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Education for sustainability and resilience

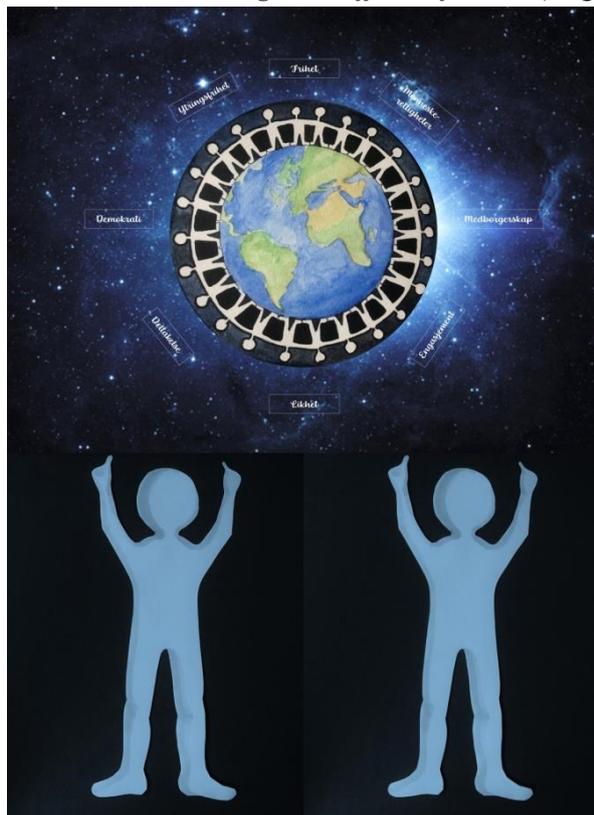
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Highlights from “Imagine a different future” Margaretha Häggström and Gitte Cecilie Motzfeldt

“Storyline as a pedagogic method to enable imagination of a different future”

What would a sustainable future look like? The world is changing fast, and our future generation will need to face challenges that the older generation left them to inherit. Therefore, there is a need for the students to look critically at the society's development and question what kind of society we appreciate or want to live in, in the future. In Storyline, the narrative and creating a story together is essential (Harkness 2007). Storyline involves a comprehensive simulation through various courses of actions where visualisation and the use of stories are important.

In our research, “*Imagine a different future*” (Häggström & Motzfeldt, 2023), our purpose was to shed



light on the role of storytelling in a Storyline working with sustainable development. We discussed how the theory of “future literacy” can contribute to understanding the development of the student’s ability to imagine, reflect and communicate a different future, through the dramaturgy of the Storylines.

The dramaturgy of a Storyline

To create a good story, it is important for the teacher to understand the function of each of the three parts (beginning, middle, end) in a Storyline. Each part must have an incident, contain key questions, and include various activities that drive the story forward. This is important to engage students’ emotions, creativity, and finding resistance in the story and overcoming the obstacles. Throughout the story, shared imaginary worlds are built where new thoughts and ideas are developed. The world of imagination is constantly in motion. There must

be a clear context in the story which means that what happens at one point in the story needs to be linked to the story later through learning situations.

The imaginative possibilities of storytelling through future literacy

Holden and Linderud (2021), address sustainable development as an *idea* that exists as notions in our heads. There is nothing physical that we can touch but we could imagine what sustainability could be and work together on the idea to solve common challenges. The Storyline with its narrative gives

teachers a space to help students to imagine another time and world, or other characters, animals and plants.

Our understanding of ‘futures literacy’ is based on a range of competencies (see also Häggström & Schmidt, 2021). These include meta literacy capabilities and analysing competences, regarding for example, global crisis. In short, the abilities are:

- the ability to envision a future
- the ability to identify future competences
- the ability to orchestrate actions
- the ability to critically examine actions

As we can see, future literacy relies on an individual’s ability to both anticipate and to imagine, two intertwined abilities that Storyline work evokes. Through such work, pupils are given opportunities to discover, invent and construct an alternative world and future.

Examples of unknown imaginary worlds

In this study three Storylines were used as analytical cases supplemented by students’ quotes (see Häggström & Motzfeldt 2023). Those Storylines were “River Delta”, “the Sea City” and “World War 2”. All three Storylines are included as separate chapters in *The Anthology: “Teaching for Sustainable Development in Secondary and Upper Secondary Education”: A Pluralistic and Critical Approach to Sustainability*” (2023). Below are examples of how the dramaturgy, particularly the incidents, of two Storylines facilitated an imaginary world that made the students reflect on various dimensions of sustainability past, present and in the future.

“The River Delta”

In the Storyline “River Delta”, which was carried out at the primary school teacher education for grades 5-10 at Østfold University College in 2019, the incident “Danger” was introduced by the teacher-in-role. The students had just established themselves as residents of their respective river deltas, local communities when old smelly shrimp shells which had been hidden by teachers, began to smell and the residents searched the room to find the source. Suddenly, the residents were interrupted and hurriedly evacuated from the classroom to the College main hall. The teachers had been picking up rubbish such as snuff boxes, Q-tips, McDonalds paper and other plastic materials in the local area. This authentic rubbish was then put into the various River Deltas polluting the building, gardens/recreational areas, rivers and livestock. Gradually, the habitants of the River Deltas were brought back into the classroom by municipality workers in yellow vests, where teachers handed out gloves and facemasks. Some of the students reacted and uttered:

“There is garbage in our delta!” ... “They have not killed the sheep then. There’s a snuff box there...it smells like shit” ... “It was awful that the rubbish destroyed what we have spent so much time creating. It’s terrible to see the earth being littered” ... “now there has been an accident here so now everyone has to help to clean up. And it will be a picture of what will actually happen in the society” (author translations).

This incident, where the garbage was placed in the River Delta communities, enabled the students to create a bridge between their own learning process in the classroom and the challenge of littering in the outdoor society. This created an authentic “as-if” experience by mirroring the outside world (Karlsen et.al. 2020). Challenges of sustainable development, in particular the consequences of overconsumption and rubbish polluting the ecosystems, became subjects of engagement, reflections, and discussions in the further learning process. The key question “what do you think has happened?” was posed to initiate dialogue and reflections.

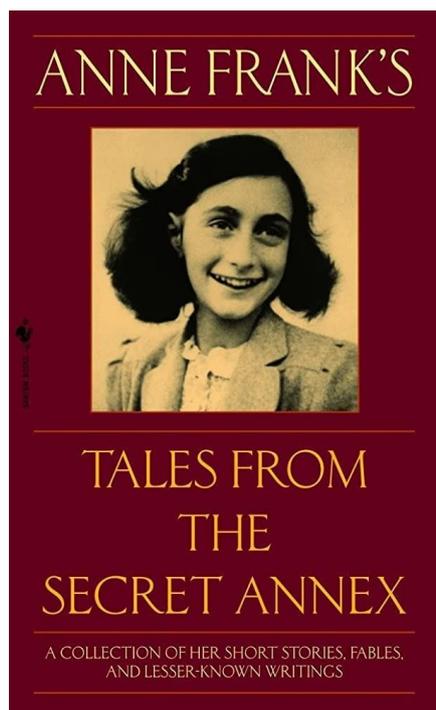


Photo: 1: Bård Halvorsen (2019)

“Anne Frank”

In this historical Storyline, based on the book “Anne Frank’s Diary”, a true story written by a Jewish youth during World War II. The students were all characters of Jews and the teachers were all characters as Nazis. The students made their own ID card, laminated it, and hung it around their necks. The students quickly understood that it was important to wear the ID cards when they went to the toilets and elsewhere. Students who forgot the ID cards or did not behave could experience “punishment” such as scraping up chewing gum from the school yard. However, one day the incident “the persecution of the Jews” took place. Ahead of this, the students have been through both a subject loop and read the book “Anne Frank’s Diary”. The incident started with teachers in-roles saying to the students that something terrible is about to happen and that you are no longer safe in your homes. The students are also told that more and more of the Jewish families nearby have been picked up by the Nazi troops. The students are well aware of the Nazis’ hatred of the Jews and are therefore uncertain of what will happen to them. They become scared and they then bring their ID cards for registration. The students are further told that some will be sent with the boat D/S Donau and others will be sent to concentration camps (Høeg, S. 2023). The students are then given the opportunity to reflect on their emotions, their feelings and thoughts. These are written down on paper and published on a wall in the school library.

The incidents, the line-ups and the meaningless marches become the new everyday life of the students. The students became engaged and started to question it, wondering if this really happened.



The teachers introduced the key questions: Why were you all arrested?, and, What do you think will happen to you now? These incidents stage actions and social practices that give the students opportunities to use feelings and values to imagine how the Jews felt during the Second World War. They make the students stop, reflect and think critically on the discrimination of a particular people. Historical awareness is an important competency that teachers can facilitate through such incidents so that students can practise and activate feelings in order to imagine a future in light of the past. This competency may enable the students to understand and to critically assess discriminations and persecution taking place against particular groups in different societies today. Preconditions, emotions, and cognitive understanding are woven together to enable the students to discuss the characters current situations and a possible future.

The importance of dramaturgy in storytelling

Dramaturgy is the basis or grammar of storytelling, and in a Storyline these basics are a map to navigate from. Every story has a clear beginning, and the beginning in Anne Frank was very dramatic – the pupils were thrown into what would become their reality for some time. The start is significant; it should evoke feelings, interest, and curiosity. The start is then followed by the incidents, the red thread and plot, with one or usually several problems for the pupils to solve. Here, the pupils become their characters, through whom, the pupils identify with the story. It is important to create a balance between the various content parts in a Storyline. Previous research by Häggström (2022), shows that content such as creative activities and key questions can often take up a lot of space at the expense of

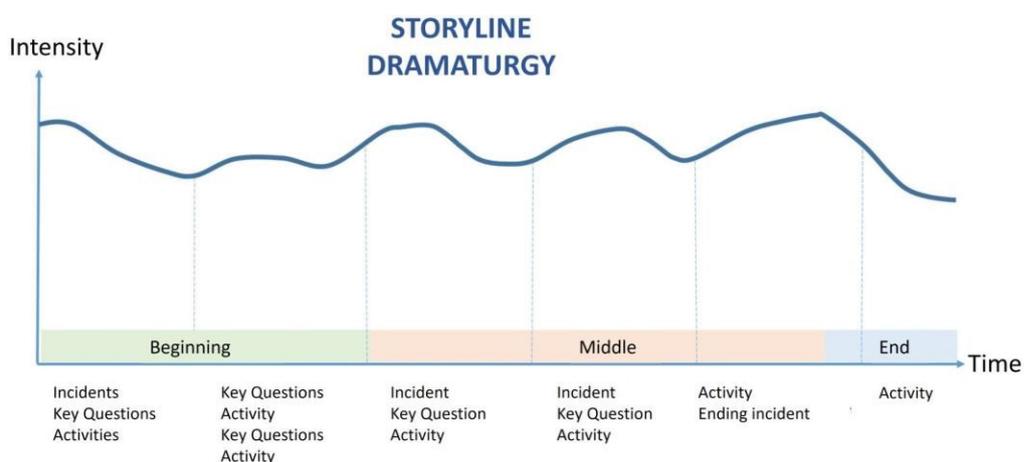


Figure 1: Häggström & Motzfeldt, 2020

the role-playing activities. As a help for planning the different features for advancing the story in a storyline, the teacher can use the Storyline dramaturgy curve (figure 1). As shown here, the middle part is the longest, and it is in this part where the pupils have most influence. The end part, just like in a movie or other traditional story, should not be very long. In the role-playing activities the students have the ability to use their characters engaging in exciting events “as-if” it was something really happening to them (Høeg Karlsen, et.al. 2020). The role-playing events bring action to the story, and the middle part should allow for many opportunities for role-playing. This may evoke strong emotions and embody the actions, facilitating engagement at a personal level, which we have seen is crucial for storytelling (Häggström, 2022a). Working with sustainable development commitment on a personal level is also necessary to understand one’s own role, as well as limitations, in the community, and the need for a deeper structural societal and political changes in the narrative and aspiration for a more sustainable future for different people and societies around the world (Eie & Motzfeldt, 2022). Through our analyses we have discussed how the characters in a Storyline’s fictional world, with commitment, feelings, and action, can explore the complex challenges of today. We believe we need the stories to imagine what sustainability in the future would imply and what it means for changes for the present- and future generations. However, in the end, it is all about the *ideas* which each student believes in.

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