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Democratic Processes in Storyline Work

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In the curricula of the Nordic countries, and elsewhere, it is emphasised that education has two main tasks: the knowledge mission, and a democratic mission. The schools in our countries thus represent democratic arenas, based on democratic principles. The fact that the democratic idea is rooted in our school systems and our societies cannot be taken for granted; the principles of democracy must be re-won and retaught, every day (Fridolin, 2018). There are different opinions of what democracy means. Some emphasise democracy as formal institutions and a form of political governance, including the ability to vote in elections. Other are more concerned that democracy is about values, asking questions, critical thinking, participation in public debate and safeguarding human rights.

However, it is not enough to teach and learn *about* democracy, we need to find ways to teach and learn *through* democratic manners as well. The Storyline approach has such aims. The liberation educator Freire (1969/2001) emphasises that people should build their identity and take responsibility in their own environment as active participants in society's community. Through Storyline with, among other things, key questions, the student gets to experience democracy and develop action competence required for democratic participation.

The democratic aspects within a Storyline can be described with help of Klafki's (2005) interlinked characteristics of education: 1) self-determination, 2) the dependency on historical, social, and cultural circumstances, 3) student's individual path to self-determination, and 4) co-operation. There is a balance here between an individual-oriented perspective and a community-oriented one, which together contain a critical-oriented education. To Klafki, education aims at developing students' competence to think and act in a critical, solidary, and self-determined manner. That is to enhance knowledge about the world, and to examine the social value and functions of knowledge; being and becoming is a social process. Following Klafki, letting students interact and collaborate with others, is the way to endorse individual developing.

Democratic participation

Researchers Iann Lundegård and Cecilia Caiman see democracy education as an essential part of all teaching and, consequently, also in education around sustainable development. With the support of previous research, Lundegård and Caiman (2019) have developed five different forms of democratic participation that are central to consider when teachers organise their teaching around sustainable development. The five forms are *deliberative discussions* (deliberation), *agency*, *creativity*, *critical reflection*, and *authenticity*. All five forms are often found in a Storyline work. Deliberative conversations i.e., "all the meaning-making that takes

place when students interact communicatively with each other in order to find out and solve problems” (Lundegård & Caiman, 2019, p. 43) are included in a Storyline both when it comes to discussing knowledge-related and ethical issues linked to various sustainability themes. Agency, that students take initiative and act, takes place within Storyline in a fictional context and in role, but students often experience the actions as real. Creativity in various forms, both conceptually and concretely by creating with the help of different materials or visualising events with the help of drama, is a central part of Storyline. The fact that the Storyline work takes place in a fictional world enables various, even difficult and challenging, questions to be considered. The theme, setting and questions are authentic, but the action takes place within the safe confines of fiction. Here, the teacher has an important task to challenge the students to critical reflections on values, norms, and facts (e.g., source criticism) and also to encourage the students to discuss different feelings.

Key questions as facilitators for democratic practices

Questioning, as a fundamental feature of Storyline, is a way to create dialogue with students (Omand, 2020). It also involves and supports students in their learning process in an active way and teaches them how to ask questions themselves. However, it needs a skilled teacher to manage the class through a key question lecture; she or he must first create an open classroom atmosphere, and build a partnership of reciprocal trust, respect, and care. Key questions are open-ended to provide opportunities for students to respond in a wide range of ways. They build on students’ existing knowledge through experiential learning. Effective questioning has an influential role to play in scaffolding meaningful discussions.

However, different types of open-ended key questions could also facilitate various democratic practices when teaching through Storyline. Among these is democracy as deliberation. Deliberation in school often take form of a conversational democracy where the student’s ability to think critically and learn how to deal with different opinion is practised (Lenz 2021). Disagreement, both in school and public spaces, contributes to a diversity of opinions, challenges, and possible solutions. Questions such as “How can you explain why this is happening?”, or “How can you support your opinion?” can be used to engage deliberations. Another democratic practice that the Storyline approach with its key questions can initiate is democracy as involvement and participation.

An important characteristic of a participatory democracy is the conflict of interests between groups in the society. This conflict of interest is made visible through strikes, boycotts, and various forms of civil disobedience (Lenz 2021). So how does this appear in the context of Storyline? The key questions are followed by various activities which enable the student to exercise skills in the learning situation. For example, by having the students, as characters, to write a letter to the local newspaper, organise a voting exercise, mobilise for a demonstration or visit the local municipality to confront the politicians concerning a particular topic of interests. To scaffold the students, the teacher can ask questions such as “What can you do...?”, and “How can you react to this event?”.

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