diagnosis, treatment, and rehabilitation of learning disorders like dyspraxia, dysphasia, dyscalculia, dyslexia. The centre is called "Trajectoire" and is located in Mons, Belgium.

Trajectoire treats all kinds of learners in a wide age range (from toddlers to teenagers). Our specialists come from multiple disciplines such as speech therapy, psychotherapy, neuropsychology, ergotherapy and neuropediatrics. The objective of our work is to help these learners be more autonomous and able to reach their learning goals. Our work method consists of having regular meetings with the different professionals and with schools every six weeks to ensure that our approach aligns with their activities and supports them in ensuring inclusion in their centres.

- Many DYS seem to enjoy comics while others reject them completely. Is it a good medium for them?

I believe it is a suitable medium, but we need to be very careful with the way we present our strips. It is essential to visualize the images in the panel, the vocabulary related to the actions happening there, the objects that appear and the feelings expressed. This context creates empathy in the readers that helps them understand what the story is about and to put/attach words to the illustrations.

Comics can be useful to work on the narrative structure since they allow us to visualize what provokes a situation through the drawings in the scene: we can perceive the notions of time, location, cause and consequence of the story. Working on the narrative structure is also an

advantage to understand verb tenses and adjectives, verbs and noun inflections. With visual support, the learner can see if there is one or several objects and choose the correct word inflection; for instance: if there are two newspapers in the panel, the reader will be more likely to say "newspaper**s**" instead of "newspaper". The example proves that the image leads to using the correct form of the words.

According to Antoine de la Garanderie[1], (a researcher and expert in pedagogy), including visual and aural support in the classroom, if it is well employed, helps create a mental image that, at the same time, allows the learner to memorize and remember information more easily. This approach is even more relevant with DYS students, i.e. students who present Specific Learning Disorders (SLD) since they can better understand the sequence of narrative elements through visual support. If we want this to work efficiently, extra support explaining how the different aspects of the narrative are linked becomes essential; otherwise, the vocabulary might not be enough to understand the logic of the narrative sequence and the story.

- What adaptations are useful in comics to meet the needs of the largest number of DYS readers?

In order to achieve a good reading, it is important to consider three main aspects: the vocabulary used, the reader's comprehension and the choice of correct words and their inflections to tell the story. Without these aspects, we can't anticipate the following elements of the narrative and get lost in the reading. An option to ensure that we properly present these features could be to use comics as a base where we add different elements.

A useful adaptation we could employ when using comics as a teaching tool, especially for DYS readers, would be to provide the learners with vocabulary that is not present in the comic itself like: synonyms, words related to the story or linking words specifying the time, place, cause, consequence… This adaptation is beneficial because it allows the readers to tell the story themselves or even go further and imagine its continuation, which makes them work their capacity to visualize it. Moreover, this exercise is very helpful for learners since they will need to think about the context where the action will take place, leading them to practise using different word inflexions.

In addition, if we work with comics, we need to think of not surcharging the illustrations and keep it simple so readers can better receive and interpret the information in front of them. The scene must be clean, panels should be well-differentiated or separated, and preferably, there should

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[1]**Antoine de La Garanderie** was a <u>French</u> <u>educator</u> and philosopher. He studied the reasons for students' success and failure, and described the processes involved in thinking and learning. He was in line with the perspective of differentiated pedagogy, which strives to make the students the actors of their learning.

be only one intervention per character in each illustration to avoid any confusion by overcharging the drawings.

Finally, we could also use the strips without any text and provide the vocabulary as support so that learners can create their own stories, which makes them work their narrative structure skills and is very beneficial for working their memory, as well.

- **In your opinion, can comics be a valuable tool for teaching DYS children or adolescents? What are its strengths and limitations for this type of learners?**

Comics can be a valuable tool but only for children from the age in which they are able to narrate a story (around seven years old). It seems useful to train their reading skills, learn languages and improve their mother tongue when using narration and vocabulary support. Moreover, we can't forget about the learners' interests; this tool will be more effective and motivating if readers have a taste for comics and if the topics we work on align with their preferences.

For teenagers, comics seem a great tool because they are pretty immediate, which means that they can quickly get the information they need and allow them to participate in the story. In addition, comics can be a very engaging method to work with teenagers because they can bring along their own ideas and structures.

Regarding comics limitations, it is necessary to keep the comics created and used clear and straightforward because otherwise, we will not be able to exploit this tool to the fullest extent; therefore, this method may become a bit limited.

In terms of advantages, comics can be a great support, even for a traditional class, since it allows working with adverbs of time, place, manner as I mentioned earlier, since strips and images provide with context. Another asset is that we can adapt this tool to different targets and levels; we only need to keep it short and precise and make it longer and a bit more complex when readers get more comfortable with their narrative skills.

- **Do you know any speech therapists or teachers who use this type of tool with DYS? If so, with what results and on what subject?**

I don't know anyone who uses this kind of tool, but I think it could be a good suggestion for some teachers. It would be interesting to hear their reactions after implementing it with their students.

I also think that comics are a valuable method to use outside the classroom to increase the learner's motivation. In addition, a non-formal context would be a perfect environment to work on specific and concrete topics, which is the best way to use comics as a teaching tool.

# Lidia Gil González' interview

- Could you introduce yourself? What is your background and tasks related to education?

Hello, my name is Lidia, and I am a primary school teacher and a speech therapist.

My teaching career began when I started offering English classes to adults. Afterwards, I was successful in the national competition for teachers and started working as an English teacher for public primary education in Spain. Later, after some time working with children, I realised that some students had special needs regarding language skills. These needs were not necessarily related to English learning but to the use of their own language. That is the reason why I decided to study speech therapy, so as to be able to face the multiple learning difficulties in language education we encounter nowadays.

- Many DYS students seem to enjoy comics while others reject them completely. Is it a good medium for them?

Like all other children, students presenting learning difficulties have their tastes; some like comics, and some don't like them at all. However, despite those personal preferences, in my opinion, and according to my experiences, I consider comics to be an excellent resource for people with learning difficulties for several reasons:

Firstly, I think they can be beneficial for teaching languages because they are very different tools to those typically presented in the classroom, motivating learners and making them want to participate in class and be more interested in the subject.

Moreover, comics can be very useful for students with learning difficulties because they allow them to focus on small amounts of text which are separated thanks to the panels. As a result, readers do not have to deal with a large text where lines and letters get mixed, and that helps them work with the language little by little, focusing on specific words that may cause them more doubts, which is a huge advantage for them.

- What adaptations are useful in comics to meet the needs of the largest number of DYS readers?

Among the adaptations that we could apply to comics so that a large number of readers with learning difficulties can benefit from, we can find the following:

Firstly, as mentioned previously, we should reduce and simplify the text we use so readers don't get lost and can clearly identify the panel they are reading.

Secondly, we can modify the size of the typography and use a style that is easy to read, like Comic Sans, which is recommended for students with reading difficulties.

If we work with existing comics that we can't modify, we can ask the students to use a ruler that will help them isolate the line they are currently reading, avoiding getting confused with the others.

Moreover, we can make the students work in pairs or more, so that they can solve their doubts together and read the text aloud. For an SLD student, it is very beneficial to hear the text first since they can better understand the story and identify the potential difficulties. Then, reading for a second time and repeating some words will help them remember the vocabulary and narrative structure.

We should avoid giving too much information in one go. Instead, we can show three or four panels each time and keep all the strips on the same page since the reader can get confused following the story on different pages.

If we mean to be inclusive with students presenting hyperactivity, it will be very beneficial to describe the session's activities. Planning helps them tackle the incertitude, that is why we could first show them the illustrations with no text  so we can introduce the activity by asking them what they think is going on in the strip and explain the exercises we will do together after. It may seem like quite an easy technique; however, it is a valuable tool that positively impacts ADHD students' motivation, engagement, and concentration.

As we just said, these learners need to understand first, the general idea, and then gradually unpack the content. Comics are ideal for this because they allow showing one panel at a time, something much more challenging to do with a longer and denser text.

Finally, the last adaptation I would like to suggest is to allow the students to stand up and move while reading the comics. They can even scene the story, make up a continuation, or try to memorize the key vocabulary and sentences. This exercise seems to be pretty beneficial not only for ADHD students, but for all, and can be applied to teaching languages but also other subjects in a dynamic and engaging way.

- **In your opinion, can comics be a valuable tool for teaching DYS children or adolescents? What are its strengths and limitations for this type of learners?**

There is no doubt that comics are an excellent resource for children and adolescents with or without reading, praxis, or mathematical calculation problems. First, as mentioned above, comics are very visual resources, which represents their most valuable advantage. Graphics support each character's intervention and illustrate the text facilitating its comprehension. Secondly, the text in comics is usually brief, making it easier to read and more difficult for a learner to get lost in.

Regarding its limitations, my opinion is that we can face challenges in adapting this tool to different age groups. It seems evident that we can't use the same kind of comics with children who are learning to read (five or six years old) and teenagers. The amount of text and the topics we treat must be different and well adapted. To exploit comics with young children, we need to reduce the number of words, whereas when using this resource with teenagers and young adults, we can extend the text and add more elaborated sentences.

In addition, the themes and illustrations presented should be simple and adequate for children. We should work with more complex topics and stories to raise the youngsters' interest.

- Do you know any speech therapists or teachers who use this type of tool with DYS? If so, with what results and on what subject?

In Spain, speech therapists work in an isolated and individualized way with students; hence, hearing and speech specialists are not necessarily aware of the employed techniques and methods to support learners. Due to this individualization of our work, we don't have the chance to discuss our different practices. Unfortunately, I don't know any professional who has used comics in their therapy sessions. More communication between teachers and therapists would be essential to improve our support for SLD students.

However, teachers usually utilize this resource in their classes as an innovative and engaging method for adults and teenagers, especially when teaching languages. The objective, in general, is to ease the reading for all of them and sometimes teachers can find this kind of resource in the book they are using for their lessons.

In terms of results, my colleagues and I agree that students are motivated and more likely to participate and read aloud (even in English) when working with comics. Finally, we observe that students are more comfortable using this tool when they have the chance to do it on several occasions. After the first time, they know better how to work with it, share their roles, the steps they need to follow and get ready to read with more confidence and not feel overwhelmed by the text. We can conclude that, in the end, comics can be an excellent tool to work with students presenting learning difficulties and for those who don't too.

## Last reflections on comics and inclusion

After talking with these two specialists, we can conclude that comics may present some challenges if they are not used consciously. However, if we employ them wisely considering our target groups, they can become an excellent tool to teach languages and other subjects too.

The 'EdComix' methodologies represent a great opportunity to be innovative, dynamic and inclusive in the classroom. In these interviews, we had the chance to discuss accessibility and inclusion in terms of learning difficulties. Nevertheless, we believe that they can be a great

tool to teach a language to immigrants or people with different social and cultural backgrounds as well. On top of all the advantages we evoked in the previous conversations, we can imagine the use of comics to represent cultural aspects and include all kinds of people. Have you ever used comics to work on inclusion? Do you have comments or recommendations? Do not hesitate to share it with us through info@logopsycom.com

## Are comics a reliable learning tool for language acquisition?

**Lower and upper secondary school students with different learning needs interact and work cooperatively while indulging in comic strip creation**

### Our learning experience started here

In the following pages we are going to tell about the experiences obtained from 'Mihai Bacescu' Technical College located in Falticeni, Romania. Our team consists of more than 90 teachers, including six teachers of English, and we are prepared to help our 1400 students acquire knowledge, values and attitudes that allow them to adapt to a continuously evolving society and live in a multicultural environment.

We provide theoretical training for students at **lower secondary education** (11-14 years old) and **upper secondary education** for **theoretical profiles** (15-18 years old). At the same time, we are responsible for theoretical and practical training for **technological profiles** (15-18 years old) in several professional qualifications. Moreover, the school offers a wide range of **vocational training and apprenticeship,** including **dual education** (15-17 years old) programmes.

We have received the European School title thanks to our participation in more than 50 other European projects so far. Participating in these projects is important for us as it allows our staff to be trained continuously to better accompany our students.

### Learners are not all the same

The school's teaching staff undergoes continuous theoretical and practical training and we regularly register great results in regional, national and international curricular and extracurricular competitions as well. Yet, our school has been facing several challenges regarding the educational opportunities which, in fact, all students should equally have.

Obviously, by means of the 'EdComix' project under the Erasmus+ Programme, together with more than 50 other European projects which have been successfully implemented in our institution so far, there have been important steps to achieve the European prerogatives of promoting an effective education for all students.

Nevertheless, not all students have an optimum access to education, this fact being widely explained below together with glimpses of how the lessons and workshops created under the 'EdComix' umbrella succeeded in involving disadvantaged groups of students in different tasks. We will share the main challenges faced by our students, and how we used the tools and the

know-how of the project to support our students in overcoming these challenges.

Two distinct categories of students with **special educational needs** (SEN) have been identified, such as:

## A. Involving students facing learning difficulties due to external causes in lessons and workshops

- More than 70% of our students come from rural areas

The students attending the educational courses at our school live in the satellite villages which surround the town of Fălticeni, thus not residing near the school area. In addition to distance given by remote rural communities, these students come to school in two learning shifts, consisting of morning and afternoon classes, lasting from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. Nevertheless, they responded promptly to all project-based lessons and workshops, and here we refer to theoretical, technical and professional/vocational classes involved in the field tests. We used the activity called Directions – asking for directions, giving directions, symbols, landmarks for A2 level, with both local and commuting students. This type of lesson is usually met in their English textbooks and it was realised as a reinforcing activity to the already acquired vocabulary on giving directions in order to get to different locations from or to their home place. Organised in groups, the lower secondary students created digital comic strips using the StoryboardThat platform at www.storyboardthat.com, where they challenged their classmates to use specific vocabulary: turn left, turn right, cross, next to, opposite etc. As a follow-up, they had to take photos of the institution icons on their way: hospital, hotel, park, museum, church, Falticeni town hall, memorial houses, market and present them in front of the class for speaking activities.

- Absence of one or both parents in students' families

Unemployment and low income in rural areas force people to search for work abroad, this fact with significant consequences for many students who come from families where one or even both parents are working abroad, having relatives (usually grandparents) as tutors. Not having

one or both of the family adult members to guide and offer moral support, makes it very difficult for some of these children to cope with socio-educational life. In the feed-back offered after participating in the comic-based lessons and workshops the students appreciated the lessons

about the Future and Law and Justice through 'BLACKSAD' graphic novel, B1 level. At A2 level, the students were very active doing the tasks in activities pertaining to the lesson Jobs and occupations, which also increased the soon-to-be technical graduates' awareness in terms of future jobs and professions with a reference to the current demands of the labour market. The discussions after the lesson pointed out the need for information and the desire to find a decent job in their community, not wishing to depart from their future families.

- Bullying affects school and social life



From previous studies conducted by the educational counsellor in our school, not only children from ethnic or religious minorities, those having a different appearance or social status are bullied or marginalised, but also children who apparently have no vulnerable or weaker points. Yet, our school is regularly developing anti-bullying programmes and class tutors constantly have counselling and guidance meetings on this topic. To be more specific, 50 students in the 10th grade from Social Sciences and Mathematics-Computer Sciences participated in a workshop activity based on different types of bullying using comics pages from Vera Brosgol's graphic novel at Anya's Ghost – verabee. For the workshop, each group of students had to present one of the main characters in the novel, insisting on the emotional aspects and personal issues arising from the bullying phenomenon. This topic derived from Bullying, the lesson created inside the 'EdComix' project, was also related to another interdisciplinary activity developed at school level, where about 300 students from both lower and upper secondary levels were involved in actions (drawings, posters, meetings) against different forms of verbal and physical aggression inside and outside school.

- Learning drawbacks during the pandemic crisis

Blended learning during the pandemic crisis was carried out via high-tech (online learning), low-tech (TV broadcasting) and no-tech educational resources (student's textbooks and hardcopies). In our region, online learning is available in urban areas, but with fluctuations in rural areas due to poor digital infrastructure and lack of distance learning devices inside low-income families.

The introduction of new techniques and resources to enhance digital learning has represented a huge gain for effective education and also drop-out reduction. In this respect, teaching with comics has promoted a genuine opportunity for students to develop language competences by indulging in comic strip creation about stringent topics, for example cyberbullying, a subtopic which was widely referred to in the school material about bullying.

## B. Involving students facing learning difficulties due to internal causes in lessons and workshops

Depending on the severity of their needs, children may enrol in either mainstream schools and can follow the same curriculum as the other children, or they may benefit from specific subjects for rehabilitation and specific intervention. At the beginning of 2020, **14 students with a mild cognitive disability** started attending our institution which fosters access to education for all children, regardless of their socio-economic status. The children in need (mainly children with disabilities) are benefiting from both educational and social support.

Especially during the online learning imposed by the pandemic, teachers worked very hard in making the syllabus material accessible for the students with disabilities, some requiring a personalised curriculum and adapted teaching methods and techniques for distance learning. These students coming particularly from vocational profile (aged 15 to 17) were mainly involved in comic strip workshop scenarios. The classes were invited to the Documentation and Information Centre in our school and realised comic strips directly while displaying their creation in real time for their classmates on a video projector screen.

For example, the twenty-two students in Textiles, with **two students presenting a mild cognitive disability**, had to create first hand-made posters by drawing different clothing items and small pieces of cloth in different colours or textures glued to them. Based on these posters, they were asked to create comic strips where to display and name in English various clothing items and fabric patterns, following a simple storyboard. Clothes was the lesson which provided the basic vocabulary exercises. Role-playing in pairs just like the comic strip with Jack who wants to buy a new shirt in Mr. Phil's clothes shop was nice and funny!

The students specialised in Food Technology and Gastronomy had previously realised a project work in the same domain, describing an international dish with text and visual support. **Three students with a mild cognitive disability** from this class were involved in Cooking and Food and drink lessons, enjoying the colourful worksheets, the infographics on grammar and the comic strips. They learnt how to use the coffee machine with the comic strip characters in Giving instructions, saying that they can work now as a barista in their local café.

Overall, having the lessons about various topics at hand was a huge opportunity for both the **20 teachers and 140 students** involved in the field testing of the lesson packs and workshops. As regards the digital tools used, the lower secondary students preferred the cartoonish platform

StoryboardThat, while the upper secondary students said the comic strips realised in Pixton or Canva were more appealing, with the drag and drop features and ready-made templates. The students were highly motivated to create digital comic strips during the workshops and really enjoyed this task. To conclude, learning through comics improved not only their linguistic competences, but also their creative skills and world understanding. They would definitely like to repeat this enjoyable activity!

# Comics involve students and educators in formal, non-formal and informal activities

## Examples of good practices carried on throughout the great experience of the 'EdComix' project

Designed to create a methodology for educators to teach English in an inclusive way using comics, an umbrella of formal, non-formal and informal activities emerged while working in this project. Sharing testimonials, good practices, suggestions, encouraging words expressed by teachers and students alike prove the productive synergy of the 'EdComix' project.

### Teachers' testimonies

Didactically speaking, 'EdComix' is an extremely valuable European project, as it offers an innovative perspective on teaching foreign languages and not only. The materials and the information made available for students and teachers are attractive, motivating and easy to use. Congratulations! (Roxana Mercore, English teacher at 'Mihai Băcescu' Technical College, Fălticeni)

Comics are a funny and an innovative way of learning English. Comics provide narrative experiences for students just beginning to read and for students acquiring a new language. Students follow story beginnings and endings, plot, characters, time and setting, sequencing, without needing sophisticated word decoding skills. Reading comics can introduce students to concepts of story structure and character development. They can also help children understand mood, tone, humour, irony, and experience a wide range of vocabulary. An easy way to get students reading is to introduce them to comics, a medium that uses images and text to represent ideas. There are comics for every student, from the lower level readers to advanced readers. Comics also allow teachers to sneak in a bit of grammar and writing practice. (Ioana-Elena Danciu, English teacher at 'Cristofor Simionescu' Secondary School, Plopeni, Suceava)

Working in this project has opened up new opportunities for me, as teaching with comics had been quite an unexplored territory before I became involved in this project. After studying the potential of comics and exploiting this multimodal resource during my English classes, I challenged my students to use storytelling and storyboarding techniques and then help them create their own digital comic strips. These activities, in their opinion, were very funny and engaging, giving students the possibility to create, cooperate, work in teams, and even use the knowledge acquired in different domains. All in all, teaching with comics meant entertaining and educating at the same time. (Magdalena-Simona Trușcan, English teacher and project coordinator at 'Mihai Băcescu' Technical College, Fălticeni)

## Students' testimonies

The testimonials below are all written or said by students at 'Mihai Bacescu' Technical College, Fălticeni. They describe so well all the time spent creating comic strips for learning purposes.

Comics are something new to me. It is an area that allows you to express your creativity. I like that there are sites for both beginners and experts, which is clearly an advantage. I felt like an enthusiastic child waiting for Santa when I explored comic book sites. I will definitely try to create more comics for my own fun. (Cristina, 10th grade D)

Comics are very interesting and I like them a lot, because they help you express your creativity and you can create everything you want. It's a lot of fun and you can work with a friend. (Larisa, 10th grade D)

All I can say about comics is that they are an easy way to understand English. I like it because I can do whatever I want with them! (Dorin, 10th grade D)

I really enjoyed creating comics. They are interesting and help me develop my English. I haven't created a lot of comics but I will try it in the future because it's fun! (Laura, 10th grade D)

I've always wanted to create a comic strip of my own, but I never had the patience to do it. I started drawing comic strip characters on sheets of paper when I was six. They were fighting in my drawings, and they remained unfinished. Now that I learnt how to use this digital site (StoryboardThat), it is much easier for me to create comic strips. Yay! (Tudor, 7th grade)

## Sharing good practices

Following the evaluation of the applications received, the National Agency for Community Programs in Vocational Education and Training through the Erasmus + Romania Programme chose the winners of the European Language Label in 2021. The official moment of the award ceremony took place during the LinguaFEST 10 online event, thus marking the context of the European Day of Languages from 24th to 30[th]September 2021. 'Mihai Băcescu' Technical College is one of the five national schools that came into possession of this valuable document through the results of the European project 'EdComix', which are in line with European priorities. Motivating lessons and activities, originality and creativity in the field of modern language learning, development of methodological guides taking into account the learning needs of students, transferability of project results in education are just a few aspects found in the intellectual products of this project.

The school presentation video and the links leading to the broadcast events are below:

ANewsnoiembrie 2021 (adobe.com), European Language Label Community | Facebook, Proiectepremiate ELL_2020.pdf (erasmusplus.ro)

Throughout the 'EdComix' project, the partners created together all these tools, bringing different perspectives, knowledge and expertise to their work.

By sharing the most rewarding and the most challenging aspects of their experience, they wish to inspire readers to seize the project's tools and methodology to use, adapt and create new innovative activities for language teaching in their local context.

In conclusion, there is no better farewell message and project overall vision than the words offered by the consortium representatives themselves.

## Project consortium about the 'EdComix' experience

"The idea of 'EdComix' came as team members of YuzuPulse (France) and Logopsycom (Belgium) discussed the use of comics in education. As avid readers of different types of comics, ranging from European classics, American superhero comics and manga, we really wanted to spread the love of comics in the context of secondary education. Why? Because using comics is often accepted for children, yet their value seems to be less recognised for older students. And, of course, cultural perceptions of comics greatly vary in Europe. This is why we chose to bring the strength and culture of all partners in this European partnership, to develop tools that can hopefully support European teachers to bring comics into the classroom."
Alice Godayol, Director of YuzuPulse, Lille, France - project coordinator

"As a non-profit educational and research center, Citizens in Power (CIP) is constantly dedicated to finding new and innovative solutions within and for educational settings, to increase learners' engagement and motivation, as well as their inclusion. The use of comics for educational purposes, specifically in the context of English language learning, is highly beneficial and can open pathways to new forms of teaching that are non-conventional and non-formal. The project has provided easy-to-use and inclusive resources with step-by-step processes for participating in pedagogical comics' creation. This will enable educators to gain more confidence in engaging with this tool and utilize it according to their learners' diverse needs and interests. After all, who would mind learning grammar and syntax with the X-Men?"
Louiza Kythreotou, Senior Project Manager at Citizens in Power organization in Nicosia, Cyprus

"As a teacher-training organization, we are always looking for resources that can help our trainee teachers and trainers expand their arsenal of teaching tools and approaches. We believe that using and making comics for educational purposes is such a method, and that 'EdComix' has made this method that many teachers regard intricate and difficult to implement, easily accessible to anyone. It shows that you don't have to be talented or trained in the arts to use it in

your day-to-day lessons." Yanis Papadopoulos, project manager for Areadne Lifelong Learning Centre from Kalamata, Greece

"Babel Idiomas y Cultura' is a language learning academy which is constantly looking to improve its teaching methods and innovate in the classroom. We encourage our teachers to explore new teaching tools regularly and based on their feed-back and our students' feed-back we adapt our lessons. The 'EdComix' project prompted us to see a new way to engage and motivate our students to learn a second language through the marvellous world of comics. The project provides courses, tools and resources for both new and experienced teachers, which are easy to understand and use. 'EdComix' showed us that anyone can create comic strips for educational purposes if they receive adequate training. Our teachers are happy with the results that they have in their classroom after using comics. And the students even more." Irina Griga, director of studies, Babel Idiomas y Cultura, Málaga, Spain

"EdComix is an innovative project that offers teachers all the necessary tools and methodology to use and create digital and inclusive comics for their teaching practice. Looking at how using comics and graphic novels for learning can support learners and offer opportunities to those with learning difficulties or with underprivileged backgrounds we have been focusing on creating engaging and accessible material for all. We invite educators to discover this new methodology and hope to greatly benefit from it!" Bérenger Dupont, director of Logopsycom, Belgium

"Especially in the current context of learning, we are confident that the intellectual products developed in this project, the experiences during the activities and the examples of good practices will be an effective tool for English teachers and all those involved in education and student training. These new directions for presenting the content of the lessons can turn teachers into SUPERHEROES who join forces to provide students with an inspiring and creative learning environment." Magdalena-Simona Trușcan, project manager and teacher of English at 'Mihai Băcescu' Technical College from Fălticeni, Romania.


What are you waiting for? Be confident in the knowledge you acquired from all this material and start making comics today. We are here to support you!

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