



Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

The European Commission's support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents, which reflect the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

# Education for sustainability and resilience

2022. *Highlights from research*. Volume 1 Number (7).

## Relational Pedagogy: Supporting Storyline and ESD

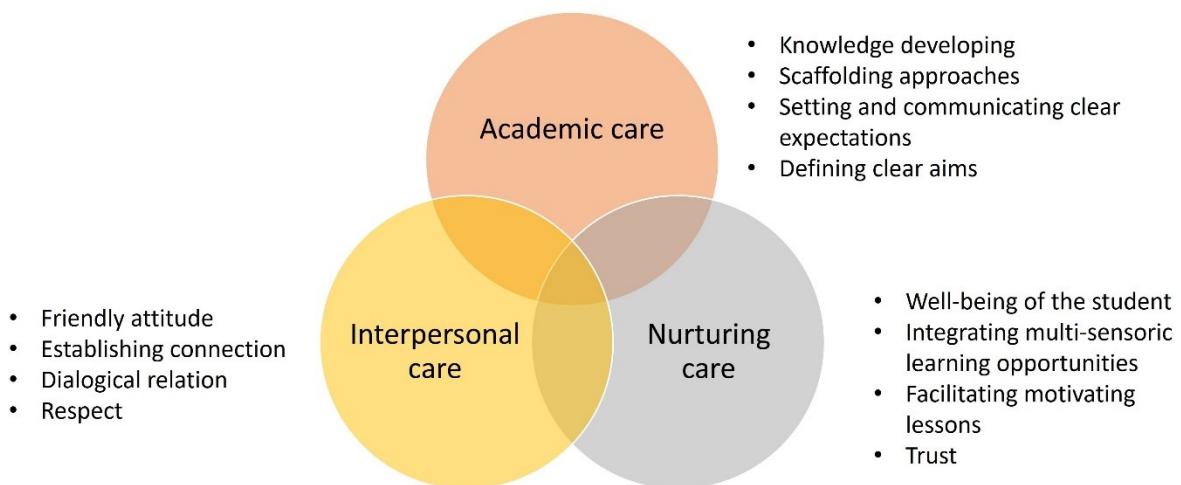
Margaretha Häggström, Virginia Lockhart Pedersen



A holistic democratic pedagogical methodology, such as the Storyline approach, builds on an open-minded classroom atmosphere with good relationships between teachers and students. Storyline work aims to scaffold and empower students, and thus encourage independence, interdependence, and critical thinking. Empowerment, independence, interdependence, and critical thinking are also among the aims of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). A holistic pedagogy goes beyond passive assimilation of facts and teacher centred approaches. Instead, a holistic pedagogy challenges the students and teachers to work together, requiring them to feel, think, and act in a complex world. Dialogue, cooperation, and active participation are crucial in both Storyline and ESD. Both approaches integrate learning content and processes with oneself and others as a human being. One goal of ESD is to encourage students to be interested, involved, and to care about the environment, fellow human beings, the more-than-human world, and biodiversity (Häggström & Schmidt, 2022). Holistic pedagogy aims to address this by including the intellectual, emotional, and social aspects of learning, often referred to as deep learning. Combining Storyline and ESD is a way to make students not only concerned and critical but also (and perhaps more importantly) enthusiastic, creative, passionate, and hopeful. Naturally, this cannot be achieved overnight. These goals are ambitious.

Navigation in such a complex world is difficult, as is teaching about such complicated, alarming, and frightening issues as ESD addresses. Therefore, ESD requires courageous, bold, and ambitious teachers. Storyline, and its use of drama, aesthetics, and narratives also requires courageous, bold, and ambitious teachers. And therefore, we argue for a relational pedagogy as a pedagogical foundation for Storyline and ESD, a pedagogical foundation ensures a democratic and caring approach that can tackle this teaching and learning challenge. Together with classroom leadership abilities, relational competence is a keystone of teacher professionalism (Aspelin et al., 2021). Relational competence is defined as the ability to meet students with openness and respect, to show empathy, and to take responsibility for the relationships in the classroom (Jensen et al., 2015). In this manner, teaching with relational pedagogical foundation may enhance students' sense of agency, social inclusion, and feeling of being taken seriously.

Relational pedagogy is also described as the intentional practice of a caring teacher (Adams, 2018). This is based on three key pedagogical aspects of caring: *nurturing care*, *interpersonal*



*care*, and *academic care*. Nurturing care concerns general welfare and well-being of the pupil, interpersonal care has to do with a friendly attitude to the pupils, and academic care with knowledge developing.

As mentioned earlier, the holistic democratic pedagogical methodology, such as the Storyline approach, builds on an open-minded classroom atmosphere with good relationships between teachers and students. The figure above, relational pedagogy, and the three aspects of caring are therefore well suited for Storyline work, as Storyline aims at developing knowledge, collaborative skills, and self-confidence. The caring aspects of teaching are essential for making the students comfortable to act as characters in a Storyline, to express their beliefs, opinions and to argue for them. They are also important for creating an atmosphere, in which the students work together and feel safe to talk about their worries and concerns related to the state of the world.

## References

- Adams, K.L. (2018). *Relational Pedagogy in Higher Education*. Dissertation. University of Oklahoma: Department of Instructional Leadership and academic curriculum.
- Aspelin, J., Östlund, D., & Jönsson, A. (2021). Pre-Service Special Educators' Understandings of Relational Competence. *Frontiers in Education*, 6, 1-12, doi: 10.3389/feduc.2021.678793.
- Häggström, M., & Schmidt, C. (2022). Introduction: A Holistic Perspective on Futures Literacy and Education for Sustainable Development. In M. Häggström & C. Schmidt (eds.), *Relational and Critical Perspectives on Education for Sustainable Development. Belonging and Sensing in a Vanishing World*. (ix-xix). Springer.
- Jensen, E., Bengaard Skibsted, E., & Vedsgaard Christensen, M. (2015). Educating teachers focusing on the development of reflective and relational competences. *Educational Research Policy Practice*, 14(3), 201–212.