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# How Does Teaching with Storyline Affect Teachers, Students and Families?



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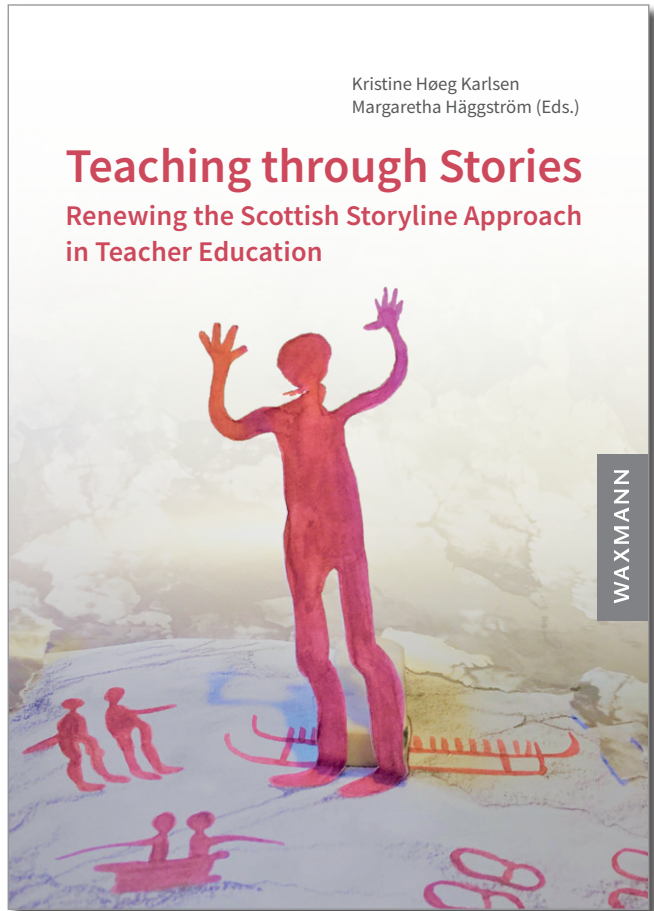
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## Chapter 6

### How Does Teaching with Storyline Affect Teachers, Students and Families?

*Wendy Emo and Kenneth R. Emo*

*Abstract* This study examines how Storyline influences a school learning community: Why do teachers use Storyline? How does Storyline affect the school community? Motivation research and teachers' lives research informed this study. We conducted an ethnographically-informed instrumental case study exploring the subjective effects of Storyline. Data analysed includes teachers' reflective journals and semi-structured interviews with teachers, the principal, parents, and former students. Storyline teachers experience challenge, curiosity, fantasy, and control, factors which highly correlate with motivation. Former students referred to curiosity and fantasy, and they had high recall of events and factual understanding. Storyline allows teachers to reach their full potential through using their creativity, curiosity, and intellectual exploration.

*Keywords:* Storyline, teachers' lives, motivation

#### Introduction

Storyline can be considered an innovative curricular strategy: it is a unique approach to engaging students in required curriculum. We have used Storyline in our elementary classrooms and in teacher education courses; we have enjoyed watching students engage in Storylines. We wondered about the ways that Storyline as a school-wide strategy influenced the learning community in an elementary school and how Storyline impacts students and teachers.

Prior to any involvement with Highland School personnel, we developed two research questions, "Why do teachers use Storyline?" and "How does Storyline affect the teachers and their students?" At our first meeting with Highland teachers, the teachers requested that we add two additional research questions: "How does teaching with an all-school Storyline affect the school community?" and "What do parents and former students think of Storyline?"

#### Background

##### Prior Research in Storyline

Several studies indicate that Storyline teaching has positive effects on learning. These studies generally centre on motivation or creativity; we include summaries of six here.

Hofmann (2007) conducted a study of Storyline in England. The elementary students talked of the originality of their work; they said that they learned better when

being imaginative or creative. Hofmann suggested that to increase student engagement and ownership of learning, “knowledge should not be purely ‘acquired’ but ‘lived’ or ‘felt’” (ibid., p. 73), such as through Storyline.

Language researcher Smogorzewska (2012) focused on creativity in language use. Polish preschool children who were taught language through either Storyline or an Associations Pyramid. The children who used Storyline had significantly higher creative use of language.

Motivation is a theme throughout some Storyline research literature. Mitchell-Barrett (2010) measured student motivation in England. During a Storyline, students were much more motivated to attend school and did not realise they were doing academic work. Midwestern United States teachers found that their students were highly motivated while using Storyline and that the teachers themselves were enjoying their teaching (Emo, 2010). Swedish elementary students learning English through Storyline demonstrated “greater willingness to speak English ... (and produced) longer and more complex written texts” (Ahlquist, 2013, p. 96), showing high task motivation and achievement along with higher student self-confidence. Kocher (2019) found similar result in motivation and self-confidence with German secondary students learning English.

### **The School in this Study: Highland Elementary.**

Most public schools in the United States are neighbourhood schools which accept all students from the local area; schools provide transportation. Public “magnet” schools provide focus, such as schools of performing arts or science; the school population is from a wider area and families must provide their own transportation. Highland, a magnet school focused on Storyline, admits students through a lottery. At the time of the study, there were few other schools in the USA which focused on Storyline.

We focused on Highland Elementary School in Bend, Oregon, USA. All of the teachers use Storyline and rarely have a day without it. Classes at Highland are organised as kindergarten only, first grade only, second and third grades combined, and fourth and fifth grades combined. The year of the study began with several changes: a new principal, a remodelled building, iPads, and required reading texts. Families are involved through volunteering and fundraising; their financial goal for 2020 is to raise \$55,000 with 70% of those funds supporting Storyline and the other 30% supporting other school activities (Highland Elementary PTO, 2020).

There are almost 400 students at the school. At the time of the study, the school had 7% students with disabilities (state-wide, 13%) and 13% of students considered economically disadvantaged (53% state-wide) (Oregon Department of Education, 2014).

Two magnet schools in the same city as Highland do not use Storyline school-wide. These schools have very similar student populations to Highland’s (low percentages of students who are migrant, limited English proficient or economically disadvantaged, or students who receive special education services). For the five years previous to the study, attendance in these demographically comparable schools was lower by 5 to 8 percent than Highland’s, and test scores were lower by 10 to 15 percent in language arts and mathematics (Emo & Emo, 2014). In these five years, Highland’s student test scores

for grades 3–5 were one of the two highest in the state (*ibid.*). The teacher turnover rate at Highland is 2%; at the two demographically similar schools in the same city, the turnover rate is 12% (Oregon Department of Education, 2018), similar to Oregon's 11,3% for elementary teachers (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

## Conceptual Framework

Our conceptual framework is based on research in motivation, educational psychology, and teachers' lives.

Within motivation research, one of the studies most relevant to Storyline was conducted with early educational computer games (Malone & Lepper, 1987). Players were more engaged and stayed with tasks longer when the games offered (personally meaningful and appropriate level of challenge, elements of curiosity and fantasy, and some player control (*ibid.*, p. 248–249). Settings, characters, and incidents in Storyline provide teacher-guided but learner-selected challenges, control, and fantasy; Storyline teachers provide the learners with surprises and situations which elicit curiosity.

Choice is an aspect of control; choice appears to be highly relevant to motivation in educational tasks. Denton (2005) provides a summary of 32 research studies on the results of giving students choices: students are more likely to be on task, work at personally challenging tasks, persist in the face of difficulty, apply more creativity and organisation skills, and behave in socially constructive ways. Storyline offers many opportunities for student choice; students create the settings and characters, and students also make decisions regarding their learning and presentation of their learning.

Choice (or lack thereof) affects teachers as well. Teachers' lives research reveals that teacher-initiated innovation correlates with higher teacher motivation (Huberman et al., 1993). Higher teacher motivation correlates with more meaningful educational experiences for learners (Day, Sammons, Stobart, Kington, & Gu, 2007). Being able to innovate affects teacher retention as well. Teachers are more satisfied and more likely to stay in schools in which they feel trusted to make educational decisions and innovations; “narrowly defined and imposed curriculum and teacher competencies repel good people from entering and/or staying” (Fullan, 2001, p. 332). Storyline is one way that teachers innovate in their work.

## Method

We designed an ethnographically-informed, instrumental case study to examine the research questions. Instrumental studies seek to understand an educational event, programme or curricular strategy with the purpose of using the information to better understand how the findings can be generalised (Stake, 1995).

The study relied upon interviews and reflective journals. Interviews with teachers, the school principal, and former students and their families were semi-structured (Appendix A). We visited the school five times during an all-school Storyline and conducted interviews with participating teachers each time. Teachers also recorded their

observations and feelings about the teaching and learning and submitted those journals to us weekly (Appendix B). Not all participants responded to all interview or journal prompts due to the nature of the study which encouraged conversation and thought-flow responses rather than strict adherence to questions posed by the researchers, who were outside the teachers' experience.

All interviews were digitally recorded. Interviews were transcribed word-for-word. Data analysis proceeded in two stages. In the first, we examined the transcribed conversations for responses according to the research questions which they answered. In the second stage, we further sorted the responses by type of response. Through this qualitative analysis, grounded in the transcribed data, themes emerged.

We aggregated the interview and journal data and represented it together in the tables in the results section. The tables are organised according to the questions in the interview prompts. Representative quotes from the participants are provided in each type of response.

## Participants

The participants in this study were teachers at Highland school (13), the school principal (1), and former students and their families (7).

All classroom teachers volunteered to participate in the study. Due to unforeseen circumstances, one teacher was unable to participate in any of the interviews and two participated in only one interview. Some of the teachers have additional certifications or training in drama, science, or reading. All but two had taught at a school without using Storyline prior to their employment at Highland. Some lead Storyline workshops for teachers, and some have had their own children attend the school. All consider themselves experienced Storyline teachers.

This was the principal's first year with Storyline. Prior to being hired, he had been a principal at a school in another state. He was unaware of Storyline before his work with Highland.

According to the teachers' request to add Storyline families to the study, we interviewed seven families to find out their perspectives on Storyline. Teachers suggested families for participation, such as parents who were leaders in the school parent organisation; some parents referred others to us. Some families were interested in participating but unable to do so due to time constraints. The seven families who did participate consisted of parents, grandparents, and children who were between two and six years from their last year of attendance at Highland.

## The Storyline During the Study: National Parks

Highland teachers often work in grade level teams through the same Storyline; they also use their own Storylines independent of other teachers. Every two years Highland teachers organise an all-school Storyline in which the classes have closely related settings. The Storyline we observed during the research was *National Parks*, which empha-

sised science learning. As with all Storylines at Highland, it incorporated most other academic areas.

Each classroom's Storyline setting was in a different national park. The characters were all junior park rangers. Most incidents related to all the classes, so the students worked through the same incidents at the same time, such as trash in the park or tourists who were missing, injured, or obnoxious.

## Results

In this section we provide the data resulting from the analyses of the teachers' journals and the interviews with the teachers, the administrator, former students, and families of former students. The four research questions are addressed in the separate sections below. Where teachers made quite similar remarks, we provide one representative comment. When remarks showed variety within a type of answer, we provided more than one teacher's response.

### Why Do Teachers Use Storyline?

This research question is best viewed through the teachers' answers to all of the questions as shown in Tables 1–9. Table 1 provides teachers' answers to just one part of this research question: "What drew you to teaching with Storyline?" Generally, the teachers were introduced to Storyline through seeing it in action.

All the teachers and the principal were introduced to Storyline through direct interaction with another teacher; they saw it in action. Nine interviewees said they realised that Storyline provided ways to attach meaning and purpose for the students, such as Abby's remark that students wanted to be involved due to the mystery and excitement. Storyline fit with teachers' philosophy of teaching and learning, as stated by five and stated by Avery: story is how "human brains work." For Avery, Storyline teaching is what should be happening in the classroom.

### How Does Storyline Affect the Teachers and Their Students?

This research question had multiple related questions. Each is presented in a separate table (Tables 2–8). In general, the teachers at Highland Elementary felt excited and interested in the teaching with Storyline.

Seven of the teachers used the word "excited" to convey their feelings (Table 2). Storyline is interesting to them (four), they get to be creative (three) and they feel passionate about their work (three). As Aubrey said, "I am just as excited as the kids."

We asked teachers to compare how teaching with Storyline affected them versus teaching with other methods (Table 3). Responses mostly were regarding their own engagement, learning, and fun.

Tab. 1: Reasons teachers and the principal gave for what attracted them to Storyline

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=14)	Representative responses
I observed Storyline and was positively impressed	14	<p>I first observed Storyline:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• as a parent (5 teachers) or extended family member (1 teacher)</li> <li>• in colleagues’ classrooms (4 teachers)</li> <li>• in a workshop given by a teacher (required for employment at Highland, 2 teachers and 1 principal; my choice, 1 teacher)</li> </ul> <hr/> <p>I’m really excited and just for myself to have experience as a parent (during Storyline) and then to, just be, like, put that energy and excitement into it for my students. (Denny)</p> <hr/> <p>(My colleagues’) students seemed to be really excited and then one of the teachers across the hall invited me to come over and take a look. ... I thought, “Wow, this sounds really neat.” (Avery)</p> <hr/> <p>I just fell in love (with Storyline). (Emily)</p>
Storyline provides meaning and purpose	9	<p>The depth of vocabulary and understanding of concepts within a story, within Storyline, is so authentic. (Denny)</p> <hr/> <p>The mystery and excitement for the kids that something happens in it. Instead of just showing up to learn, it’s happening. I think that makes it so exciting and where they feel so involved. (Abby)</p>
Storyline fit with my philosophy of education	5	<p>This is how I believe human brains work. They’re wired to receive and understand stories across all cultures. ... That’s kind of how human beings think and make sense of the word. And so, education outside of that to me doesn’t quite make sense. (Avery)</p> <hr/> <p>My philosophy of teaching was a good fit for Storyline. (Bridget)</p>

Table 1: Reasons teachers gave for what attracted them to Storyline.

Tab. 2: Teachers' perceptions of how Storyline affects them

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
I'm excited	7	I am just as excited as the kids. (Aubrey) It makes me love my job because it's so fun. . . . It makes me excited to work and puts the fun in it. (Hannah)
I'm interested	4	I get really interested in (our Storylines). (Nina)
I get to be creative	3	What keeps me engaged in my teaching is that I get to be creative and look for ways to tie the curriculum together. . . . Instead of just being told, "Hey, here's the science book, open the lesson, teach it," which to me isn't as engaging, I get to be creative in finding the resources and then writing them into how that would look like for the students. (Aubrey) I need to have a creative outlet in my (professional) life. A lot of what I developed in myself as an actor and, more specifically, as a director, comes out constantly in Storyline. (Lucy)
Storyline keeps me passionate	3	It keeps me passionate about my job. . . . After the hook, we were just as excited as the kids were, . . . instead of getting burned out with the same old thing. (Aubrey)

Table 2: Teachers' perceptions of how Storyline affects them.

Tab. 3: Teachers' perceptions of the personal benefits of Storyline as compared to other methods with which they are familiar

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Engaging for me in ways that other methods are not	9	If all I did was standardized tests and follow page 6 of the teacher's guide for some standard curriculum, I think I would be burnt out. (Bridget) I think we all grew up doing topic studies. But when you live it in the classroom and you're actively participating in the story, it infuses your teaching with excitement. The kids see that you're invested in what you're teaching and I think that magically just forms this wonderful connect between you and your students. (Chelsea) It's much more engaging for me. (Cheryl)
Get to learn subject matter	5	I'll get really geeky about it and get into it (learning the subject matter of the Storyline). (Bridget)



Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Fun	4	I get to have fun with the kids naturally. (Hollie) It makes it fun, really fun. (Cheryl)
Personal challenge	3	Overall, it just makes me a stronger teacher because I have to think beyond just delivering a curriculum. I'm more of an engineer. . . . That makes me continue to have to get better at my craft and what I do because of, just, the challenge of it. (Aubrey) It allows me to feel like I'm challenged. (Nina)
Excitement in the kids	3	I see that excitement in the kids. I don't see it when I'm following a prescribed curriculum. (Bridget)
Change	3	It's always growing and changing and becoming better. (Emily) I love that they (the Storylines) change all the time. (Hollie) I just love it, love it, love it. I just love how there's such a different feel for each part of the year because of what the classroom looks like and what the kids are doing and what they're pretending. (Abby)

Table 3: Teachers' perceptions of the benefits of Storyline as compared to other methods with which they are familiar.

Nine of the teachers said that Storyline engaged them in ways that other curricular methods had not (Table 3). Five mentioned enjoying learning subject matter content and that Storyline provided this opportunity. Four mentioned fun and three each said they enjoy the challenge of teaching with Storyline, seeing the children's excitement, and the change with the Storylines.

Teachers addressed how Storyline affects the learning environment (Table 4). The teachers closely connected this question to the question of how Storyline influences their overall teaching, so we combined the answers to these questions. Their answers centred on student ownership of their learning, meaningful connections, the teachers' own identities, and student attitudes and interactions.

All thirteen teachers commented on the students' ownership of their work. Abby connected this to meaning (mentioned by eleven teachers): "When they are the ones coming up with the plan, it gives more meaning" (Table 4). Aubrey elaborated: "these science activities aren't done in isolation." Eight teachers cited student enthusiasm, and seven described positive interactions between students. Storyline was so integral to their teaching that seven of the teachers said something similar to Avery's "Storyline is who I am as a teacher." Five commented that Storyline organised both days and semesters: "It's part of you all day long" (Hannah).

Tab. 4: Teachers' perceptions of how Storyline influences their overall teaching and learning environment

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Students have more ownership in the curriculum	13	They (kindergarteners) make the plans (for the frieze). They draw prototypes, . . . they build it. There's just so many opportunities for interaction between students for collaborative work, team work, discussions. . . . There's plenty of opportunity for them to work on a project and decide how they want to complete a project. . . . It gives them some ownership in that they can decide. (Cheryl)
		When they are the ones coming up with the plan, it gives more meaning. (Abby)
Meaningful connections between subject areas and story	11	I'm trying to create meaningful connections for kids all throughout the day. (Avery)
		It just gives meaning to what we're learning. (Bridget)
		The act of creating that frieze connects those kids with those places. (Lucy)
		What is so important about Storyline is that these science activities aren't done in isolation. They are attached to our park and given meaning so students will remember. They're not just doing a science experiment because they've been told to do it. (Aubrey)
Students are enthusiastic	8	My kids came in with tons of facts about our park today just from going home and researching it because they were excited. It wasn't even homework. (Hollie)
		It's fun and it's exciting and it makes the learning fun. It brings it alive; it brings our classroom alive. (Hannah)

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
I cannot imagine teaching without Storyline	7	<p>I couldn't really pull out teaching from Storyline anymore. It's like Storyline is who I am as a teacher. . . . (Teaching) wouldn't make sense to me anymore. I don't think I could do it. I wouldn't do it. (Avery)</p> <p>If I didn't have Storyline, I wouldn't – I don't think I'd still be teaching. (Lucy)</p> <p>I can't imagine going back to not having it ever. Even for a semester. . . . It is such the highlight of the day. (Abby)</p> <p>I can't imagine not teaching with Storyline. (Emily)</p>
Student interactions are affected positively	7	<p>They learn how to talk (to settle differences). One kid was like, "Nooooo!" and then another kid was like, "Well, let's say that in a nicer way," like, "How can we talk about that?" . . . It's impressive what they figure out on their own when I step out (of the way of their interactions). (Hollie)</p> <p>I reflected on what all of these students (at Highland) were accomplishing, . . . the negotiating, planning, problem solving, and creating happening around me. . . . The older students were independent from adult supervision and were organising and planning by themselves, critiquing their work and fixing design problems as they came up. (Bridget)</p>
Storyline organises both days and semesters	5	<p>It's part of you all day long. (Hannah)</p> <p>The story is the overall organizer of the day. (Avery)</p> <p>It lends you to looking ahead for a whole semester, . . . because it's all got to tie into the story. (Cheryl)</p>
Students are more on task	3	<p>When they're in character, they're thinking, "Well, would a chef do this? Would a chef do that?" Sometimes it raises the (behavioural) expectation. If they're in culinary school, they wouldn't be silly with the kitchen tool because they're there for a purpose. (Cindy)</p> <p>They're doing it because they have to (for themselves); if they don't do this science experiment, they'll never solve the mystery. . . . There are problems left unsolved unless they do something about it through Storyline. (Aubrey)</p>

Table 4: Teachers' perceptions of how Storyline affects their overall teaching and the learning environment of their classrooms.

“What are you currently learning about Storyline?” Teachers' responses to this question did not reveal any aspect that had to do specifically with learning about Storyline. Their replies fit better into answering the question on continuing struggles, which is where

we enfolded their answers (Table 5). The struggles included time, integrating the new district requirements, keeping the story and characters alive, and maintaining a good balance of control between students and teacher.

Tab. 5: Teachers’ perceptions of their typical struggles while teaching with Storyline

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Time	8	The overall biggest struggle is time. (Lucy)
Integrating new requirements	6	Having programmes or mandates that don’t fit and then how do you make that work? . . . I have to know what the packaged curriculum is in order to integrate it. (Avery)
Keeping story and characters “alive”	6	It’s challenging to make sure that the characters are still continuing to live. . . . I sometimes forget to just allow the students to share what’s going on from the character’s perspective. . . . To feel what’s happening. . . . to actually do some journaling or some drama work that allows them to really feel like their character. . . . That’s the part that feels sort of fluffy sometimes but it’s just as important (as the obvious academic pieces of the Storyline). (Aubrey) Having the frieze be interactive and having the characters be more interactive. (Nina) Keeping the story alive so that it’s not just a series of activities that you do that are fun activities, but that it has a story that flows through the whole thing. (Cheryl)
Balance of control between students and teacher	5	Sometimes I have a picture in my head of how it’s supposed to be and that’s not at all what they want. So part of it is me having to let go so that they can have the culture that they want to create and not have me control it. (Hollie) There’s always a balance between teacher control and student control. . . . I’m starting to understand the difference between controlling the structure and controlling the outcomes. (Lucy)
Planning	4	It’s always a challenge for me to do all the planning and get everything up but then to really follow (the plan I made). . . . Just, “Okay, what is the goal?” and “Why?” (Abby) (When I’m planning the new Storyline), I’m still working on the why—like, what’s the story that I can kick it off with. (Avery)

Table 5: Teachers’ perceptions of their typical struggles while teaching with Storyline.

“The overall biggest struggle is time,” said Lucy (Table 5); eight teachers mentioned this. Six teachers said that keeping the characters and/or plot alive could be a struggle; Cheryl said she wanted the learning experience to be “not just a series of activities that

you do that are fun activities, but that it has a story that flows through the whole thing.” Five teachers mentioned that maintaining a balance of control between teachers and students could be difficult.

Student engagement in the story also entered the teachers’ answers to, “What evidence do you have that Storyline is an effective teaching method?” (Table 6). In addition to giving examples of student engagement, teachers told us of formal and informal evaluations, student personal growth, student recall, and the effect of Storyline on family vacations.

Tab. 6: Teachers’ perceptions of evidence which shows that Storyline is an effective teaching method

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Formal evaluations	8	I do pre-tests and post-tests. . . . I’ve got writing samples . . . projects . . . models . . . speeches . . . . Just like any evidence for teaching. (Avery)  I’ve felt my student work lagging (while teaching) with fidelity (to the new required curriculum). . . . I just saw some writing work come to life again (because I was allowed to integrate with Storyline). (Aubrey)  (While conferencing with a student about his everyday writing versus his work for the Storyline culmination), I said, “What do you think happened? Why does this look just so good? Why is this (one) so much better in quality?” And he says, “Well, because I knew it was for Storyline and we were going to be showing people.” (Abby)
Student personal growth outside of evaluations	6	You’ll have a student that’s extremely shy or doesn’t work well with other kids. But when you give them a character to be . . . then they don’t have to be themselves. It gives them the confidence to stand up. . . . It gives them just a sense of purpose. (Chelsea)
Student engagement when in Storyline	5	I had this one student who was pretty shy and quiet. And it was hard to get her very motivated. Well, she was the manager at the culmination. I mean, it was this whole side of her that I had never seen. (Hannah)  Our behaviour kids love Storyline, love Storyline. They love it. They love it. (Chelsea)  Kids go home and they’re talking to their parents about what’s going on in the Storyline. (Bridget)

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
		One of my lowest readers/writers started making a book about (how tourists should take care of the park), all on his own. He would get his book out and take it with him to recess so he could work on it. This is the kind of thing that makes me know Storyline is powerful. (Abby)
Families change their vacation plans	5	(The students are) actively engaged, they're excited, they're motivated, they think it's fun. (Chelsea)
Recall from former students	4	(The families) are planning their trips; they (the students) are asking their parents. The parents are going to make that happen. They learn about something, but they learn about it so passionately that they really want to go see their park. (Chelsea)  (A former student came back) and said, "My professor gets confused about the order that they (the events from the American Revolution) went in, but I lived it, so I know the order that they go in." (Hollie)

Table 6: Teachers' perceptions of evidence which shows that Storyline is an effective teaching method.

When citing evidence of the effectiveness of Storyline (Table 6), eight teachers referred to formal evaluations of student work. Six teachers cited student personal growth, and five each mentioned student engagement and the impact on family trips. Four talked of long-term student recall, such as the order of events in the American Revolution (Hollie).

Highland teachers also shared with us their everyday experiences. These comments were in the teachers' frustrations, their successes, and their appreciation of their colleagues (Table 7).

Tab. 7: Teachers' comments on daily experiences in Storyline teaching

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Collegiality	9	We're always checking in and helping each other and improving, . . . being critical friends. (Aubrey)  I get my best ideas for Storyline when I work with my team. (Hannah)  I see other people (teachers) and they're so inspiring with it (Storyline). Luckily, I'm surrounded by those people. (Bridget)

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Successes	9	A colleague reminded me how important it is to really bring the characters to life and make sure to spend time on introducing them. . . . I would have failed to do this important piece without the reminder of my colleague. (Aubrey)
		The people that work here give you the confidence that you can do it. (Chelsea)
		We divide up the work. (Aubrey)
		(One student) is easily the most challenging student I have ever had the opportunity to work with. Well, he turned to me with his eyes wide and full of love and whispered, “It’s so beautiful!” . . . It was a fantastic moment. And I forgot about my worries and remembered why it was so important . . . so that kids could have an out-of-character moment of awe, wonder, and excitement for this new Storyline. (Lucy)
		The new student in class was so surprised and delighted by the idea of me playing make-believe with all of them in this new world we’ve created together. (Lucy)
		(The students’ ideas for the top of the totem) include a circle of children holding hands to represent joy, togetherness, and community—almost their words—so I think they are getting the idea (of what a totem is). (Denny)
		(The) Storyline character-building activity . . . required a great deal of self-control, respect, and listening. . . . The community building part of this activity was priceless. . . . I could not have planned this moment any better for some amazing learning. (Denny)
		One of the kids said to me, “I can’t wait until after recess!” (Hannah)
		Frustration
There was glue everywhere, parts stuck on the wrong place, and the kids did not follow the steps in order. (Hollie)		
To get the skills they need, sometimes that means lessons that don’t move the story forward. (Avery)		
I feel like I’m driving this, not the kids. (Denny)		
I am typically able to predict how much time each lesson or activity will take. There are times, though, when I am dead wrong. . . . I thought it would be a quick hour . . . (it) will now be taking four days. (Hollie)		

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
		We made it through half of what I had intended to do. There is a bit of process drama that goes with learning the water cycle and each time the kids started play-acting collection to evaporation then to condensation—I lost them. The sillies took over. (Denny)
		It was pretty chaotic. . . . I was pulled in many different directions. (Abby)

Table 7: Teachers’ comments on daily experiences in Storyline teaching.

The teachers’ comments on their own daily experiences addressed the importance of their colleagues as well as their own successes and frustrations (Table 7). Nine teachers told of collegial influence; they give each other “confidence” (Chelsea) and serve as “critical friends” (Aubrey). Successes happen; nine teachers related “priceless” moments (Denny). Frustrations happen at Highland just as they do in any classroom; eight teachers gave examples.

**How Does Teaching with an All-School Storyline Affect the School Community?**

Interactions with colleagues and students formed most of the comments that teachers made on their perceptions of the effects of an all-school Storyline (Table 8). As with the teachers, the principal did not answer all of the questions in the interview in ways that could be included in other tables. His remarks are included only here and in Table 1, where he gave his background information.

Tab. 8: Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of an all-school Storyline

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Impact on collegiality	10	There’s a lot of lunchtime chatter (amongst faculty). When we’re all in this and it’s a common thing, we really talk about it: “What did you do?” (Abby)
		Everybody pulls it together and I think it really helps just with staff cohesiveness because you’re all trying to work towards the same end. . . . All of us benefit from the work of others. (Avery)
		We’ve been working on this (all-school Storyline) for a year already. So we’re definitely invested in it, and we definitely rely on each other, . . . trusting each other. (Cheryl)
		A school-wide Storyline helps with staff cohesiveness. We all have the same context. (Bridget)



Type of response	Frequency of response (n=13)	Representative responses
Impact on students	10	<p>(The principal) made time for us to do a “frieze walk.” . . . to see the work that everyone has done. (Avery)</p> <hr/> <p>My role is very different from where I was before. I need to protect time for Storyline and time for planning. We’ve used (district meeting time) just for Storyline that other schools use for other things . . . (so that the teachers can) organise an all-school Storyline. (principal James)</p> <hr/> <p>Storyline is extremely beneficial. It is a key to the success of our school, and it is a really good unifying focus. The whole team believes that this is a valuable and powerful use of our time. (principal James)</p>
Importance of adhering to the group calendar	4	<p>Some of the so very confident older students totally changed their ideas after hearing the reasoning of some of the younger students. (Denny)</p> <hr/> <p>The kinds of questions that they (the older students) were asking of their hosts (the younger students) in this room. . . . They were thinking of that question because they knew the answer in their own park. So it was helping them to better understand and better think about our park and naturally compare the two. They were like, “Oh, the Rockefeller family, they did this in our park. I didn’t know they did things in other parks.” (Lucy)</p> <hr/> <p>When students (in all grades) share a common purpose and goal, their interactions are more meaningful and they are more connected, even afterwards. (Aubrey)</p> <hr/> <p>All the way up through fifth grade we have children who are willing to be children and who are not in a rush to grow up. Storyline is a built-in time to make believe that all-ows kids to be kids. A lot of project-based learning is kids acting as grown-ups. Storyline is kids pretending, allowing the kids to be kids, enjoying who they are. (principal James)</p>
Importance of adhering to the group calendar	4	<p>Staying caught up on the school-wide Storyline schedule means setting aside regular lessons. (Avery)</p> <hr/> <p>You’ve got to be on that same page. (Cindy)</p>

Table 8: Teachers’ perceptions of the effects of an all-school Storyline.

Ten interviewees noted how an all-school Storyline affected collegiality (Table 8). Cheryl said, “we’re definitely invested in it, . . . trusting each other.” Ten said there was an impact on students, such as older students changing their ideas after listening to

the younger students (Denny). Lucy heard children comparing the Rockefeller family’s influence in different parks. The principal noted that he had to adjust his role to provide opportunities for the teachers to plan.

We asked teachers and the principal the question, “What do you like most about Storyline?” They cited multiple features with no one characteristic distinguished from any other. These comments have been included in their responses to other questions.

**What do parents and former students think of Storyline?**

Families had the interview guide (Appendix A) during the interviews. Interviewees focused on sharing their experiences rather than answering the questions directly. None of the family interviewees separated what they liked most about Storyline from their other comments.

Parents were inspired to enrol their students at Highland primarily due to the philosophy of Storyline and recommendations from others (Table 9).

Tab. 9: Parents’ perception of what inspired them to enrol their children in a Storyline school

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=7)	Representative responses
The philosophy appealed to me for my child	7	There’s the potential for a lot of possibilities in the characters, just social-emotional learning and problem-solving with taking on a persona and having opportunity to play out some things with that character. (Kathy)
		You can sit at your desk all day long and be fed information, but it’s when you become what you’re studying, when you encircle your environment with what you’re studying, and then you do it, . . . there’s going to be deeper learning. (Paula)
		Integration (of subject areas) and relevancy is critical in kids’ ability to understand and learn and make sense of the world. (Kathy)
Recommendations from others	3	Seeing the experience that my neighbours had (with Storyline). (Millie)  (My oldest daughter) visited Highland. And she said, “If I had a kid, this is the school that I would go to.” (Tamara)
Teachers appear excited and happy	2	I feel a very positive, warm, small-town feel that the teachers are genuinely excited and happy. (Olivia)
High academics	2	It’s probably, if not, the most challenging academic school in the town. (Paula)

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=7)	Representative responses
		Every day when I'd go and sign in to help (as a volunteer before my children were enrolled at Highland), I would just be amazed at what I saw in the school. (Tamara)

Table 9: Parents' perceptions of what inspired them to enrol their children in a Storyline school.

All the parents said the reason for enrolling their child(ren) at the school was an alignment of the Storyline philosophy of education with their own (Table 9). Three mentioned the recommendations from others as influential in their decisions.

We asked how Storyline affected the students (Table 10). The students mentioned it being a favourite time of day and that it their engagement and attitude toward school.

Tab. 10: Family perceptions of how Storyline teaching affected the students in the family

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=7)	Representative responses
Positive attitude toward school	7	They did great in that environment and loved it and thrived even more probably than they would have done in any other. (Millie)
		I think it (Storyline) played an important role with my kids enjoying learning and doing as well as they do. (Millie)
		My kids never wanted to miss school because they didn't want to miss Storyline, just to see what was going to happen that day. (Millie)
Highly engaged in learning	7	The kids want to keep learning; they're immersed in the story; I see passion and excitement in my kids. (Victoria)
		You feel like the kids get so much more out of it and are so much more involved in the learning. (Millie)
		My favourite Storyline was the San Francisco all-school (Storyline). I was part of the Mission District, and we were a pastry business. We went through sanitation school, we learned all the business requirements, there was fog (dry ice), and there was an earthquake. It was just like a new adventure. We walked around like, "What's going to happen today?" It was really clever and creative. (Gracie)
		I was never thinking, like, "Aww, we're doing math." It was like, "Oh, here's another thing in Storyline, my favourite part of the day." (Gracie)

Table 10: Family perceptions of how Storyline affected the students in the family.

All of the parents and children agreed that the children had a positive attitude toward school, wanting to be there and wanting to take part (Table 10). All also remarked on being highly engaged, shown in Gracie’s comment, “It was just like a new adventure.”

Families gave two related types of answers to the question of how Storyline influenced their family’s interactions (Table 11): the influence showed in conversations and vacations.

Tab. 11: Family perceptions of how Storyline influenced family interactions

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=7)	Representative responses
Family conversations and activities are related to Storyline	7	<p>They come home and tell me about it, all excited. It’s like when a new movie comes out. (Paula)</p> <hr/> <p>(Storyline) made our family more involved in their education, versus, “Oh, what are your math problems?” . . . I was excited. My husband was as excited as they were. “Oh, what happened?” (Millie)</p> <hr/> <p>Every dinner table conversation was, “And guess what? Grandma died today.” And I’m like, “What?” “No, on the Oregon Trail. You know, Grandma passed.” (Olivia)</p> <hr/> <p>You bring Storyline everywhere you go. (Tamara)</p> <hr/> <p>(Due to the Top Chef Storyline), he feels more comfortable (cooking), and it motivated us. . . . It just opened up his world and our world. (Millie)</p>
Inspired vacation travel to site of Storyline topic	7	<p>(After the San Francisco all-school), there was a whole bunch of us who ended up in San Francisco. (Kathy)</p> <hr/> <p>We try to, when we can, incorporate the Storyline into our trips and vacations. . . . We did the (all-school Winter Olympic Storyline a couple of years ago. . . . Whistler (the site of the Vancouver Winter Olympics) is only ten hours away and we ski, and so it was just like, “Let’s go to Whistler this year.” (Paula)</p>

Table 11: Family perceptions of how Storyline influenced family interactions.

For the families interviewed, Storyline became a topic of conversation during family times (Table 11). All of these families were so intrigued by the Storyline that they spent their vacations traveling to Storyline locations.

The families were convinced that Storyline was an effective teaching method (Table 12). Evidence cited included long-term recall and applying Storyline in a variety of contexts.

Tab. 12: Family perceptions of evidence which shows that learning with Storyline is effective

Type of response	Frequency of response (n=7)	Representative responses
Ability to recall facts or events	7	<p>My kids will remember things, and it'll go back to something that happened in Storyline, something I sure wouldn't remember from a history class. (Millie)</p> <p>That jars their memory, having a character. (Millie)</p> <p>We went to the culmination today and I could compare their frieze to the one I did when I was that age, because I remembered it so well. (Tera)</p> <p>It made it a lot easier to remember (than learning now in middle school). (Gracie)</p> <p>It was so exciting that we still get excited talking about it. (Victoria)</p>
Learning from Storyline used in context away from school	7	<p>They apply it wherever they go. . . . We were at a dump for metal recycling, this huge dump. And they saw this big, big screw. And one of them blurted out, "Look! It looks like Archimedes' screw pump, right?" Or we'll be at the Getty Museum in LA and they'll come across a Monet or a Degas, and they'll know it because they drew it. (Paula)</p>
Student achievement	2	<p>My son did an art Storyline. . . . He's not a creative kid. He's math/science. . . . He loved that Storyline. To see him – he was the one that never thought he was good at art or anything like that – creating these amazing things. (Millie)</p> <p>He did amazing and did things I would never expect of him. (Millie)</p>
Learning social skills	2	<p>I was like, "That must be how they feel." And I feel like that was when I really realized – I got to feel how they did for a little bit. (Tera)</p> <p>I always made someone that I wanted to be; it was kind of like a dream person. (Gracie)</p> <p>One time I was completely different than myself. . . . I liked it. It kind of gave you, like, the other side of things. (Tera)</p> <p>I was Clan Mother of the Turtle Clan and I had some hard people that were causing trouble in other clans, and I had to try to control them. I'm trying to be a leader with a bunch of boys that did not cooperate in second grade. . . . As hard as it was, . . . it really helped you become a leader and realize that you're going to have to deal with this for as long as you live, pretty much. So it kind of taught you life lessons along with it (the academics). (Tera)</p>

Table 12: Family perceptions of evidence which shows that learning with Storyline is effective.

Parents noted that even after the children graduated, they talked about Storylines (Table 12). The former students remembered specific details about the Storyline, such as when the frieze looked like. Storyline served as a context for applying the learning in out-of-school situations.

## Discussion

We found three themes in the data: Storyline affects the connectedness of the school community, student and teacher motivation, and teachers' lives. A fourth theme was pivotal for the teachers' work: support from the school principal.

The all-school Storyline enhanced the Highland community connections. Teachers relied on each other and trusted each other; they planned together for a year beforehand. Students interacted with and learned from each other in ways that they would not have otherwise; older students learned from the younger and through those interactions made even more connections in their learning. Families and former students attended the culminating event.

Participants noted that Storyline affected student and teacher motivation. The teachers referred to both themselves and their students as experiencing challenge, curiosity, control, and fantasy, the important contributors to motivation (Malone & Lepper, 1987). These grew from the opportunities the teachers gave to their students to make sense of the world through story. When teachers nurture the student ownership of that story, they allow learners to both become more engaged in their learning and to put that learning into a meaningful context which then can lead to better retention of learning. Former students attributed their long recall of academics specifically to The Storyline Approach; they recalled the fantasy and spoke of the challenges, their curiosity, and the choices they made. Families recalled how the Storylines influenced the family conversations and trips; the high socio-economic status of most families at this school may have influenced their ability to follow up.

Storyline influenced the teachers' lives in ways that may happen in other schools which have a strong common focus. The teachers referred to the collegiality of their teaching staff due to having the common context of using Storyline. The teachers mentioned working closely with teams. They give each other confidence and serve as "critical friends," reminding each other of important aspects of teaching with Storyline. The teachers told us of their struggles, successes, and frustrations, which are common to teachers: time, managing new requirements, and having plans that don't work out as expected; they resolved unexpected events and recognised "payoffs" of student joy or achievement.

The principal's leadership was key to the daily operation of this school and to the all-school Storyline. He encouraged the staff himself and created opportunities for them to encourage each other. He found ways to create group planning time. Without his support, the school would have operated differently.

### Relationship of this Study to Teacher Education and Early Career Teachers

Teachers need opportunities to develop and to find enjoyment in their profession; some, as those at the school in this study, find this through Storyline. Storyline teachers often are situated in a local network of teachers using Storyline, such as Highland in this chapter. There may be a need for teachers to develop knowledge and expertise in community as they act as Storyline designers. It may be that learning about Storyline while in teacher education classes will give early career teachers the tools they need to make their careers more vital and rewarding. As we look to train future teachers for the classroom, we need to be sure that we include alternative teaching methods such as Storyline which offer them options to enhance their own professional lives as well as provide opportunities to enhance the lives of their students.

### Strengths and Limitations of the Study

Each person participated voluntarily. There was no individual incentive to participate although the research grant provided a sum to the school's Storyline fund. The content of the interviews and journals were consistent with each other over the three months of the study. We used pseudonyms to preserve anonymity.

The main strength of this study is that it was conducted within one school where all the teachers were highly experienced in teaching with Storyline. The participants had a common setting, experience, and perspective. This was the intended group to study for this research. The limitation is that in a school where there were fewer experienced Storyline teachers, a different population, or a different culture, some of the data might be different.

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## Appendix A: Interview Prompts

Note: Not all questions were used in each interview. Not all participants answered all questions.

### Teacher Interview Prompts

1. Tell me about your teaching background.
  - a. Years/content specialties/grade level
  - b. When in your career did you start using Storyline?
  - c. About how many Storylines have you taught?
  - d. Would you describe yourself as a novice, middle, or well-experienced Storyline teacher?
2. What drew you to teaching with Storyline?
  - a. Why did you start using Storyline?
3. How does Storyline teaching affect you?
  - a. How has using Storyline encouraged you as a teacher?



- b. How has Storyline influenced your teaching?
- c. What does Storyline do for you – yourself as a teacher – that other methods do not?
- d. What are you currently learning about teaching with Storyline?
4. Where in Storyline teaching do you tend to struggle? (planning overall/culmination/reflection; keeping the plot alive; responding to student input ...)
5. How has Storyline influenced your teaching?
  - a. How has your teaching changed because of Storyline?
  - b. How do you do things differently when teaching with Storyline?
  - c. How has Storyline changed your teaching life?
6. How does Storyline influence the learning environment of your classroom? Feeling tone, ownership, student control, how much “say” they have, student interactions, what is rewarded, what is encouraged....
  - a. How do students engage while in a Storyline versus not in a Storyline?
  - b. What do students do differently while in Storyline?
  - c. If we walked into your class while students are working in Storyline, what would we see that is different from a classroom that is not working in Storyline?
  - d. How do you manage/get student input in the Storyline?
  - e. What does Storyline do for your students that other methods do not?
7. What do you like most about using Storyline?
8. What evidence do you have that Storyline is effective?

### *Principal Interview Prompts*

1. Tell me about your teaching and administration background
  - a. Years/content specialties/grade level
  - b. When in your career did you become aware of Storyline?
2. What drew you to being an administrator in a school which uses Storyline?
3. How does Storyline teaching affect the teachers you supervise? (Please do not identify any specific teachers.) Please address any particular difficulties, encouraging aspects, or discouraging aspects that you have witnessed.
  - a. What does Storyline do for the teachers that other methods do not?
  - b. What are you currently learning about teaching and learning with Storyline?
4. How has Storyline influenced your administrative role?
5. How does Storyline influence the learning environment of the classroom and school?
6. How do you see that Storyline influences the children under your administration?
7. What do you like most about teachers using Storyline?
8. What evidence do you have that Storyline is effective?

### *Parent/Family/Former Student Interview Prompts*

1. What drew you to having your child in a Storyline school?

2. How did Storyline teaching affect your child/you?
  - a. How has using Storyline encouraged your child?
3. How did Storyline influence you and your interactions with your child?
  - a. How has Storyline influenced your parenting?
  - b. What are you currently learning about your child while in a Storyline that you think might have developed differently with another teaching method?
4. What do you like most about Storyline?
5. What evidence do you have that Storyline is effective?

## Appendix B: Journaling Prompts (Teachers)

Note: Not teachers answered all questions.

### *Journaling*

As a reflective activity, one that will give you time to review what you have done and learned, we ask that you record your thoughts about the day's activities in an ongoing journal. Please spend approximately 15 minutes two or three times a week writing your reflections on the events of the class (you certainly can write every day if you wish). Think of your reflections as a brief story of some aspect of your day upon which you want to reflect: perhaps what you did but more significantly what you discovered, thought, felt, or learned about your teaching and your students. Provide detail as you think through and write about your days. Consider addressing one or more of the following prompts to guide your reflections (or add your own ideas):

In general:

- What happened today that was interesting/unique/notable?

Daily work:

- Did things go the way you expected?
- Describe a frustration you experienced today.
- Describe a success you experienced today.
- List a question (or multiple questions) that you had about how teaching went today.
- What role did questions play in your thinking processes in your work today?

Problems and problem solving:

- How did you solve problems you encountered today?
- Describe patterns you see in things that frustrate – or challenge – your teaching.

Changes in lessons:

- Did things go as planned today? If not, what changed?
- How did today's lesson change from what you expected?
- What caused the changes to your lesson?
- What do you expect to have happen in your lessons in the next few days?
- Is the flow of your Storyline predictable or not? Why?

Working with others:

- What attitudes towards teaching and learning did you see exemplified by students in class?
- Interactions: describe an interaction regarding Storyline in class today.
- Describe the interpersonal dynamics you witnessed in class today.
- How has the work of others influenced your own teaching?
- Who assisted you today and how did that person assist you?
- Who did you help today and what did you do to help that person?

New learning:

- When and how do you get your best ideas for teaching?
- Discuss the sources of information that assist your learning (consider other teachers, your students, resource materials, and just plain experimentation).
- Complete the following: I used to think \_\_\_\_\_ but now I think \_\_\_\_\_ .
- Describe a new skill that you learned in class today.