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# Education for sustainability and resilience

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## A budding community of practice: professional development, ESD and Storyline teacher workshops

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Using the Storyline approach differs from other approaches in that the learning process is centred around a narrative that the pupils actively co-create with the teacher. The narrative involves interdisciplinary teaching and learning. In addition, aesthetic processes are central as the narrative progresses. In this manner, using the Storyline approach may require additional competences from teachers and perhaps require teachers to move outside of their comfort zone to learn these new competences.



In the context of Education for Sustainability (ESD) the teachers' professional action competences may also require teachers to move into unknown territories in order to develop their teaching practice. In Norway, the Norwegian education policy states that a professional learning community is necessary for developing good teaching practices, defining a professional learning community as a place where teachers "reflect on and assess the planning and implementation of pedagogical lessons, developing a richer understanding of good practice" (Directorate of Education, n.å.). Research has shown that good collegial cooperation and a well-functioning professional community create positive learning for students (Vangrieken et al., 2015), as well as build positively on the teacher's professional development and well-being (Sandholtz, 2000, Vangrieken et al., 2015). More recently, Isac et al., (2022) found teachers working in a learning community in ESD showed higher levels of professional action competences than those without this support. In this manner, learning new competences for teachers will be supported with a strong community of practice, a community that gives them a framework to negotiate their experiences with unfamiliar teaching practices (Warr Pedersen, 2017).

In this study, we reflect on what happens in the professional community at two high schools in Norway with the teachers who participated in Storyline workshops focusing on ESD. Based on these two cases, we take a critical look at the implementation of the Storyline workshops. We focus on the challenges and dilemmas the teachers meet when developing their competences to work in interdisciplinary groups, to use aesthetic processes, and to address ESD in a Storyline approach. Through our study we aim to reflect on the following questions: Can such a Storyline workshop contribute to the development of (a) professional community?; Will teachers be able to use Storyline in ESD following such a workshop?; Does a 5-hour workshop format give the teachers time and space to develop competences for ESD?



The context of both cases in this research is a collaboration between a teacher training institute and two different upper secondary schools that expressed interest in the Storyline approach and working with ESD across school disciplines. In each 5-hour workshop, several school subjects were represented, and at one school, teacher participation in the workshop was voluntary. When working with the case narrative, we used three concepts taken from Communities of Practice (CoP): mutual commitment, joint activity, and shared repertoires (cf. Wenger, 1998) as the lenses when looking at the data which consist of four 45 min group in-depth semi-structured interviews (Kvale et al., 2015). We then use the three CoP concepts mentioned above along with our own reflections to analyse the actions that unfold during the workshops.

For the workshops, we created two *here-and-now* storylines, in a context of two different businesses that reflected the high school programmes at each school. The characters in the Storylines represented employees of each company, a company for electricians and a company for re-designing clothes. Teachers at the 5-hour workshops experienced a shorter version of these storylines, creating their own company and character.



In conversations with the teachers, we found that the framework of the workshop and elements in the Storyline scheme indicated they contributed to the teachers experiencing a CoP. For example, the aesthetic learning processes, such as creating characters through crafts and drama, using sound to develop the setting, and designing products for the companies, are mentioned especially as supporting a feeling of community through these *joint activities*. The teachers express that the workshop gave them the vocabulary they needed to discuss the Storyline approach, also called a *shared repertoire*. And the key questions facilitated professional reflection on their own pedagogical practice and on the topic of sustainability. Work with ESD is supported and facilitated, through such reflection in professional communities, creating an opportunity for transformative learning processes for the teachers (Warr Pedersen, 2017).

What also becomes clear in the conversations with the teachers is that implementation of the learning from the Storyline workshops was not straightforward. In these cases, we found the school contexts influenced the school's CoP and future implementation. For example, although each school expressed wanting to strengthen the professional community for ESD, the teachers found it difficult to find the time and space to gather colleagues to work in interdisciplinary teams. Both schools experienced the actual dialogues around the concepts and pedagogy of Storyline and ESD difficult to discuss outside of the workshop. One school found it difficult to share their commitment of the workshop's joint activities and joint repertoire with the administration. However, both schools expressed explicitly the importance of having several teachers experience a Storyline in order to carry out a Storyline at school; the teachers had to both argue for the value of the Storyline and train the other colleagues after the workshops. In our analysis, the opportunities of implementing a Storyline in ESD appears to trump the challenges, as both schools implemented their Storyline following the workshops. In a follow-up conversation a year later, one school was continuing its work with Storyline and ESD, while the other school expressed an interest, but had not planned one.

We started our research with the purpose to investigate to what extent the Storyline workshops contributed to a community of practice that would support developing competences for implementing a Storyline that focused on Education for Sustainability. What we found, based on the analysis, is that the workshops created joint activities and gave the teachers a common repertoire in the form of techniques, implements and tools (cf. Wenger, 1998) with which to carry out interdisciplinary sustainability education. Based on the content



of the two Storylines, there were opportunities for some exciting discussions about sustainability between teachers. However, in-depth discussions that investigated deeply the complexity of sustainability were missing, resulting in discussing the topic relatively superficially. Although we found that the workshops managed to support an understanding that Storyline is an interdisciplinary, student-centred, and aesthetic approach to learning and that ESD requires complex ways of knowing, the Storyline schema and perhaps the time limit developed little new knowledge, skills and values related to sustainability. Future research should be done on how such a workshop might better strengthen a more open-ended, pluralistic approach to developing competences for sustainable development (Öhman,2006) .

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