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Storyline: A holistic and interdisciplinary pedagogical approach

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Research about concrete pedagogical methodology and strategies for implementing Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is underrepresented. Accordingly, many researchers have identified a need for pedagogical approaches to ESD. There is a wide consensus that ESD needs to move towards participatory pedagogical methods that empower students to meet sustainable issues as agents of change (OECD 2019). Such education enhances critical thinking, stimulates the ability of imagining future scenarios, and builds on collaborative learning situations that may develop students' independence, reflectiveness, and critical thinking. One pedagogical approach that can meet these requirements is Storyline.

Picture 1.
Häggström
(2021).

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Storyline is an inquiry-based approach that facilitates teaching and learning activities through a narrative, created by teachers and students in collaboration. It was developed in the 1960s by Harkness, Bell, and Rendell, at the University of Strathclyde, Glasgow (Harkness, 2007), as a learner-

centred approach, based on holistic perspectives on teaching. It includes active and explorative activities, group work, and an integration of school subjects. Apart from the story making that includes episodes, a Storyline differs from other interdisciplinary teaching and learning methods in several ways. For example, the students create characters, who will be challenged in different ways. The teacher includes several incidents, which in turn lead to different activities. What can be challenging for the teacher is to link all the episodes to form a story.

Picture 2. Häggström, (2021, 2022)

Every Storyline include a set of pedagogical features, which are: choice of theme, episodes, key questions, activities, reflections, and assessment (Omand, 2014). In addition we add a didactic tool called subject loops (Høeg Karlsen & Häggström, 2020).

Choice of theme

A Storyline is always based on a topic or a theme, which the teacher chooses from the curricular, current events – both local and global – fantasy topics, literature, or from the students' own interests. The basis of the thematic framework is knowledge acquisition, skills and developing competencies. Regardless of theme, it will always be interdisciplinary which enables the teachers and students to address, for example, contemporary challenges. The work will also integrate aesthetic topics, cooperative learning, social learning, and sometimes transformative learning (Høeg Karlsen & Häggström, 2020).

Episodes

The episodes are the driving force that move the story forward. Each episode contains an incident, key questions, and activities. During a Storyline, it is the characters who experience the incidents, which is why it is crucial to use the characters. This means teaching the students to be in role, by modelling acting-in-role. The incidents occur in a certain place and time. This place is created by the students, either as a large painting – or frieze – made in collaboration, or a three-dimensional model placed on a table. This setting forms the story's context; it is here the incidents happen. Often the frieze is the place where the characters live their lives.

Key questions

Key questions play a crucial role in a Storyline, for enhancing both students' knowledge and different skills, and for developing the theme (Omand, 2020). These questions are open-ended, and give the

students opportunities to reflect, learn from each other, express their thoughts, and take a stand. Often, the students first think individually, then talk in pairs or small groups, and finally they talk in class. This is a way to encourage dialogue and collaboration to enable problem-solving and discussions that push the common learning. Key questions lead to different activities, such as constructing buildings, creating artefacts or a sustainable town, knowledge seeking, or anything that the teacher wants the students to practise. The questions are open-ended with no single right answer, rather different ideas, perspectives, and connections often emerge (Häggström & Motzfeldt, 2024). A key question can in this way elicit and challenge the students' preunderstandings.

Activities

The activities that follow a session with key questions, or an incident, are usually planned to provide opportunities to practise new skills. An essential part of the activities is the aesthetic work, such as creating the characters and the frieze and everything that belongs to the setting and the theme. Some activities can be individual tasks, but much work is collaborative. Activities can take place in the classroom, in the schoolyard or outside the school. Many tasks are formulated as a mission. Most activities are documented in many ways and will be part of the frieze. Visualising all work is important in a Storyline. It helps the students to "be on track", to remember what they have done, and it strengthens cohesion and a feeling of togetherness.

Reflections

During a Storyline, students are given many opportunities to reflect on the theme, topics, issues related to key questions and on their experiences and learning processes. They reflect individually as well as together. Through reflections, students can adopt different perspectives, including their character's perspective on certain issues. In this learning process the students can gain opportunities to understand complex but important connections between subject and themes.

Subject loops.

Not all activities during a Storyline are part of the ongoing narrative or the story (Høeg Karlsen & Häggström, 2020). That means that the story sometimes needs to pause, for the students to explore a specific subject in greater depth. This may be needed for the students' understanding of a central concept, process, or other matters that are important for the story. However, a subject loop may be included as part of the story if, for example, the characters are involved as experts, researchers, or as journalists.

Picture 3. Häggström (2021)

Assessment

There are lots of opportunities for assessment during a Storyline. Especially assessment *for* learning, i.e., formative assessment (Black & Wiliam, 2009). Criteria are highlighted as a basis for the dialogue between teachers and students regarding assessment work in Storyline (Harkness, 2007). They can be about the quality of a product the student has created, a collaborative work, the development of skills, or something else. Criteria give students information about what is expected of them, or what needs more practice. They can also help to make a process or a product more concrete. The idea is to support students in their own development and learning in an interdisciplinary learning event. Criteria can also be used in the assessment *of* learning both during the storyline and after.

The Storyline approach allows for many in-process feedback occasions, to discuss about what students are experiencing, doing, training, and learning. Student achievements can be elicited, interpreted, and discussed both by teachers and students, to identify and improve learning, and to involve students in their own learning. By doing this, students also demonstrate and develop competence when they reflect on themselves and others as part of their community now and in the future (Häggström & Motzfeldt, 2023). In any case, this will also help the teachers to modify subsequent learning activities. The Storyline approach, may therefore, enable the teacher to facilitate students' participation, motivation, and desire to learn in various ways, such as oral, written, digital and practical aesthetic ways.

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