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THE POTENTIAL OF THE STORYLINE APPROACH IN CROATIAN ELT CLASSROOMS

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POTENCIJAL STORYLINE PRISTUPA U NASTAVI ENGLESKOGA JEZIKA U HRVATSKOJ

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Abstract

The Storyline approach is a communicative and social constructivist approach to teaching a foreign language in which learners create their own, unique story that provides them with a meaningful context for the use of the target language and an opportunity to cover curricular objectives from the syllabus. In a typical Storyline project, learners work in groups, and by following the story framework previously designed by their teacher, they construct the characters, setting and all events in the story. Since the approach puts emphasis on pupils' creativity and makes use of their various talents, pupils' work is visually displayed on a classroom frieze. Teacher designs the line of Storyline episodes depending on the desired learning outcomes and curricular aims which need to be covered, and pupils have an opportunity to develop all four language skills by participating in the activities which they find meaningful and interesting. Since the Storyline approach is generally unknown in Croatian educational context, the aim of this thesis is to provide information about the crucial features of Storyline, as well as to present a study conducted for the purpose of this paper. The primary aim of the study was to investigate novice teachers' perceptions on the Storyline method and to examine their opinion on the feasibility of Storyline in Croatian ELT classrooms. The author expected that participants would recognize the teaching potential of Storyline and that they would be willing to incorporate it in their classrooms. Those hypotheses proved to be correct, and results show that the majority of novice teachers think that it would be possible to implement some of its aspects to their classrooms, even though they are also aware of its possible drawbacks and obstacles.

Key words: *Storyline*, *EFL, story framework, curricular aims, novice teachers, feasibility*

1. Introduction

In November 2016, the group of approximately twenty final year graduate students of the TEFL Section at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb received an invitation to attend a three days long teaching workshop held by Dr Sharon Ahlquist, a Senior Lecturer in TESOL and Applied Linguistics from the Kristianstad University in Sweden. The only information that the group had was that the topic of the workshop was going to be "The Storyline Approach" and that they were all supposed to bring some papers, scissors, coloured pens or crayons and marker pens. Since the majority of students have been participating in various workshops throughout their studies, it is safe to say that most of the colleagues were at first sceptical about the outcome. None of them had ever heard of The Storyline Approach prior to that first day of the workshop, and on the basis of some previous experience with unconventional teaching techniques and approaches, they had some doubts concerning the relevance and practicability of that topic in Croatian educational context. However, almost two years later, everyone still distinctly remembers the enthusiasm, engagement and the sense of unity brought by the Storyline Approach. During those three days they were no longer groups of colleagues tired after the whole day of lectures, but they became groups of different tight-knit families moving to an imaginary British town of Danbury. It was not long before they realized that that was not just another guest lecture which they would forget as soon as it ended. A year later, the next generation of students at the Department of English also had the opportunity to take part in the workshop designed by Dr Ahlquist.

This paper examines an approach to teaching English as a foreign language known as the Storyline Approach, or simply, Storyline. It is organized as follows. The following section first presents Storytelling and its significance in foreign language teaching. Then, the Storyline Approach is introduced, with subsections which deal with its theoretical background and central features. An example of a Storyline project is also included, followed by an overview of previous research. The subsequent section then presents the study which investigates novice teachers' attitudes to whether or not it would be possible to implement Storyline in the Croatian educational context. This was achieved through conducting semi-structured interviews with participants of the Storyline workshops in Zagreb in 2016 and 2017. In that section the research results are presented and analysed, whereas the final section of the paper is the conclusion.

2. Storytelling

Since the earliest childhood, stories play an essential role in our lives. The activity of telling and sharing stories is embedded in virtually all cultures of the world and present in different forms throughout all periods of recorded human history. Walter Fisher (1987) goes so far as to make an assumption that humans are storytellers by nature and that almost all forms of communication can be interpreted from a narrational perspective. Because of their obvious lure and appeal, stories have a broad range of application, one of which is fulfilling educational objectives while being integrated in formal education. Roney (1996) provides a definition of Storytelling in which he emphasizes its effectiveness as a teaching method:

> In its most basic form, Storytelling is a process where a person (the teller), using vocalization, narrative structure, and mental imagery, communicates with the audience who also use mental imagery and, in turn, communicate back to the teller primarily through body language and facial expression in an ongoing communication cycle. Storytelling is co-creative and interactive. It is one of the most powerful forms of art/communication known to humans and this explains why it possesses such great potential as a teaching-learning tool. (p. 1).

The greatest advantage of using storytelling in classrooms is probably its ability to cater for various learning needs and individual differences. Many different school subjects can be covered with the help of stories, and if they are used in an appropriate way, due to their interesting and instructive nature, stories can be a very effective teaching tool. Fox Eades (2006) emphasizes the significance of including stories in the curriculum: "Listening to stories and telling stories can reduce stress in the classroom, promote literacy, speaking and listening skills, help children to develop thinking strategies and promote their social and emotional development – and all while they engage in a rewarding and enjoyable activity" (p. 12). All these arguments also work strongly in favour of using Storytelling in the context of the foreign language teaching, especially when there is an emphasis on classroom activities which are meaningful to learners. Students, particularly young ones, are engrossed in meaning rather than in isolated grammatical structures, because of which Storytelling may be an opportunity for them to acquire language in the context of its functional use, and even, as stated by Sandra Kerka, "incidentally". Kerka (2000) considers incidental learning (unintentional learning which results from other activities) the most effective form of learning, because it is "natural", situated, contextual and social. It is safe to say that when learners read or listen to a story that

captivates them, they may internalise the new vocabulary more easily and willingly than in a formal learning environment, as is for example the "ex-cathedra" type of teaching. Studies also confirm that learners who participate in Storytelling activities develop an increased ability to listen actively and their vocabulary and syntax are also more advanced and complex (Speaker, 2000; Roney, 1989; Phillips, 2000). Zaro and Salaberri link storytelling to the hypotheses of language acquisition proposed by Stephen Krashen. In their opinion, the recognisable language used in stories can be associated with Krashen's "comprehensible input", and using the stories as a listening activity fits in well with the "silent period theory" (Zaro and Salaberri, 1995). When reading the story in class, learners can infer meaning from the context even though the provided input may be slightly above their proficiency level. With the Krashen's theory in mind, using the comprehensible input within storytelling can help learners to acquire L2 naturally, rather than consciously making an effort. Also, while listening to sufficient comprehensible input from the story, without being expected to produce anything, learners actively process their L2 during the silent period of language acquisition.

With these didactic implications of stories in mind, the Scottish Storyline Approach will be presented in the following section of the paper. As is evident from the name of the method itself, Storyline, as well as the usual storytelling, uses the context of a narrative and the structure of a story (characters, episodes, setting, plot) to create opportunities for teaching and learning. However, even though it employs the framework of a story to reach learning objectives, there are more differences than similarities between Storyline and Storytelling. While both teach language in context through the means of a story, due to which thinking traits and knowledge of the world are developed, there is one core difference between the two methods: in Storyline, learners are required to be active participants in creating the story with all its components.

3. The Storyline Approach
3.1 Background

Storyline is an approach to teaching originally developed in Scotland and today used in the educational systems of the UK, USA, Scandinavian countries, in other European countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, as well as in some parts of Asia and Southern America (Ahlquist, 2013). An idea for a new teaching methodology emerged in 1965, when the Scottish Education Department published a report called "The Primary School in Scotland". This curriculum document demanded a radical change in approach to teaching in primary schools:

instead of training the teachers to teach separate subjects using textbooks, a different, cross-curricular approach to teaching was recommended (Bell and Harkness, 2006). That new approach was supposed to be learner centred and it was to use active and discovery learning, encourage differentiated group work and introduce integrated subject areas (Bell and Harkness, 2006). Sallie Harkness (1997), who is alongside Steve Bell one of the originators and main developers of Storyline, quotes the mentioned document that was supposed to provide teachers with the guidelines for the next twenty-five years:

> How the child learns is educationally no less important than what he learns. Certainly, skills must be mastered, knowledge must be acquired, and the curriculum must be carefully planned to ensure that basic skills and essential knowledge are adequately covered. Primary education, however, will have failed the age and society it serves if children leave the primary school without the right attitude to learning, or the resource and will to continue and further their own education. (p. 14)

In that context, a group of teachers from the Jordanhill College of Education in Glasgow created a teaching methodology now known as the Storyline approach. According to Bell and Harkness (2006), Storyline is an approach that allows teachers and pupils to cooperatively create lessons, simultaneously addressing the children's interests and concerns and ensuring that core curricular knowledge and skills are being covered.

The practical development of Storyline has been taking place since the 1970s, with the start of workshops for teachers in Scotland. Harkness (1997) states that the international popularity of the Storyline method began to spread in the 1980s, when the original Scottish tutor team started to run workshops in other countries. Since then, it has been proving itself as a successful and useful classroom practice in educational systems across the world (Harkness, 1997).

Since the Storyline method was organized as a practical answer to the curriculum demands of the time, academic literature or empirical research concerning Storyline is still scarce. The useful source of information about the practical work and ongoing research about the method is the main Storyline website and newspage[1], on which it can be read that even though it is still a relatively unknown approach, Storyline is becoming the centre of research for a growing number of students in Masters and Doctoral programmes across the globe. For instance, the doctoral theses in progress include researching the effects of Storyline on English

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[1] www.storyline-scotland.com

learners in Germany or exploring the influence of Storyline on Turkish young learners' attitudes and learning (Ahlquist, 2013). Jeff Creswell (1997), an American Storyline educator, mentions "The European Association for Educational Design", the organization which supports the development of the Storyline approach and sponsors the international "Golden Circle Storyline Conference", which is held every eighteen months in countries across the world in order to share research, resources and applications of the method. It is interesting to mention that the next Storyline conference takes place in Ljubljana this June, where speakers from the US, Finland and Scotland will promote Storyline principles and practices in our region.

3.2 Central features of the Storyline approach

While working on a Storyline project, learners become the main contributors in making their own story come alive. Ahlquist (2013) explains that this is enabled by working on the "line" of episodes previously created and planned by the teacher. While staying within that framework of a story, learners in various ways engage in "Key Questions" that integrate practical and theoretical topics and which are also devised by the teacher on the basis of the curriculum content. Through working on the activities connected to the setting of their Storyline topic, or while inventing the characters and solving the incidents which the story framework provides, learners construct and negotiate their own meanings without consciously being aware of participating in the learning process. Furthermore, Bell and Harkness (2006) claim that learners develop procedural, conditional and declarative knowledge due to the tasks they need to overcome in a Storyline topic: "The theory is that the story, which is jointly created by the children, contextualises and motivates them; they become emotionally and intellectually involved with their learning" (p. 5).

One of the important features of Storyline is that it functions at all levels of education and with different curricula. It is flexible and easily adapted to fit the needs of learners of different ages and abilities. Since it is not a teacher-centred approach, learners actively participate during the whole Storyline experience and they most often work in groups, together choosing and creating actions and further steps of the process. Since every Storyline is planned as a series of episodes with a logical sequence, it is important for learners to feel that they are in control of the whole process. Creswell (1997) claims that learners establish control and the sense of ownership over the topic due to the Storyline design that requires a combination of

their prior knowledge and imagination, what functions as a powerful motivator to them. Not only does the Storyline method take into account the curricular content, but it also provides an opportunity to explore topics which are close to learners' everyday lives. The story proposed by the teacher can develop in many different ways depending on the learners' creativity and curriculum demands, due to which, as Bell and Harkness (2006) argue, the principles of creativity and accountability are reconciled. As it is stated on the Storyline Scotland website, Storyline aims to develop capacities of the Scottish Curriculum for Excellence: successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors.

Creswell (1997) and Ahlquist (2016) describe Storyline as a fundamentally social constructivist approach. Social constructivism is usually associated with Lev Vygotsky, who emphasized the social nature of language and the importance of social interaction and cultural context in learning. Douglas Brown (2014) explains it as a learner-centred theory which advocates the negotiation of meaning between teacher and learners, and according to which students need to engage in discovery learning. While participating in a Storyline project, pupils find themselves in an environment which provokes their active engagement and helps them to develop critical thinking. Also, according to social constructivism, learning outcomes should be related to students' reality outside the classroom and they should not be taught in an abstract manner, what is definitely true for the Storyline method. Apart from these characteristics, in learners' collaborative work on Key Questions in Storyline, Ahlquist (2016) recognizes the conditions in which learning occurs within Vygotsky's "Zone of Proximal Development". That notion is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In Storyline, learners who are engaged in meaningful tasks cooperatively develop their linguistic and cultural knowledge, and due to support from more skilful peers, a higher level of performance can be expected even from less proficient learners. Also, Storyline in various ways makes use of many talents, which is a powerful motivation for students who may not be proficient in English, but are good in other subjects. Apart from looking at the approach within the scope of social constructivism and closely related sociocultural theory, Ahlquist (2016) also compares Storyline to task-based learning and teaching. Task-based language teaching is a form of communicative approach to languages, and as its name indicates, its focus is on various types of tasks in the classroom. The story framework makes those tasks more meaningful and interconnected, since the tasks used in one part are used to develop the story in later parts. Therefore, throughout the project, learners have a feeling that their work is respected

and taken seriously because they can see that it is made use of. Furthermore, the Storyline approach bears the characteristics of task-based teaching because it also builds upon learner's existing knowledge and puts emphasis on authenticity and social interaction. Speaking, reading, listening or writing activities that arise from Storyline episodes fit well into Skehan's definition provided by Douglas Brown (2014), according to which a task is an activity in which: meaning is primary, there is a problem to solve, a relationship to real-world activities exists and an objective that can be assessed in terms of an outcome is present. Jane Willis's (1996) classification of tasks also bears a resemblance to possible realizations of Storyline's Key Questions. She introduces listing (brainstorming, fact-finding, researching), ordering and sorting, comparing, problem solving, sharing personal experiences and a wide range of creative tasks (making models, creative writing, performing dialogues, etc). Even though task-based learning and Storyline share significant mutual characteristics, Ahlquist (2013) identifies some important differences between the two approaches. She stresses that both Storyline and task-based approach provide meaningful context for all language skills through the use of tasks; however, Storyline always uses a framework of a story as a starting point to every task. Furthermore, Ahlquist mentions that while solving a Storyline task, learners do it in the role of characters which they designed by themselves, and characters stay the same from the first to the last episode. She also emphasizes practical work that learners do during their Storyline project as another important distinction. Every Storyline is unique because while designing the characters or a story setting displayed on the frieze, each learner has the opportunity and freedom to realize his creative potential. Moreover, group work, which is so often used in Storyline, is also a common feature of the task-based approach. Nevertheless, Ahlquist (2013) clarifies that in Storyline, groups are homogenous, what is very Storyline specific. For example, in "Our Sustainable Street" Storyline groups function as families and neighbours from the same street, and in "Open Market" they are traders who have stalls at the same market. The last difference which Ahlquist (2013) mentions is a celebration event as an essential part of every Storyline. In this way, learners use the last task to recapitulate all the previous ones and it serves as a grand closing of the story.

Creswell (1997) uses a set of principles created by "The European Association for Educational Design" in order to emphasize the distinctiveness of this approach. According to him, these principles should function as guidelines when planning a Storyline project (p. 10):

- *The Principle of Story*: Storyline uses the power of a story to provide a clear structure and a meaningful context for acquiring the material required by the curriculum.

- *The Principle of Anticipation*: the key question in a successful Storyline is "What is going to happen next?" Learners anticipate the unfolding of the story and they are eager to contribute in the learning process because they feel like a part of it.

- *The Principle of the Teacher's Rope:* there is a balance between teacher control and learner control in a Storyline topic. Teacher continuously holds "the rope" (the framework of Storyline with its Key Questions and planned curricular goals), but that rope is flexible and learners have the freedom to move on it in many different ways.

- *The Principle of Ownership:* a Storyline topic uses the learners' previous knowledge and the participants feel responsibility, pride and enthusiasm for taking part in it.

- *The Principle of Context:* Storyline provides a context that represents real life and which is familiar and close to learners. By using a predictable structure of the story, learners go from the known to the unknown.

- *The Structure Before Activity Principle:* a teacher provides a structure for accomplishing a certain task (e.g. creating a frieze, writing a character's biography, doing a research for presentation) which helps learners to answer the questions which they created by themselves.

The episodes in a typical Storyline topic are organised as follows[2]. In the episode one, learners answer the first Key Question by establishing a *setting* of their story. An important part of working with Storyline is a visual representation of everything that is being created. For that purpose, when learners collaboratively brainstorm characteristics of their story's setting, a frieze, a large display or an empty wall in the classroom should be accessible. With many different materials and in various techniques, learners design their background for the events in the story throughout the whole process. Consequently, in the second episode, learners invent and shape the *characters* which are going to be the protagonists of their narrative. The composition and design of the characters is completely up to learners, and Bell and Harkness (2006) emphasize that this "human element" brings fun and feelings to learning. In addition, learners often easily and quickly relate and identify with the created characters, which also increases their feeling of personal involvement in story. The sequence of the first two episodes may also be reversed, so learners can establish their characters before choosing the story setting. The third episode together with its Key Question brings some *initiating event* that learners need to devote themselves to. In all of the episodes, Key Questions should focus on the learners'

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[2] The following information about the narrative sequence in Storyline is taken from Bell and Harkness, 2006, p. 9.

previous knowledge and they should be designed in a way to promote brainstorming, mind-mapping and critical thinking. The activities which evolve from these Key Questions may on the other hand explore the curriculum content in many different ways. Some of the suggested activities are oral narrative, personal recount, picture story, role play and drama, rap/poem/song, newspaper/radio/TV report, dialogue. Furthermore, the episode four presents an *incident* which can be either proposed by the learners or previously planned and imposed by the teacher. According to Creswell (1997), these incidents provide the opportunity to work on the specific curriculum goals, and they can take many different forms depending on the Storyline topic: a robbery, a fire breaking out, an outbreak of food poisoning, problems with new neighbours, etc. According to that incident, the story further develops to the fifth episode, which functions as a *culminating event*. That last episode usually takes form of a celebration or an exhibition of a sort, and its objective is to bring the story to its highest point. This is an opportunity for summarizing and concluding everything that has been done. Bell and Harkness (2006) mention the possibility of involving learners' parents or other school staff at this stage, and it can also be done in the form of a field trip or some similar outdoor activity. Having officially finished the narrative sequence, learners then reflect and review what they have learnt and their awareness about the learning objectives is raised.

As already mentioned, the choice of a Storyline topic depends on the desired curriculum outcomes. Teacher has the freedom of designing a framework suitable for the learners' needs, whereas learners negotiate the setting and characters, as well as the way in which they are going to answer the Key Questions and respond to the incidents they come across. On the Storyline Scotland website some examples of successfully conducted projects can be found. To name but a few: "Our Farm" project was done in primary schools in Finland and Slovenia; 4th graders from England learnt about "Immigration"; students from Tanzania and Norway did a Storyline on "Water", and different American schools conducted a project about various types of "Villages". Bell and Harkness (2006) give examples of projects such as "The New Neighbours", "A Holiday in Europe", "Open Market", or "Viking Family" and some Storylines designed by Jeff Creswell include "The Hotel", "Space Adventure", "The Huk-Toocht Fish Farm" and "The Radio Station". Interesting Storyline projects can also be done with book-based topics, in which Storyline framework is designed according to the content of chosen literary works. Examples of such topics are Creswell's Storyline "Underground to Canada", created on the basis of the novel about slavery written by Barbara Smucker, or the American-Swedish literature-based Storylines inspired by the novels "Ronia the Robber's Daughter" by Astrid Lindgren and "The miraculous journey of Edward Tulane" by Kate DiCamillo. Even though

the careful and meticulous planning of such a project may be challenging and time consuming, Ahlquist (2013) emphasizes how rewarding it is to stimulate learners' captivation with the story: "There is a lot to be gained by planning a *Storyline* which will capture the learners' interest from the beginning and hold that interest as the story develops through a variety of tasks, all linked to the curriculum" (p. 49).

3.3 Description of a Storyline project: "Our Sustainable Street"

For the sake of presenting a developmental path of a typical project with all its episodes and constituent elements, in this section a Storyline conducted by Dr Sharon Ahlquist will be described. Its detailed outline is presented in chapters 5 to 9 in her book from 2013. The "Our Sustainable Street" project was done in a Swedish primary school and it was designed for 32 learners aged 11-13 with a focus on English, but its structure also made curriculum connections to art, social and natural science, home economics and mathematics (Ahlquist, 2016). The course of that Storyline will be presented by shortly describing Key Questions from the project, and its function is to provide a framework of the story by simultaneously covering content of the curriculum. All the information that follows in this part of the paper was taken from the aforementioned book by Sharon Ahlquist (p. 103-173). Before starting to work on the desired Storyline topic, Ahlquist (2013) suggests introducing the subject of the story by working on the target vocabulary and providing some input that learners are going to need throughout the project. Since "Our Sustainable Street" among other things explored the topic of sustainability and environmental issues, prior to starting with Key Questions, learners were supposed to work with images of natural disasters, engage in class discussion about climate change, read an extract from the post-apocalyptic novel "The Road" written by Cormac McCarthy and write their own ending to a story previously dramatized by their teachers. Another interesting notion which could be transferred to the whole Storyline experience is also made by Ahlquist: "The point is that if they [learners] do not understand the situation, they will not care about it…" (p. 107). At this point of the project, the learners are divided into groups and told that they are going to be families moving to a new street in the imaginary British town called Danbury. They are given an empty UK map to fill in with the names of the cities written on the board. Finally, before the Key Question 1, students are asked to close their eyes, imagine themselves in their new town and describe what they can see, hear or smell there.

- KEY QUESTION 1: "Who are you?"

Depending on their level of proficiency, learners in various ways brainstorm the lists of words that pertain to each category of a personal description (personality, appearance, nationality, job, etc.) and then those words may be translated to L1 and put on the frieze or on the wall of a classroom. Learners then think of the characteristics of their characters and present themselves to other group members using the present simple tense.

After that, learners receive a context for their writing task, which they are supposed to send to the Danbury newsletter: "The company which has built the new houses has the idea that the residents should get to know each other." The youngest or less proficient learners do this with the help of model sentences, while more proficient ones write a short piece about themselves which is then corrected and reviewed by the teacher or another peer.

The next step is to make a visual representation of each character. Learners can draw a self-portrait of their character's face, they can make models from plaster or various materials, create stick figures or even use a picture from some magazine to build their character around it.

The final task in this first episode is connected to choosing a family car. Learners draw it, look up the words connected to cars and prepare the talk about it. Finally, each family makes introductions to other groups from the class. At the end of the first episode, learners put up the portraits, cars and accompanying descriptions on the frieze.

- KEY QUESTION 2: "What is your house like?"

The second episode of this Storyline also starts by brainstorming: this time, learners think of different types of houses in Britain. Similar to the previous episode, the group then designs the interior and exterior of their house, which they present to other families. An especially interesting activity which can be done in this episode is receiving a letter from a solicitor, who informs the family that a relative had died and left them with £1000 they have to spent by furnishing one of the room in their house exclusively with IKEA furniture. Learners can then agree which room and what furniture they are going to buy, they can look up the prices and an offer online and find pictures for their presentation.

This is also the episode in which students create a name of their street: each family suggests the name and then the residents of the street vote. The winning group designs a street sign and puts it on the frieze. As the story evolves, learners also receive a map of Danbury in which they need to identify the places marked by numbers on the map (school, bank, supermarket, petrol station, etc.) and role play giving and asking for directions. This is a

preparation for a listening task which ensues: learners listen to a description of how to get to their street and they draw a map or write down what they hear.

- KEY QUESTION 3: "What is your impact on the climate?"

At the beginning of this episode families receive another letter: they are invited to participate in a project connected to sustainable living. Prior to the project, learners watch a video clip ("a presentation on climate change at the town hall") which further introduces them to the topic of climate change. A list of useful vocabulary is made and while listening to the presentation, learners make notes.

Each member of the family also needs to write down a description of a typical day in his life. These descriptions are after the presentation analysed and families discuss what they could change in order to have a more positive effect on the climate. The discussion brings about a new presentation that families are supposed to present to their neighbours.

As an introduction to the next Key Question, the teacher puts some foil or newspaper on the frieze and learners suggest what kind of a plot twist that might represent.

- KEY QUESTION 4: "What do you think we can do about the waste ground?"

When the students realize that the change on the frieze stands for a rubbish dump, a discussion and brainstorming about recycling and rubbish disposal ensues. For the next task, learners work in groups and they are supposed to mime the dumping of some large object of their choice. Before the miming, learners describe the features of that object to the teacher, using correct vocabulary and structures. After the task, learners receive a list of items that were mimed and solve vocabulary exercises. The language used in the description can be adapted to the learners' level of proficiency and curriculum goals and, as is the case at the end of every vocabulary task, learners note down the new words, translate them to L1 or use them in their own sentences. New vocabulary is also exploited in a writing task from this episode: learners need to write an e-mail to their friend, telling them about their life in the new street. Another Ahlquist's suggestion of taking the story forward comes in the form of a diary entry written by Mrs Brown, a neighbour from the next street who also has problems with a rubbish dump and who complains about it in her diary. Less proficient learners are supposed to draw Mrs Brown's house and garden and create "thought bubbles" in which they are to write simple sentences about Mrs Brown's feelings and thoughts about the rubbish problem. More proficient students'

task is to write to the local council of Danbury with a demand of cleaning up the trash and a proposition of turning the wasteland into a park. Students here make sure that they know what a formal letter should look like.

At the beginning of the next Storyline session, families receive a letter from the council in which the authorities agreed to build a park, but they also ask for suggestions about what to include in it.

For the conclusion of this episode, Ahlquist suggests a range of different tasks that can be chosen depending on the target language skills and factors connected to time management or size of the groups. One of the ideas is for learners to make a presentation about the influence of mobile phones on the environment, in an answer to a Danbury's campaign to clean up the town. They can also design posters for the same cause, as well as make video adverts or a radio programme, in which they are going to include other families from Danbury.

- KEY QUESTION 5: "What do you think we can do about the problem with our neighbours?"

The fifth episode starts by making a new change to the frieze: the teacher puts a "Sold" sign on the only plot of land in the street which was until now unoccupied and places a removal van next to it. Learners are given a list of objects from the removal van on the basis of which they need to guess what kind of family their new neighbours could be. They write down their ideas and the teacher then gives them a list of the names and ages of the Grimshaw family members, which learners check to see if they were correct.

The only feedback that learners get regarding the characterization of the new neighbours is that they are "cool". The next step for the learners is to create the Grimshaw family on the basis of that adjective: they draw portraits, write their biographies and describe their typical day. This is followed by planning an interview which the learners will conduct with Sandra Grimshaw, the mother. The teacher or some other person who is willing to improvise plays Mrs Grimshaw. At this stage learners repeat the rules of forming questions and the usage of modal verbs, since they are also supposed to make some suggestions to an impolite and anti-social new neighbour of theirs.

- KEY QUESTION 6: "How do you think we can make our homes safer?"

This episode starts with an incident: somebody has broken into the house of the Grimshaws. Learners hypothesize who the burglars might be and what they look like. Each group is then

quickly shown a photo of a burglar which they need to remember and describe. Their description is then passed to another group which is supposed to draw a portrait of the burglars according to it. After comparing the portraits to the original photo, learners design arrest warrants for the criminals. As a pre-activity to this task Ahlquist introduces a newspaper article in which reporters ask the Danbury residents to send them suggestions of protecting their homes. This is an opportunity for learners to look up different kinds of British newspapers online and consider different styles of writing.

- KEY QUESTION 7: "How do you think we can celebrate our first anniversary in Rainbow Avenue?"

The last episode of this Storyline project is done in the form of a party in celebration of the first anniversary of life in the new street. Learners are assigned to different groups depending on the tasks for the party: one group designs invitations, another one is responsible for decorating the classroom, others take care of games and entertainment, etc. If possible, students invite their parents or other school staff, they mingle at the party with other neighbours and take pride in everything they have done during the last couple of weeks.

The last task in the project is a writing one: learners are supposed to write a letter to a friend describing the last year in their lives. This is an opportunity to recapitulate all the events from the story by using the acquired vocabulary and a wide range of tenses and grammatical structures. According to Ahlquist (2013), the learners at this stage usually produce the longest and the most productive writings: "The result was, in almost all cases, longer pieces of writing from the learners than the class teachers had seen before, and also more complex language, with many of the learners using structures which were new to them or which they had not yet met in class" (p. 173).

4. Previous research

The focus of the study conducted for the purpose of this paper was on Croatian novice teachers' opinions and attitudes about the potential of the Storyline approach in Croatian ELT classrooms. Before presenting the study with its main research questions and analysed results, a brief overview of previous research will be given. As previously stated, there is an apparent deficit of empirical research connected to the Storyline method; however, in the last couple of years, novice teachers' attitudes and perceptions have been researched for various purposes.

Even though the focus of these below mentioned studies differs from the Storyline topic, they will be mentioned since all of them investigate perceptions of the same target research sample: novice teachers.

A study by Bingham Rees (2015) examined how beginning teachers in the US perceived their first year of teaching. The findings suggested that the majority of novice teachers were satisfied with their teacher preparation program and that they felt successful at work, but they also identified classroom management as an area in which they would have liked more instruction.

A similar study was conducted by Akcan (2015), who investigated the English teachers' opinions about the effectiveness of their teacher education program after their first years of teaching in Turkey. The majority of the participants concluded that they were satisfied with their teacher education, but they all thought that more emphasis should have been put on practice rather than on theory, especially regarding classroom management.

Another study by Panesar Nahal (2010) explored Canadian novice teachers' expectations of teaching prior to their first teaching experience. It is interesting that 100% of the participants stated that after a year of teaching, there was a disparity between their expectations and realities in the classroom, mostly because of problematic classroom management, unmotivated learners, a heavy workload and a lack of support from students and parents. Bergren-Mann's (2016) study on the other hand, in which she examined novice teachers' perceptions and beliefs about teacher leadership showed that almost all of the interviewed teachers believed that they had the potential to be a teacher leader.

As far as the research regarding Storyline is concerned, Ahlquist claims that the reason behind its relatively unfamiliar status in the field of SLA is probably the lack of research or references to Storyline in academic literature (2013). However, there are some conducted studies and projects worth mentioning since they report significant findings about the approach. For example, a three-year long project was conducted in Germany, England, Finland and Poland. In the 'Comenius project', which found that Storyline benefits vocabulary acquisition and motivation, primary school teachers from those countries were taught how to use the approach in their teaching (Ahlquist, 2013). Another study was done in Sweden, where the role of Storyline in reaching curricular objectives was researched. The results suggested that a story, key questions, clear structure and group work were some of the most important benefits for learners. The same study attempted to research the impacts of Storyline on the less proficient pupils' learning. The results show that those learners benefit from practical work and develop talents they may not know they possessed, because of which their self-confidence increases

(Ahlquist, 2013). Ahlquist also mentions some studies conducted by student teachers in Sweden, who report increased learner engagement in Storyline projects, a greater number of questions from pupils than usual or teachers' comments that they can get wider picture of their learners' knowledge via Storyline than through traditional testing (2013).

One of the extensive studies about Storyline was done by Rhonda Mitchell-Barrett (2010) who was interested in the effect of Storyline on pupils' levels of intrinsic motivation, as well as in the pupils' opinions and reactions to the Storyline method. Her sample group were 33 students from Class 5 in England and she collected research data by using questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study's statistical testing showed that pupils' scores for interest, enjoyment and perceived competence increased during taking part in a Storyline project, while their levels of pressure and tension decreased. All of the interviewed students stated that they thoroughly enjoyed the project and that they were all eager to participate in something similar again (2010).

When it comes to Storyline and the second language acquisition, an important study was conducted by Sharon Ahlquist (2013), who wanted to explore the Storyline effects on students' learning and find out which parts of the method learners responded well to. Over the course of 4-5 weeks Ahlquist studied the sample of 11-13 year old Swedish pupils by using classroom observation techniques, questionnaires and interviews with learners and teachers. She also used video and audio recording and analysed pupils' written assignments in the various stages of their Storyline project. The findings suggested that the features which learners liked the most in Storyline were art work, imagination and variety. Moreover, the key word that the majority of students used to describe their project was "fun". Also, Ahlquist from the learners' responses concluded that group work and solidarity in the classroom were seen by many pupils as important factors in their Storyline experience. When it comes to learners' language development, Ahlquist noticed greater willingness to speak English, longer and more complex written texts, increased ability to understand L2 instruction and increased lexical knowledge.

5. Research

The purpose of this research was to determine novice teachers' perception of the potential of introducing the Storyline approach to Croatian EFL classrooms. In this section, before presenting the data analysis and results, research questions and hypotheses will be outlined, followed by the description of the research sample and the procedure.

5.1 Research questions and hypotheses

Having taken into consideration the previous empirical research, as well as the theoretical background of the Storyline method, the following research questions arose:

1. What are novice teachers' perceptions of fundamental characteristics of English language teaching in Croatian classrooms?
2. What is the potential role of the Storyline approach in English language teaching in Croatia?
3. What do novice teachers think about the feasibility of introducing the Storyline approach in Croatian ELT classrooms?

In an attempt to answer the above questions, the following hypotheses were formulated:

a) English language teaching in Croatian classrooms is mostly characterized by adhering to textbook and workbook.
b) Storyline could provide contexts for meaningful and interesting language teaching, as well as opportunities for making cross-curricular links and greater social collaboration in class.
c) Novice teachers may think that it would be possible to introduce Storyline in their classrooms, but they may also express some practical concerns or be uncertain about the way of including it in the Croatian syllabus for English.

5.2 Sample and procedure

According to the nature of the research, fourteen participants were selected and the research was carried out in March and April 2018. The target group consisted of 14 novice teachers (NT#1-14) who participated in a shortened, three-day version of the "Our Sustainable Street" Storyline workshop conducted by Dr Ahlquist at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences in Zagreb in 2016 and 2017. Since Dr Ahlquist mentioned that some slight changes and additional activities were introduced in the Storyline seminar in 2017, the author decided to include the participants of the both sets of workshops. Some of the participants have since then graduated and all of them have passed teaching practice in different primary and secondary schools in Zagreb. All novice teachers were female and six of them were employed in different private schools of foreign languages (NT#2, NT#7, NT#9, NT#10, NT#11, NT#12) three of

them worked as novice teachers in elementary public schools in Zagreb (NT#6, NT#13, NT#14) and one taught English in a kindergarten (NT#8).

The instrument used in the study was a semi-structured interview devised by the author and conducted in Croatian (See Appendix). It comprised 30 questions, some of which included sub questions, which enabled the researcher to create a wider image and tailor the questions according to the interviewees' context. With the researcher's emphasis that their participation was voluntary and anonymous, the novice teachers gave their permissions for the interviews to be audio recorded, after which the transcripts were produced, translated to English and analysed.

5.3 Results

In this section, the results taken from the fourteen interviews with the novice teachers will be interpreted and presented, followed by a discussion. In order to analyse them, the participants' answers to the interview questions were compiled and categorised into three different subsections that are thematically in accordance with the research questions.

5.3.1 Fundamental characteristics of English language teaching in Croatian classrooms

In order to take into account the novice teachers' perceptions on the potential of the Storyline approach, it is necessary to briefly explain the English language learning situation in Croatia as well as to present the participants' notions on what characterizes English language teaching in Croatian classrooms.

In the school year 2003 the foreign language was introduced on a compulsory basis into the first grade of primary schools in Croatia and pupils have been able to choose between English, German, Italian and French (Vilke, 2007). Since then, the majority of Croatian pupils have been choosing English as their first foreign language, which they then learn until the end of their compulsory education, comprised of eight years of primary and three or four years of secondary school. From grades 1-4 in primary schools, pupils attend two 45-minute English lessons per week, and from the grades 3-8 the English language lessons consist of three periods per week. In both vocational and grammar schools in Croatia lessons consist of 45-minute periods and, as in higher grades of primary schools, students attend three English lessons per

week. At the end of their compulsory education, Croatian students take the "matura" exam in which a foreign language (most often English) is one of the three compulsory subjects.

The most important national document which describes educational standards for all subjects and which includes the syllabus for English as either the first or second foreign language is called The Croatian National Educational Standard, or "HNOS[3]". The syllabus for English relies on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) and it determines students' language proficiency on the basis of six CEFR levels (A1-C2). At the end of the eighth grade, learners who have been studying English since the beginning of elementary school should attain the A2 proficiency level, which implies the active usage of 1000-1100 lexical units and basic grammatical structures. According to HNOS, the contemporary foreign language education should aim at achieving oral and written communication competencies and include reading/literary competencies, as well as sociocultural and intercultural competencies. The emphasis is also put on the learner's general cognitive-affective and social development by learning about other cultures, promoting tolerance, improving collaboration and respecting others (HNOS, p. 4). It is also interesting to mention that the syllabus for English highlights the importance of creating a comfortable learning environment in order to maintain learners' motivation for learning a foreign language. As a means of achieving such conditions, "the element of play" and "the occasional use of alternative forms of teaching" are recommended (p. 6).

Apart from being exposed to English in their formal education, children in Croatia are surrounded with English in different forms from a very early age: through watching TV programmes and films which are not dubbed in Croatia, listening to music, using the Internet and social media, playing computer games, etc. In that kind of environment, it is not unexpected that virtually all interviewed novice teachers stated that pupils whom they had worked with generally liked English and were motivated to learn it. NT#3 for instance, remembered that her teacher mentor at school said that she was lucky to be a teacher of English "because that is the subject which all students usually like". NT#8 said that her impression was that pupils liked English because they considered it a subject that would be useful to them in practice after school, "in real life". The two novice teachers who work in elementary public schools added that they were happy to realise that, especially in lower grades, children eagerly and spontaneously volunteered for oral exams, and that they knew that some students never studied English at home, but still got the highest grade because they "picked up" the language from

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[3] The abbreviation which stands for "Hrvatski nacionalni obrazovni standard". All references from that document are taken from the latest version of HNOS found online: http://www.azoo.hr/.

computer games or TV series. In order to find out what these novice teachers do to maintain this generally positive image of learning English and further motivate their students, they were asked to describe their typical lesson and some activities they employ. Eleven out of fourteen novice teachers reported that for the main part of the lesson they used the prescribed textbook and supplemented it with additional materials created by themselves or taken from some Internet resources. Those participants also emphasized that they always made sure to include fun activities in their lesson plans, such as various games, songs, modern technology and interactive media, etc. Neville Bennett (1997) provides justification of games in the curriculum: "Under such conditions, children then demonstrate improved verbal communication, social and interactional skills, creative use of play materials, problem-solving skills, imagination and divergent thinking skills" (p. 6). Very much alike other participants, NT#13 said that she wanted her lessons to be highly interactive and with very little frontal teaching in order to provide opportunities for pupils to work on their own as much as they can: "At the beginning of the lesson we revise what we learnt last time by playing games such as 'Bingo' or 'Memory' or by using iTools on the smartboard. After that I introduce the topic of the lesson through a conversation, then we work on the textbook and put new words on the board and in the end we play again, this time 'Tic-tac-toe' or 'Snakes and ladders'. If pupils are tired and unmotivated, then we play some short games such as 'Simon says' a couple of times during the lesson." From the participants' answers we concluded that regardless of their different experience as learners, they were aware that in order to create a successful and motivating learning environment, it was not enough to use the formally prescribed teaching materials. Murdoch (1990) emphasized the interesting point made by Britten (1988), who said that the biggest change that teachers experience is the change from the method they experienced as learners to the method they are being taught to use themselves. The majority of the participants in the study stated that their teaching style was different from the way they had been taught by their teachers mostly because textbooks and workbooks dominated their own foreign language education. All of the interviewed novice teachers said that their English teachers in both primary and secondary school almost had exclusively used textbooks and workbooks, and that they only remembered the endless solving of grammar and vocabulary exercises. Nevertheless, participants obviously understood the significance of play in learners' development and they believed in pedagogical implications of games in class: only one novice teacher reported not using games in her lessons. However, all fourteen participants stated that their English teachers had used games either very rarely or not at all. The situation with stories was even worse: stories were used in class only by the teachers who worked in rare private schools which prescribed them by their syllabus,

and no participant recalled stories ever being used by their teachers of English. One participant also commented that she definitely wanted to develop a teaching style which would be very different from the one she had had in school: "I was always dissatisfied with my English classes. All the teachers that I had were very uninterested in their work. I will be a different teacher primarily because I will always care about teaching somebody something, and I will explain grammar in a different way. I will rely on contemporary theories in linguistics" (NT#9).

However, there were two participants who claimed that their teaching style did not differ from the way they had been taught in school and that they considered themselves "old-school teachers". NT#14 explains: "My teaching style is not different from the way I was taught: I use a textbook, a board and a chalk. I do not use modern technology, but I am going to start using it because I see that new generations do not respond well to these old methods. Even though I think my teachers did a good job using traditional methods, times are changing and we need to adapt." Her typical lesson definitely differed from the lesson previously described by her colleague: "At the beginning I always check homework. Then we continue with the next unit from the textbook after which pupils solve the exercises on their own which we then go through together. They copy new vocabulary or grammar from the board and in the end, they again solve textbook or workbook exercises."

Even though it was obvious that all participants, regardless of their personal preferences, considered that it was important not to be overly dependent on textbooks, it is clear from their answers that the English language teaching in Croatian classrooms is still mostly characterized by using textbooks, workbooks and little other material. Not only did the participants mention their English teachers adhering strictly to textbooks, but also the majority of them stated that their teacher mentors at schools where they had attended teaching practice used the same methods. Penny Ur (2009) suggests some advantages of using a textbook: it provides a clear framework and serves as a syllabus, it consists of ready-made texts and tasks whose preparation would be very time-consuming for the teacher, it provides guidance and support for inexperienced teachers and it is economic and convenient for the learner. The interviewed novice teachers provided very similar arguments in favour of using a coursebook; for example, NT#6 said that "If you do not have enough time for preparing a lesson, you can still do it effortlessly with the textbook" and NT#7 claimed that "When using a textbook, you are sure that you are going to meet the expected outcomes and you do not have to worry whether the content is appropriate and useful to your learners". On the other hand, Ur (2009) also gives some arguments against using a textbook; in her opinion, they are often inadequate and cannot satisfy every learner's needs, they may consist of irrelevant and uninteresting material and they

may also lead to the lack of motivation and boredom on the part of both teacher and learners. According to the participants from the study, "textbooks cannot cover all the prescribed outcomes from the curriculum" (NT#8), "textbook does not take into account learners' individual differences and it puts pressure on learners to be correct all the time" (NT#10) and "learners cannot develop a positive attitude to learning a language by using a textbook only. They can get some linguistic knowledge from it, but not the knowledge they are going to use in real-life situations" (NT#11).

When asked about their opinion on the reasons behind so many teachers designing their lessons almost entirely around textbooks, participants suggested the causes such as the lack of time and will, laziness, insecurity in their teaching competencies and staying in the comfort zone. However, they also mentioned some positive sides to it, as having a provided structure and more systematic lesson plans. NT#6 commented: "Maybe teachers work that way because they realized that pupils do not appreciate their time and effort put into inventing creative lessons" and NT#12 added, "I really doubt that after 10 years of teaching you want to bother with all that. There is too much of everything that you are supposed to do." Although young teachers may have more energy and ambition to incorporate a different and more modern approach to teaching, NT#13 explained why they also sometimes choose the easier path: "It is the easiest to stick to the textbook because when you improvise, there is more possibility that pupils will ask you something that you do not know."

Even though many teachers, especially inexperienced ones, often feel less confident, and although textbooks and workbooks definitely have both benefits and drawbacks, it is important to bear in mind that "our job as the teacher is to create conditions in which our learners have something to say, want to say it and are not afraid to do so" (Ahlquist, 2013, p. 13). With this in mind, the next section of the paper will examine the part of the study that deals with the novice teachers' perceptions on the potential role of the Storyline approach.

5.3.2   The potential role of Storyline in English language teaching in Croatia

Fourteen out of fourteen participants used either the word "fun" or "interesting" when asked about their first associations of the Storyline approach. This is in line with Ahlquist's (2013) observation that "What has been enjoyed will be remembered" (p. 41) since all of the participants were even after a year or two able to describe all the activities and impressions from the workshop in detail. All novice teachers also stated that they had never heard of

Storyline prior to the workshop they attended at the University. NT#2 recalled: "I was very excited when I realised that we were going to create our own stories and that we could invent the characters by ourselves. I communicated with the colleagues with whom I had never talked before". NT#9 said: "At first I thought that we were going to read stories because I associated the Storyline with Storytelling, but then I realised that we ourselves were actually the story" and NT#12 stated: "My first associations of Storyline are freedom, creativity and including the 21st century skills in the syllabus." Three participants admitted that they had at first been sceptical about the workshop, that they felt silly while doing some activities and did not see the point in all that. NT#14 emphasized: "It was unusual and interesting, but on the one hand a bit uncomfortable as well because I was not used to working that way. We had to be very creative, what is usually not expected of us in class, so at the beginning it was difficult to adapt and think along those lines." However, all participants concluded that the power of Storyline lies in being so engrossed with the story that you are unaware of acquiring new things until somebody points that out to you.

The author also wanted to find out which aspects of the approach the novice teachers found most useful. According to its main developers, Storyline provides many educational benefits to both teachers and students, such as contexts for meaningful language work with all four modes of language, structure of the story which allows flexible and responsive teaching, cross-curricular links, social collaboration and multi-sensory learning opportunities (Bell and Harkness, 2006). Novice teachers obviously found those same benefits appealing since the characteristics which emerged the most often in their answers were: covering the fascinating amount of vocabulary, making cross-curricular links, building up learners' intrinsic motivation for acquiring new knowledge, increasing learners' self-esteem, taking part in meaningful group work and raising learners' awareness that they were using some real-life language or structures they were not even aware of possessing. The participant who works in a public elementary school stated: "The most useful thing about Storyline is that it can incorporate any topic that children may relate to. For example, when we teach vocabulary connected to pets, we will not mention that 'Polly has a dog', but each of us can now have a dog that we created by ourselves. Our dog can be ideal, children who do not really have a pet can take care of it, express their wishes, etc. And the best thing is that that does not stop at one lesson, but it can be constantly extended" (NT#13). NT#9 also made an interesting point: "The teacher needs to be very careful when planning a Storyline framework because it may all turn out to be just for the sake of laughter and fun. However, it can also develop to an experience in which you do not only teach the language, but you raise those children and find out what sparks their interest. I also liked

the fact that all forms of language can be included in Storyline: you can create a situation in which learners practice production, reception and all types of discourses." Along these lines, NT#8 considered Storyline an interesting idea which could expand horizons of the system in which educational reform is needed. NT#12 on the other hand thought that everybody emphasized 'the concept of entrepreneurship' in Croatian schools: "Storyline would fit perfectly into that. It would be much more useful to the society than this competitive regime that we have in our schools".

Novice teachers were also asked about their opinions on some drawbacks of the approach and the characteristics of Storyline that they did not find appealing or useful. Ten out of fourteen participants described Storyline as being very time consuming. According to them, including that kind of activities into a regular schedule of two or three 45-minute lessons per week presents a considerable issue. NT#13 said that in an ideal case, the teacher had less than 40 minutes for his lesson: "You need 5 minutes to get children to calm down, another 5 minutes to explain what you are doing… If pupils are used to Storyline then it probably takes less time, but if you are at the beginning of its implementation and if you teach several classes per day… Time is not just an imaginary obstacle, it is definitely a real one." Also, six novice teachers considered that the Storyline approach did not give enough emphasis to grammar and they thought that a lot of grammar would be neglected and uncovered in such activities: "I think that all approaches to teaching which are not traditional lack grammar. There are students who like having a framework and explicit rules stated" (NT#2) or "Some creative activities including grammar might be incorporated, but I have no idea how I would apply Storyline to, for example, articles" (NT#3) and "In my opinion grammar must be taught explicitly" (NT#10). Apart from the time factor and underrepresentation of grammar, one participant thought that it would be difficult to get pupils switch from their current mindset that was used to traditional frontal teaching to the mindset of Storyline. NT#14 also emphasized the importance of a proper way of leading the Storyline activities, which reminds of the previously mentioned "Teacher's Rope Principle": "Students may inappropriately react to the activity and there could be a digression due to which everything could go in a wrong direction."

Nevertheless, the majority of the downsides mentioned by the participants did not actually refer to the nature of Storyline, but to the conditions and circumstances in Croatian educational system. Taking this into account, one of the issues that was especially interesting to the researcher was the participants' perception of constraints that they encounter when trying to create a favourable learning environment. The answers which have repeatedly been mentioned were: the demands of the curriculum, teacher's lack of freedom in organizing

classes, large classes, poorly equipped classrooms, lack of time, and having pupils who are used to traditional, frontal teaching. Since the notions of the curriculum demands and teachers' freedom present the biggest challenges in the novice teachers' perception of the feasibility of the approach, they will be referred to in more detail in the next section of the paper. When it comes to classroom conditions, which are often very far from being perfect, Ahlquist (2013), after conducting her study in a stuffy, noisy and unequipped classroom makes an interesting point about another strength of Storyline: "For all that the physical conditions were not ideal, it is safe to say that we adults were more aware of them than the children seemed to be" (p. 64).

Being aware that all learners are distinct individuals with different personalities, learning styles and learning preferences, the participants were also asked to describe the characteristics of pupils to whom Storyline would or would not suit. Whereas the majority of novice teachers mentioned creativity as a key personality trait necessary to enjoy Storyline, it was interesting that seven out of fourteen participants stated that Storyline would be suitable for everyone, and that each pupil could draw from the approach at least something that he or she enjoys. While some of the participants thought that extrovert pupils would enjoy and benefit from the Storyline experience more than the introverted and shy ones, other novice teachers claimed that that was not the case. For example, NT#11 said: "Storyline would suit weaker pupils because they would not feel under pressure to always give a correct answer and to always write everything correctly. They would feel freer. On the other hand, it might not suit the best ones who stand out from the rest of the class because they may feel that they could learn more. Children are often unaware of how much they learn that way." A couple of participants also mentioned that Storyline would be disliked by learners who like to have everything structured and explicitly explained. Many pupils feel secure when they can rely on their textbooks, and since they are in general used to solving grammatical and workbook exercises, they know what to expect from each lesson. According to NT#13, "Storyline would not suit students who like to memorize things by heart and those who have troubles with logical reasoning. Those kind of learners could not relax. But I think Storyline should suit the majority of learners."

Having considered the participants' perception of both benefits and drawbacks of the approach, as well as their opinion on what characterizes the teaching of English in Croatia, the next section of the paper will deal with their attitudes on the feasibility of introducing Storyline in the Croatian educational context.

5.3.3 The novice teachers' perceptions on the feasibility of introducing Storyline in Croatian ELT classrooms

Seven participants stated that the greatest obstacle in introducing Storyline to their everyday teaching was the syllabus that they needed to follow, which they perceived as something that constrained them and deprived them of their freedom and creativity in class. For example, NT#1 said: "I would love to include Storyline in my lessons, but I think that is not possible here because everything that we need to do is prescribed and teachers do not really have freedom. Everything is prescribed by the syllabus… I think that syllabus also prescribes the ways in which certain things need to be done." NT#2 also saw the pressure to obey the syllabus and the lack of teacher's freedom as significant impediments to the approach. Another participant also commented that she had been thrilled at the prospect of including such activities in her lessons, but that throughout the whole workshop, she could not stop thinking of the impossibility of using Storyline in our classrooms, where everything needs to done by the textbook and teachers have no freedom at all. On the other hand, it is very interesting to mention that all novice teachers admitted that they were not really familiar with the syllabus for English and that they had never studied it in more detail: "I have some general idea about it, but I am not familiar with the details" (NT#3), "I am ashamed to admit that I know very little about it" (N/#7) or "I am roughly familiar with its framework. I am not sure whether it states the ways of teaching something, but I know that it prescribes outcomes" (NT#6). The majority of them also confused the notions of "curriculum", "syllabus" and "HNOS" and, contradictorily, even though most of the participants claimed that that document strictly prescribed what they ought to do as teachers, they also admitted that, at their workplace or teaching practice, they had the freedom of organizing their lessons as they liked.

When the main teaching standards described by HNOS are furtherly examined, it becomes obvious that the Storyline approach can also be considered in the context of Croatian syllabus for English. For example, the first two teaching standards are "developing and maintaining motivation for foreign language learning" and "creating comfortable learning environment" (HNOS, p. 6). As previously mentioned, Mitchell-Barrett (2010) conducted a study which dealt with the effects of Storyline on primary school pupils' motivation, and her research findings suggest that the participants' level of intrinsic motivation significantly increased while participating in a Storyline project. Also, the students' levels of interest and enjoyment increased, while their levels of pressure and tension considerably decreased. The Storyline way of working can also be taken into account when considering the following

standards from the syllabus: "including the learners' interests and experiences" (HNOS, p. 7). As already stated, pupils have a considerable amount of freedom when working on the framework of a story, and they are able to design the story plot and characters according to their personal affinities and interests. Storyline also gives importance to pupils' previous knowledge and experience since many Storyline topics reflect the situations and contexts that students meet in everyday life. An important teaching standard from HNOS which is sadly very often not incorporated in practice states that "foreign language teaching should never be teaching of grammar and vocabulary", but rather educational research which encourages students to work on their own (HNOS, p. 7). In Storyline projects, learners are personally involved in all activities and because they feel that they own the story, they care about it and want to constantly build up on their existing knowledge. Throughout the process, they use new vocabulary and grammar structures in the form of activities which remind them of real-life situations, and without using the meta-language which is, almost always, unnecessary for successful acquisition. "Classroom organization" is also seen as a standard which teachers should provide for, and it presupposes a classroom in which there are some visual representations of students' work and a display of their achievements (HNOS, p. 7). One of the core features of Storyline is having a classroom frieze and visual displays of the story's setting, characters, events and incidents. With such omnipresent and concrete evidence of their learning progress, learners take pride in their improvements and can constantly revise and recall something they may have forgotten.

Dr Ahlquist felt the necessity to slightly change the second set of workshops for the students in Zagreb when one participant from 2016 drew a sad face as a visual symbol of something that she was going to remember from the workshop. When asked to justify her drawing, she explained that she really liked Storyline, but was sad that she would not be able to use it in practice because of having to use a textbook in school. Some participants from the study also shared that opinion; NT#8 described an ideal learning environment as a system in which teachers did not have to follow a strict prescription to do everything by the textbook and NT#9 thought that pupils' parents wanted their children to use textbooks and workbooks in class because they had to pay for them. It seems that many novice teachers saw the textbook and a demand to cover textbook objectives as another obstacle in introducing Storyline to their classrooms. Howard Gardner (1993) criticises a school system which does not allow students to get involved in their learning more deeply: "We have got to do a lot fewer things in school. The greatest enemy of understanding is coverage. As long as you are determined to cover everything, you actually ensure that most kids are not going to understand." However, one of

the most important characteristics of Storyline is that it is adaptable to various learning environments and curricular needs; therefore, it can be introduced and used in classrooms alongside a prescribed textbook. With that in mind, the participants of the study were also asked whether they thought that it would be possible to adapt the textbook content to an outline of Storyline. Eleven participants agreed that that would definitely be possible and some of them gave their ideas of adapting certain chapters from the textbooks they currently worked with. For example, NT#5 would design her Storyline framework according to a textbook unit connected to travelling. In her opinion, pupils could invent characters who are preparing for a trip and do some research about the countries which they want to travel to, design their travel brochures or simulate shopping for souvenirs. Throughout the whole project, in order to meet the curricular objectives, the vocabulary from the textbook unit would be used. Another participant, NT#9 had an idea of adapting the textbook chapters which dealt with animals or food in the form of a story with a farm setting. The farmers would take care of animals and visit the market, where they could exchange and sell their products, learn how to bargain, etc. The incident and a plot twist could appear in the form of a storm which caused damage and ruined their crops. Three participants also stated that many textbooks introduced and portrayed some characters which appeared throughout the whole book and which pupils could closely relate to if they were included in Storyline. Apart from those characters or some kind of short stories or comics that occasionally appear in textbooks, it is often the case that each unit in textbook deals with a different subject, and that there is no logical connection between chapters. The vocabulary or grammar which students meet in one chapter is usually not repeated and revised in later chapters. NT#8 concluded that due to Storyline, pupils could realise that all curriculum material was somehow connected because the interrelatedness of units was more obvious in Storyline than in textbooks.

Apart from curriculum demands and the participants' perceived obligation to use a textbook, another important obstacle to feasibility of Storyline is the lack of time and the way in which lessons are timetabled. Since lessons in Croatian schools are as short as 45 minutes, ten out of fourteen participants considered the time factor as a great challenge in Storyline implementation. However, some participants thought otherwise: "The lack of time is very often just a good excuse. If the Storyline project is well created, it could cover a couple of units without any problem. So, nothing would be lost, it would just require a little more effort" (NT#5) and "I think that the lack of time is not a real obstacle, it's just that people are often not willing to find a solution" (NT#7). With a weekly lesson distribution of English in mind (two English lessons per week in lower and three in higher grades), the author was curious how the

novice teachers would fit Storyline into their regular timetables. Four participants thought that pupils would find Storyline the most effective if they dedicated 15 minutes of the lesson to that way of working. Four participants would also organise Storyline as a project that would last a couple of weeks and take place within regular classes, and two participants stated that they would organise it as an additional extracurricular activity. NT#13 also had an idea of dedicating one whole lesson per week to Storyline, and NT#14 said that she would work on Storyline continuously through the whole semester. NT#9 would combine the approach with regular lessons whenever she found it appropriate: "Students could have a Storyline folder which they would always bring to class. When I would see that the unit fits the Storyline, I would do the Storyline and combine it with the traditional way of teaching. So, students would have the prepared setting and characters always with themselves and they would use them when I find it appropriate. We would do it systematically throughout the whole year, in order to take a break from textbooks. In that way, pupils could always stay in character, go back to that and have a constant reinforcement."

It is safe to say that the Storyline approach is unknown and unfamiliar in the Croatian context of English language teaching. Therefore, the researcher was interested in how the participants perceived their superiors' and pupils' parents' reactions to implementing it in their classrooms. When it comes to the reactions of school staff, especially principals and pedagogues, the participants' opinions were divided. Seven out of fourteen novice teachers believed that their superiors would not understand the potential of such an idea and that they would be sceptical to introducing a new way of teaching English. For example, NT#2 thought that her initiative would be met by demotivational comments such as "ah, just another young and enthusiastic teacher with silly ideas" and NT#12 believed that more conservative teachers would think her "crazy to experiment with something new and different from the prescribed methods". She also thought that the majority of people who would be against Storyline would also consider it not serious enough and regard her as a teacher who did not want to work hard, but just wanted to play and tell stories with pupils. According to NT#9, this negative attitude towards any kind of innovations has to do with Croatian mentality: "In our mentality, people would consider Storyline an un-concrete work, because obviously pupils need to die of boredom if their work is to be considered concrete". NT#10 shared a similar opinion: "Primarily, it is due to our mentality: we are still focused on educating as many people as possible, in a prescribed way, and as quick as possible. The individual approach lags behind in our case".

On the other hand, the rest of the participants believed that their superiors would react in a positive way: "My school is very open minded and I think everybody would support it"

(NT#13) and "My school likes to put emphasis on contemporary methods and trends. I think nobody would mind it if all curricular objectives were met" or "I would present them the Storyline method by putting them in the role of pupils. If they saw how interesting it was, they would definitely agree" (NT#4). Another participant thought that the school which wanted to have a reputation of being "modern" would regard Storyline as a good way of making parents to enrol their children there, since school would put attractive Storyline activities on their webpage, etc. When it comes to parents' reactions to Storyline, participants' opinions were more homogenous. Ten of them thought that parents would react positively to that way of learning English, especially if their children would talk about those activities at home and look forward to English classes. NT#7 and NT#12 thought that today's parents were "eager beavers" who were very engaged with their children's education, but simultaneously, two participants claimed that the majority of parents were mostly focused on children's results and good grades. Also, the participants who were sceptical about positive parents' reactions believed that some parents would see Storyline as an extra and unnecessary work, because of which they would need to prepare additional materials, do some research at home, etc. NT#1 claimed: "The situation with parents would be problematic because they would not regard Storyline as something profitable, they may think that children would just play and not learn anything". However, participants in general believed that if appropriately designed and presented, Storyline may be found by pupils' parents as appealing and beneficial.

The author was also interested in the novice teachers' perceptions on group work since that is an important characteristic of Storyline. According to Paul Nation (1989), there are several ways in which group work can benefit learning. Primarily, group work provides opportunities for learners to negotiate comprehensible input and it also exposes them to new language items and language functions. When working in groups, learners also learn various communication strategies and develop fluency in the use of both familiar and new language features (Nation, 1989). The interviewed novice teachers also gave similar arguments in favour of using group work in English classes: "Through collaboration with others you learn something that you previously didn't know and together you reach the conclusion which you wouldn't have reached on your own" (NT#3), "They correct each other in group work, and in that way both the ones that are being corrected learn, and the ones who are providing correction. And everybody feels freer" (NT#7). NT#6 also mentioned that while exchanging ideas with their peers, pupils did not feel the pressure and anxiety to say "I don't know" in front of the whole class. Another important point was made by NT#9, who said that group work developed social intelligence and tolerance: "In life you always need to work alongside somebody, and Storyline

positively develops this cooperation". Since "about 70 per cent of the utterances in most classrooms come from the teacher" (Cook, 1996, p. 120), Storyline may definitely present an effective way of reducing the teacher talk time and encourage students to be more actively involved, to form habits of using a foreign language and engage in activities which are meaningful to them.

Nevertheless, the participants all agreed that there were some significant negative sides to group work due to which they did not use it often in practice. For example, NT#14 thought that primary school pupils regarded group work as a break in the middle of the lesson: "I do not use group work because of disciplinary problems, it is hard to monitor it" and NT#12 said that when her pupils heard that they were about to work in groups, their first reaction was: "Yes, now I don't have to do anything!" Eight out of fourteen participants stated that a considerable difficulty in creating effective group work was an unfair distribution of work in groups: from their experience, there were always pupils who dominated in groups, as well as the ones who were happy to let others dominate because they did not want to participate. Two participants also thought that group work made sense only if teacher assigned group members, but that may also be problematic because of bad personal relations between some students and potential rows and disagreements. Three participants mentioned that group work often leads to noise and murmur that could be difficult to control and two of them were also aware that pupils usually shifted to their L1 when talking to their peers. NT#9 reported that group work was often used in Croatian classrooms, but not in a very effective way: "Teachers assign tasks to pupils and pupils are then left on their own. At the end, the result is presented by one person who did the entire job by herself. What I like about the Storyline is that roles are clearly assigned." Even though the degree of success of group work may be determined by some individualistic factors which are at times uncontrollable, Storyline, because of its characteristics, provides an opportunity for a teacher to act as a facilitator who creates conditions in which students actually want to use the target language because they have an honest interest in the outcome of the task.

An important aspect of every Storyline project are materials needed for creating and constructing the story. Apart from the frieze or empty classroom walls, students should have an access to some art supplies, which could be either basic, if the teacher wants to keep the artwork simple, or more diversified, such as cardboard boxes, pieces of wood, scraps of fabric, ribbons, tin foil, sticks, plasticine etc. Six participants assumed that it would not be a problem to obtain Storyline goodies: "All classes have their pinboards and all pupils have their materials for art class" (NT#13). Another six novice teachers did not agree and according to them, teacher would have to manage on his own: "I do not expect that school would be of any help, I would have to

rely on myself" (NT#14), "I got an impression that teachers would have to purchase those materials, everything would be up to them" (NT#3). One participant also thought that it would be unfair to ask pupils to bring their own additional materials for English and that school should be responsible for providing any kind of supplies. Finally, NT#9 concluded: "There are schools which do not provide printing services or even toilet paper. But when there's a will there's a way. The point is in using imagination, and not in having too much materials." Due to the nature of Storyline, those projects often enable teachers to make cross-curricular links by including curricular objectives from more than one school subject. With that in mind, the participants were asked whether they thought that it would be possible to include another school teacher as a co-organizer of their potential Storyline project. Ten participants optimistically believed that their colleagues would be enthusiastic about Storyline and willing to experience something new and beneficial for their learners. In their opinion, the framework for English could be combined with various school subjects, and even with a different foreign language. Two novice teachers were sceptical about asking another colleague to participate and they thought that their co-workers would not be willing to take part in something like that because "everyone is too engaged with their own textbooks and syllabi" (NT#8).

The Storyline aspect for which all fourteen participants agreed that it would be possible to successfully implement in their schools was a concluding Storyline activity. As previously mentioned, the concluding episode provides an opportunity for learners to recapitulate and reflect on everything they have learnt, as well as to share their work with family, friends or other school staff. All novice teachers thought that both teachers and parents would benefit from organising such an event: "That would be a good opportunity to prove to parents that the project paid off" (NT#7), "It could be done within the final school play at the end of the school year" (NT#10) and "Children definitely don't have enough opportunities to take pride in their work. They would be very proud if their parents came. Today's parents are much more open, they would certainly come" (NT#12). According to Jeff Creswell (1997), the concluding Storyline episode also provides an opportunity for something which almost all of the participants considered a problematic Storyline trait: meaningful assessment.

Nine novice teachers admitted that they had not thought about assessing pupils through Storyline activities: "I have always considered it an additional activity, not as something that I am supposed to assess. How could I assess something so creative, how could I evaluate the amount of effort that somebody put into that?" (NT#3) and "Assessing Storyline? God, no. It would have to be some kind of continual assessment, but of what? Their contribution, effort, knowledge? It would be very complex." (NT#12). Five participants stated that they did not

know in which way Storyline could be assessed and saw that as a major problem in its classroom implementation. One participant said that "pupils could receive constructive criticism about their work" (NT#5) and another similarly stated that "assessment could not be numerical, but descriptive" (NT#7). Four participants thought that the pupils' grade would result from continuous monitoring of their efforts and overall activity and commitment to Storyline tasks. NT#9 saw assessment as one of the reasons why she would introduce Storyline only as an extra, reinforcement activity: "It would be a nightmare if I had to evaluate Storyline. You cannot get pupils to relax and have fun while telling a story and then give them a C. But I still think it would be good to organise Storyline as a project because children would enjoy it and they would stop studying just to do well on a test". Also, NT#10 stated that because of the lack of standardized assessment, she could not see Storyline as a main teaching method: "Concrete assessment in form of a test would be impossible". NT#11 added: "After working with Storyline, you cannot give to a pupil a present simple/present continuous exercise on a test. He would not be aware that he knew it, even if he did acquire it. He wouldn't even know the terminology. It would not be realistic to assess pupils on the basis of their contribution to the project – those are not the grades which public schools seek."

Jeff Creswell (1997) made an important point when he said: "If I cannot give concrete evidence that my students have learned the curriculum, I have failed" (p. 119) and NT#13 also made a similar statement: "Everything done in the Storyline needs to be properly assessed. The goal of Storyline is not just for pupils to have fun, but to acquire new knowledge". Even though the majority of participants could not think of a proper way of evaluating such an activity, Ahlquist (2013) and Creswell (1997) provide plenty of evaluation methods which should inspire pupils to do their best. For example, pupils can record everything they do throughout their Storyline experience by creating a topic book, or some kind of a unique portfolio on the basis of which teacher can assess their written assignments. Various learners' presentations and speaking activities can also be regularly assessed, and Ahlquist recommends keeping a learner's journal, in which learners can do self-evaluations at the end of each episode, as well as receive feedback and be assessed by their teachers for their performance in all four language skills. It is interesting to mention that some teachers decided to give their pupils the same test after the Storyline project as they would have given them if they taught those units more traditionally: "They are often surprised to find that the children do better on the test after doing a Storyline topic because they have learned the material in a way that has made sense to them" (Creswell, 1997, p. 122).

Finally, having taken into account all novice teachers' perceptions on advantages and

disadvantages of the approach, the author was interested in whether they had thought about implementing Storyline to their English language teaching. The participants who were still not employed (four participants out of fourteen) were asked to give their opinion on the basis of their practical classroom experience during their teaching practice. Consequently, eight novice teachers reported that they have all considered introducing Storyline to their classrooms, but that they were currently unable to do it. However, all of them were definitely planning to try it in near future: two teachers already had Storyline in their plans for the next school year, and one participant had already tried to incorporate it in her syllabus. On the other hand, four participants neither considered carrying out a Storyline project nor had plans of using it in their teaching in the future. Two participants stated that they would like to work with the Storyline framework, but they still thought that it would not be feasible in our educational system. Those two novice teachers mentioned the previously stated reasons, such as curriculum demands and too few English lessons per week.

The participants who were eager to try their own versions of Storyline were at the moment incapable of doing it for various purposes: they either worked at private schools whose syllabi they needed to obey or they still felt that it was too early to start with implementing that kind of approach during their first year at work. For example, NT#6, who was ending her first year of teaching in a public elementary school, said: "I have been thinking of implementing it in my lessons, but at the moment I am too overwhelmed with everything. I will be trying to integrate it little by little at the beginning of the next school year." NT#9, who had come up with the way of integrating Storyline to her regular classes, commented: "Both my pupils and I would profit from Storyline because I also don't like to be bored when teaching. But you need to be ready to work hard and love that. Nobody would pay you for extra work. Simply work, work, work." NT#13, who had also been working in an elementary public school for a year, had already tried to perform a Storyline topic. Because of the large number of pupils in her class and some administrative obligations (such as obtaining an approval from a headmaster), she decided to start her first Storyline as a part of an extracurricular activity. However, she concluded that in order for Storyline to be successful and to sustain the learners' interest, it was too rare to work on a story just once a week: "In the next school year I will start it as a project, and if pupils react well, I will start with the full implementation and combine it with my regular English classes." On the other hand, the reasons behind the four participants' unwillingness to try the Storyline were the lack of experience and enthusiasm, insecurity and disciplinary problems. NT#3 explained: "Honestly, I don't think that I would have enough will and enthusiasm for such an endeavour, especially now as a beginner. And it will be even worse

when I get older" and NT#10 added: "I think that would require a lot of ambitiousness from the teacher. After a couple of years into teaching I would maybe be brave enough to try it, but now definitely not". NT#12 would not consider the Storyline implementation because of financial reasons: "Of course that I would not be willing or enthusiastic enough to practice Storyline – who would pay me for doing that? It wouldn't be profitable". Another teacher who had been working in a public elementary school, NT#14, reported that she did not feel competent enough for the realization of a Storyline project: "I honestly didn't think of implementing Storyline because I think that would be too chaotic. As a teacher beginner, I would not dare to go that far".

Thirteen out of fourteen participants also reported that they would eagerly attend the Storyline conference or any kind of workshops connected to the approach and that they would definitely spread the word about it to their colleagues. According to them, they would at this point welcome any kind of professional development, and they would especially like to see the viewpoint of experienced Storyline practitioners.

5.4 Discussion

According to the participants, Croatian pupils generally like English and do not lack the motivation to learn it, but they also confirm that the English language teaching in our classrooms is mostly characterized by working on textbooks, workbooks and little other material. However, almost all novice teachers, regardless of the fact that they were taught differently by their teachers, try to make their lessons more fun and appealing to their learners by incorporating games, songs or new technology in their lesson plans. The majority of the participants also stated that they wanted to develop a different teaching style from their English teachers or teacher mentors because they wanted to focus on new approaches and modern technology. Novice teachers did not have difficulties in thinking of both advantages and disadvantages of using prescribed teaching materials, and they mentioned the lack of time, will and self-confidence as reasons behind so many teachers basing their lessons almost entirely on textbooks.

The author's second hypothesis was also confirmed since the participants obviously recognized the teaching potential of Storyline. Providing opportunities for meaningful communication and successful group work, increasing learners' motivation and self-esteem, making cross-curricular links and practicing all language skills were some of the benefits most

often mentioned by the novice teachers. On the other hand, perceived drawbacks of the approach were mostly connected to the conditions of the Croatian educational system that participants thought were difficult to change. For instance, curriculum demands, lack of time, and large and poorly equipped classes were some common participants' answers. However, some of the participants' responses were also contradictory. While some participants thought that it would be very time-consuming to incorporate Storyline into a regular schedule, others claimed that the lack of time was just a good excuse for teachers who were not willing enough to do some extra work. It was similar with their perceived characteristics of pupils who would benefit from Storyline the most: the novice teachers had divided opinions on whether the approach would fit the extroverted and more proficient learners, or the shy and weaker ones.

Also, their answers suggested that participants were not very familiar with Croatian syllabus for English and that even though they felt that they must use the prescribed textbooks, the majority of them thought that textbooks could fit well into the Storyline framework. When the standards of the Croatian syllabus for English are examined in more detail, the Storyline approach by its features and desired outcomes definitely fits virtually all of them. Regarding the support of the Storyline implementation from school staff and parents, participants' opinions were also divided. While half of them thought that their traditional and conservative superiors would not be willing to support the new method of teaching English, another half saw their schools as places which would welcome any kind of innovative changes. Some of the participants stated that pupils' parents would also represent a considerable problem in its implementation, and one of the reasons behind that was that many parents were focused only on grades and test results. According to a few participants, the eventual negative attitude towards such innovations has to do with the country's mentality, which does not put enough emphasis on the individual approach to learning and creativity. When it comes to group work, all novice teachers took into account the benefits of peer collaboration, but they also suggested some of its significant drawbacks due to which they were hesitant to use it often in practice. Another considerable issue that the participants were not sure how to grasp was the evaluation of Storyline. According to their general opinion, it would be impossible to assess the pupils who participated in a Storyline project by traditional testing. According to some, it would be impossible to assess grammar after Storyline activities, and some participants generally thought that the underrepresentation of grammar presented an issue in the implementation of the approach.

Nevertheless, only four participants reported that they would not be willing to use Storyline in their teaching, and that was mostly because of their perception of themselves as too

inexperienced and insecure in their teaching competencies. Some of the novice teachers had plans of introducing it from the next school year, and one participant had already tried to incorporate it into her classes. Some participants already had their own ideas of adapting the story framework to their own needs and teaching contexts, and, if used in an appropriate way, they saw Storyline as a potentially powerful teaching tool. That confirmed the third hypothesis of this research: the majority of novice teachers thought that it would be possible to introduce Storyline in Croatian teaching context, and they were willing to do so, but they would feel even more certain about its advantages if further educated and presented with some practical and theoretical guidelines.

6. Conclusion

The Storyline approach is a communicative and social constructivist approach to teaching a foreign language in which learners create their own, unique story that provides them with a meaningful context for the use of the target language and an opportunity to cover curricular objectives from the syllabus. It offers a different approach to language learning from a traditional, frontal style of teaching, and the previous research shows that, among other things, Storyline significantly benefits learners' intrinsic motivation and vocabulary acquisition. The novice teachers who were interviewed for the purpose of conducting a study described in this paper, are all determined to create stimulating and motivating lessons for their learners and they see Storyline as a potentially successful and interesting means for developing their learners' communicative potential. It is encouraging to see that even though the participants are aware of possible practical obstacles in introducing Storyline to their classrooms, the majority of them are willing to find a way of using at least some aspects of the method alongside the prescribed textbook.

This paper offered only a glimpse into the crucial features of Storyline and novice teachers' perceptions on its potential in teaching English as a foreign language in Croatia. However, more studies should be done in order to explore its full potential in the Croatian teaching context. For example, an empirical research on the various impacts of Storyline among Croatian pupils should be conducted in a school setting. It is safe to say that more teachers would be willing to incorporate the method in their classrooms if they were presented with empirical results of the application of Storyline in Croatia. Also, when it comes to novice teachers, their interest should be in gaining awareness of the freedom they have in organizing

their own classes and in becoming informed about how many of their perceived obstacles in creating an ideal learning environment are actually unreal and prone to change. Constant professional development and the enthusiasm to make positive changes should be the qualities that both novice and experienced teachers should strive for. Those kind of teachers may see the Storyline approach as a good way of raising their learners' awareness that they can realize their creativity and learning potential through English, as well as making an English classroom an exciting place to be.

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Appendix

1. What do you know about the national curriculum for the English language? What does the curriculum prescribe? Can you name some examples of the outcomes stated in the curriculum?
2. Is your way of teaching different from the way you were taught by your teachers? How?
3. Do you have the freedom of organizing lessons as you like at your workplace/teaching practice?
4. What does your typical lesson consist of? What kind of activities do you prefer?
5. Which materials do you use the most? How much do you depend on textbooks and workbooks?
6. What do you think is the reason that in most of our schools textbooks dominate in English teaching?
7. What are some benefits of using textbooks and workbooks? What are some drawbacks? Can the textbook cover all the outcomes prescribed by the curriculum?
8. If you rely mostly on the textbooks and workbooks in your teaching, do you do that because you were taught that way or for some other reasons? (lack of experience, lack of confidence in your knowledge and teacher competencies, staying inside your comfort zone…)?
9. Do you use games in your lessons? Did your English teachers use games?
10. Do you use stories in your lessons? Did your English teachers use stories? In what way?
11. What are in your opinion some most important characteristics of an ideal learning environment? What are the greatest obstacles in achieving that kind of environment in practice?
12. How would you generally describe the students' attitudes towards English lessons?
13. What do you do in order to motivate your students for English classes?
14. Did you know anything about *The Storyline Approach* before attending the workshop?
15. What were your first associations on *The Storyline Approach* after attending the workshop? How did you feel in the role of students?
16. What makes *Storyline* useful?
17. Have you maybe thought of implementing *Storyline* (or some of its parts) in your regular lessons? If yes, why? If no, why?
18. In what ways would *Storyline* benefit the English language lessons in Croatian schools? What are some benefits of *The Storyline Approach*? What are its drawbacks?
19. Do you have the conditions for implementing *Storyline* in the school where you currently teach?
20. Would you be ready to adapt the textbook in accordance with *Storyline*? How would that look like in practice?
21. Time feasibility – is it a real or a perceived obstacle? Do you have any ideas how would *Storyline* fit into your syllabus for English?
22. How often and how effective do you use group work in your English lessons? What are some advantages and some disadvantages of group work?
23. Is *Storyline* for everyone? What kind of students would like *the Storyline Approach*, what kind of students would not?

24. How would other school staff react to that teaching approach (the principle, the school pedagogue)? How would parents react?
25. Would you be able to provide various materials needed for *Storyline*? (posters, frieze, empty space in the classroom)?
26. Do you think that it would be possible for you to include one more teacher as a co-organizer of your *Storyline* project?
27. Do you have any ideas how would assessing and grading of those kind of activities function?
28. Every *Storyline* ends with some kind of an event which students organize for themselves and sometimes for their parents and school staff – do you think you would be able to organize that in your school?
29. Have you heard of the *7th International Storyline Conference* being held in Ljubljana this June? Would you like to go and find out more about *Storyline* if you had the opportunity?
30. Would you recommend *Storyline* to your colleagues?