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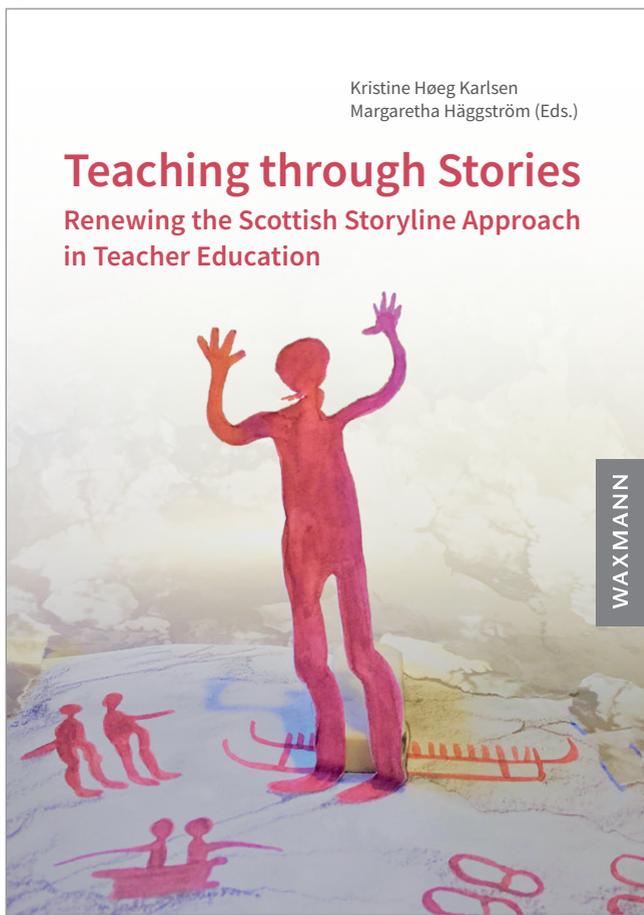
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Chapter 10

Using The Storyline Approach to Integrate Cognition and Emotion in Second Language Education

Sharon Ahlquist

Abstract. At Kristianstad University, Sweden, student teachers of lower and upper primary take part in an intensive three-week course in The Storyline Approach as part of their education in the teaching of English. The aims are: 1) For student teachers to experience the approach as learners; 2) For them to reflect as teachers on different aspects of the work as they do it; 3) To develop their own English by using it in speaking and writing tasks; 4) To understand the theories which underpin this teaching approach, including those related to second language learning; 5) To be able to create and plan their own topic based on the requirements of the national curriculum. This chapter is based on the findings of my ongoing research into The Storyline Approach in second language teacher education. The data consists of my observation field notes and students' own written self-reporting.

Keywords: Student teachers, second language education, willingness to communicate, cognition, emotion.

Introduction

In Sweden, all student teachers of both lower and upper primary school (ages 7–9 and 10–12 respectively) must study English. For those with happy memories of school English, or those who use English in their spare time, the subject is something to which they look forward: a chance to refresh their knowledge of grammar, become more comfortable speaking English and not least, learn how to work with it in the young learner classroom. However, for too many students, the subject was a chore at school, with an over-reliance on textbooks/workbooks, vocabulary tests on words they never otherwise used, and little use of the spoken language.

Though varied teaching methods and materials are more likely to increase the learners' interest, it is the view of Earl Stevick, one of the most influential applied linguists of the twentieth century, that even more important for learning is what goes on within and between people (Stevick, 1980). For some student teachers, the school experience was miserable, with use of the spoken language characterised by fear of public correction by the teacher and mockery from classmates when mistakes were made, leading to reluctance to speak. Research highlights that a learner's willingness to communicate (WTC) in a second language, defined as a state in which learners actively seek and make

use of opportunities to speak (MacIntyre, Clément, Dörnyei & Noels, 1998; Reinders & Wattano, 2015), is impacted by factors such as classroom environment, teacher and task (Pawlak & Mystkowska-Wiertelak, 2015; Zhang, Beckmann & Beckmann, 2018). This is significant since within a sociocultural research perspective, both emotion and cognition play an important role in learning another language (for example, Swain, 2013).

If student teachers are to become enthusiastic and creative teachers of English, then negative attitudes must be transformed, by building self-confidence in their own use of English, and by equipping them with skills they can apply in their future classrooms. This is the dual purpose of the intensive course in The Storyline Approach (TSA), which student teachers of both lower and upper primary take as part of their education in English at Kristianstad University. The course is the subject of this chapter, which aims to demonstrate how cognition and emotion are integrated to enhance learning. The topic of the course – *Our Sustainable Street* – is based on one which I have used in a study conducted with children aged 11–13 (Ahlquist, 2013a). In that study, findings included that the children showed less anxiety about speaking English over time and were therefore more willing to do so; they learnt new words, wrote longer and more complex texts, and improved their ability to understand when the teachers spoke only English. In other words, working with TSA in English has both affective and cognitive benefits, which student teachers will be better equipped to understand if they experience working with the approach themselves.

While TSA in second language education has featured in books such as Falkenberg and Håkansson (2000), and Mitchell and McNaughton, (2016), as well as in academic articles, such as Ahlquist (2013b), these works examine the benefits and drawbacks of the approach for classroom learning, but not within the context of teacher education. The purpose of the chapter is to shed some light on this topic based on three research questions: 1) how do the students themselves evaluate their development as learners/users of English? 2) how do the students themselves evaluate their development as future teachers? and 3) how do the students evaluate the effectiveness of cooperative group work?

I will first provide an outline of the course and its participants, followed by a consideration of how the research was conducted, and place it within the research context of second language learning, before going on to discuss the findings and the implications of these findings.

The Course and Participants

The classes consist of approximately 30 students in their second term of teacher education. The majority are in their early twenties, with different levels of ability in English and varied life experiences.

For the two weeks of the course, which was introduced at the time of the most recent teacher education reform in 2011, the students are randomly divided into five or six groups. The working language, as for all our courses in English, is English. In the initial information about the course, the students are asked to set themselves an achievable goal, to which they should refer when they evaluate their learning; to consider over the

two-week period how they are developing as student teachers; as learners of English; how cooperatively their group is working; their own contribution to the group work; and how the group could have worked more effectively. In the introductory seminar, the students are introduced to the principles of cooperative learning: individual accountability; collective responsibility; face to face interaction and small group social skills (for a recent overview of cooperative learning, see Ferguson-Patrick and Jolliffe, 2018). They are told that at the end of the course, they will be asked to review their learning in writing. This is partly an exercise in metacognition, but they are also told that their questionnaires will form part of my ongoing research into the use of TSA in teacher education. Thus, the method for my research study is that the students individually set a personal goal; are asked to reflect on their learning and group cooperation from the start to the end of the Storyline work; and to evaluate this in writing (in either English or Swedish) at the end. Sometimes time is made for the written evaluation in the final seminar; sometimes the students write at home and hand it in in the last seminar. The students are free to write their names, or not.

Regarding assessment, the students are assessed at the end of the course in two ways. The first is as a group. Each group is given a school subject (maths, physical education etc) and asked to create another Key Question for our Storyline that could include this subject. Individually, they write a plan of a Storyline which they themselves could work with over a number of weeks in the respective age groups, linked to the curriculum (Skolverket, 2011) and to the theories of how children learn another language.

The story and key questions

The student teachers take on the roles of residents of a street in a fictive town. The groups each create a family or group of people living together; write advertisements for their house and draw pictures of it. During the Storyline, the families take part in a project to live in a more environmentally-friendly way; deal with the problems of rubbish being dumped in their new street; and encounter some anti-social neighbours. Finally, they enter the Ideal Street Competition. During the course, the students meet teaching staff from art, music and educational drama, as well as myself in English. The Key Questions and some of the tasks are as follows:

1. *Who are you?* The students create families; make models of their characters; and introduce them to the class. They write about the character and his/her typical day.
2. *Where do you live?* Each group writes an estate agent's advertisement for the house which they have bought, and draw it. They agree on the family's favourite room and create a model of this to be shown to the class.
3. *How can you help the climate?* The families take part in a project to live in a more environmentally-friendly way. They watch a short video about climate change, then look back over their descriptions of a typical day to identify changes they could make to reduce their carbon footprint.
4. *What can we do about the problem of rubbish in our street?* The families petition the council to create a park on waste land adjoining their street, which has become a

dumping ground. Other tasks include designing the new park, writing a newspaper article about the rubbish problem and creating a radio phone-in programme – both the latter tasks include the street's residents as interviewees.

5. *How can we deal with the problem of the new neighbours?* The families interview the new neighbours and discuss the problems that have arisen (such as noise, unkept garden, and barking dog). This is based on a text they read about the problems; it demonstrates the drama technique of teacher-in-role (as the neighbour) and creates an opportunity for role play using the models of the characters.
6. *What makes our street ideal?* The different families create entries for the Ideal Street Competition. These are songs about the street, which are performed against a slide show of photographs or video which each group creates, using the frieze, the models or images from the internet.

To summarise, the tasks are designed both to develop the story, and also to demonstrate the variety of ways in which the national syllabus for English can be integrated into TSA. Further, the tasks also provide opportunities for the students to develop their own language skills and knowledge in English.

Learning about, Learning through

In this section, I will discuss the pedagogical issues which are taken up during the course, related to learning in general and the learning of English in particular.

Differentiation

The concept of *inclusion* is important within the Swedish national curriculum. In practice, this tends to mean that teachers provide support for those who need it. However, the academically stronger are often left to get by on their own, just because they can. In a sense, such pupils are excluded from the classroom. If we are to work with inclusion in practice as well as in theory, then we have to be able to differentiate between the challenges we can reasonably give our pupils, based on their individual knowledge and abilities. This is demonstrated during our Storyline course. For example, to introduce Key Question 2, I read the students directions on how to find their street in the town. Before we begin, they are told that there are individual and group stages to the task. First, they will work on their own, and in the final stage, as a group. The instruction is to listen and after they have heard the description twice, they have some time to draw or write down as much as they remember. They then listen again, and after listening, add detail to their existing sketch or notes. Finally, the group combine their knowledge.

In an easier version, pupils could be given a list of words they will hear – petrol station, bank etc – and number them as they listen. Then they turn their attention to a printed map and listen again, marking on the things that were mentioned in the list in the order that they hear them and are now able to check again. The task can be made simpler still by having, say, squares, already marked on the map. Our pupils first number the things on the list as before and then as they listen again, write the appropriate

number in each square on the map. In this way we can use the same listening comprehension – because this is what it is in language teaching terms – while challenging our pupils at an appropriate level.

This series of tasks based on the same listening input demonstrates differentiation in level. However, it is also an opportunity to consider different learning styles. For instance, some students draw a map when they try to recall what they have heard; others make notes. Highlighting this difference encourages the students to reflect on the kinds of techniques they use to support, or scaffold, their own learning. At the same time, it makes them aware of other techniques, as used in this instance by their classmates, which in turn may broaden their own repertoire (Holton & Clark, 2006). To further address learning styles, we can consider other ways in which the task can be approached – for instance, tactile learners might place markers on a map; kinesthetic learners might walk the route using small figures or their fingers.

The Use of Questions

A further general pedagogic point concerns the use of questions. When the characters are introduced, this is an opportunity to discuss the way in which a doll/puppet scaffolds the speaking task, taking the spotlight off the speaker. But it is also a chance to consider how a learner is affected by hearing a question before or after they are presented with information. For instance, when the groups prepare to introduce themselves, they prepare a question based on the content of their presentation, such as the job of a particular family member. When they do their presentations, some groups are asked to state their question before they begin to speak, and others to state it when the group have completed their introduction.

We work in a different way when the groups show their room model to the class and explain why it is the family's favourite room. This time, the audience are encouraged to ask questions. We discuss how the presenting group is no longer in control but must answer spontaneously and improvise. Both production and interaction are part of the syllabus for English, and they make different linguistic demands on the speaker, which the students experience in these two tasks.

Reading and Writing

While the location task and the two presentations described above can be seen as listening comprehension, we also consider how reading comprehension is an integral part of Storyline work since many developments are introduced in the form of a letter. Key Question 3, for example, begins with the arrival of a letter about the climate project, inviting the families to a meeting at the town hall. The arrival of letters also provides a chance to demonstrate the cooperative learning principle of shared resources, when learners do not each have their own copy of material. It is the group's responsibility to make sure that everyone knows what they need to know. We discuss what the groups did when the letter arrived. Some individuals read the letter and passed it on. We talk about what is likely to happen when the letter reaches a learner who does not read very

well and consider alternatives to passing it on. One is to do what some groups choose to do anyway, and that is one person reads it aloud to the others.

Reading comprehension can also be based on writing which the learners themselves have produced. For instance, the families watch part of a very short film about climate change, and then read their account of the character's typical day (written in Key Question 1), to identify changes they could make. If the changes are mentioned in the latter part of the film, which they now watch, then the family will be eligible for a prize. One issue which is raised here is how work which learners produce in one part of the Storyline – the account of a typical day – becomes the basis for further tasks, so making it more meaningful.

Multimodality

A further point of discussion concerns how multimodality can be included in TSA. The Ideal Street Competition requires the students to write a poem, rap or song about their street and to create a slide show of pictures. On the day, most perform using recorded music as backing, while others make use of their ability to play a musical instrument. There are no winners as the neighbours are competing on behalf of the street. We discuss how competitions should be handled in the young learner classroom, and the need for clear guidelines and criteria if winners are to be chosen. A discussion of this final task leads us into the way in which Storyline makes the most of learners' various talents; provides an opportunity to look back at the story, integrating characters and incidents into the song or rap; and importantly to show that this is yet another way of recycling the core vocabulary of the Storyline.

For our final seminar, the groups have preparation time to consider the role of the Key Questions and frieze, the integration of the aesthetic subjects, and the benefits and challenges of TSA as they have experienced them, before we meet to bring their conclusions up for general discussion.

Storyline and Traditional Lessons

While most student teachers take an active part in the Storyline work, there are those who feel uncomfortable with the aesthetic work, particularly drama and music. This is important to acknowledge since teachers are individuals, just as pupils are, and will enjoy different things. At the same time, it is vital that the student teachers understand that not everyone learns in the same way, and that the aesthetic subjects, as well as being valuable in their own right, also provide the tools which can make learning visible for many learners. The aesthetic subjects may also be the ones where the less academic have a chance to shine and use their talents to help their group. Such chances are few in traditional English lessons.

Further, it is important that the student teachers understand that the exercises and tasks that we do in non- Storyline situations can be incorporated into the story framework. In other words, there is no need to distinguish between TSA on the one hand, and traditional English lessons on the other. For instance, we can create a Storyline

around the content of a textbook chapter about a farm, a family, a school and so on. In addition, we follow the same lesson structure with a warm up, body and closure to our lesson, and we can assign homework based on what we have worked with. As well as using our textbook as inspiration for a topic, we can include the kinds of activities we might otherwise work with. For example, the student teachers are given words from the Storyline and asked to sort them into four groups, each of which have something in common, such as houses, people, and climate. This kind of exercise is popular in workbooks.

From Practice to Theory

Having experienced how learners learn through TSA, and having considered the pedagogical implications of the tasks we have worked with and the exercises they have done, the students are better able to understand the theory of social constructivism and theories related to second language learning.

When they work in groups, at different levels of language proficiency and possessing varying degrees of artistic and musical talent, the students understand Vygotsky's (1978) zone of proximal development – how peers can bring different skills and knowledge to a task and learn through the help they give and accept. The concept of scaffolding is central to social constructivism (Wood, Bruner & Ross, 1976), but with regard to peer scaffolding it can be problematic. We discuss how opportunities for learners to benefit from each other's skills and knowledge are based on two assumptions. One is that the learners are willing to give and receive help, which is both a personality variable and dependent on the relationships between group members. A second point to consider is that unless the task is inherently engaging, the learners will not make their best effort and the teacher will not see what they are fully capable of.

This discussion places the notion of task at the centre of teaching. With regard to second language teaching, Lynne Cameron (2001) makes the point that teachers can both provide opportunities for learning, but also limit them, by the tasks they create. In the spoken language, the task design determines who speaks, how much and about what. It gives practice in production or in interaction; it causes the learner to consider the audience and the situation, which are criteria to be graded from school year 6 (age 12) and onwards. Whether we work with TSA or not, these are considerations for planning our work in the language classroom.

In terms of second language teaching, TSA can be considered a task-based approach (TBLT). Though definitions vary, in TBLT is based on tasks which draw on skills that would be used in similar tasks in real life and there is a concrete outcome or product (for instance, Ellis, 2003). Where TSA differs from TBLT, is that there is a narrative framework for the tasks. This makes them meaningful in the context of the story. The pieces of writing or artefacts about which learners talk, as well as the work displayed on the frieze, serve important functions: they help to develop the story and also provide a record of what has been done. Not least, when learners' artefacts and writing are used throughout TSA, they can see that their work serves a purpose, which is motivating – the character's typical day, written in Key Question 1 and revisited in Key Question 3, as

described earlier, for instance. Equally, the learners could read each other's accounts in order to identify areas of possible change. Both versions of this task are directly related to the syllabus for English: one competence to develop in reading is that the learner is able to act on information they have read. The action to be taken here is to identify lifestyle changes in the context of the competition requirements.

Building on completed work can be satisfying for learners partly because it reinforces the sense of character and story. For learners of all ages, these are what makes TSA “fun”, along with working together with others. That fun is an emotion commonly associated with TSA is highly significant for second language teaching. Although the research focus in second language acquisition has historically been on cognition, this is changing. Indeed, the understanding by some researchers of the importance of emotions can be traced back almost forty years. Stephen Krashen (1982) identified the importance of feelings – affect – in language learning. He used the term *affective filter* to explain how emotions influence an individual's ability to learn: when a learner is relaxed and motivated, the filter is low and learning occurs, but when the learner is nervous or bored, the filter is high and learning is blocked.

Since the 1990s, increasing attention has been paid to the impact of the social and affective context in which learning occurs. Based on Vygotsky (1978), the sociocultural approach to the learning of a second language considers that language use and language learning go hand in hand. In other words, learners learn the language as they use it, and it is when they use it that they learn. The work of researchers such as Firth and Wagner (2007), and Lantolf (2000), for example, has highlighted the importance of context.

The inseparability of cognition and emotion can be clearly seen in the research into WTC. Researchers argue that WTC is dynamic, and that it can change within the course of a lesson, dependent on task and on classmates. In TSA, there is content in the story, the tasks are meaningful and contribute to the development of the story. The nature of the work fosters relationships both within the groups and within the class as they collaborate. Storyline as an approach thus provides conditions to support the development of WTC, which is a pre-requisite for actual production of the spoken language.

Analysis of Students' Reflective Evaluations

The experience of working with TSA makes an impact on students in different ways and it varies from individual to individual. They develop an understanding of how the approach works in practice and how it can contribute to learning. One way in which it contributes to learning is through the emotional experience, which is often revealed in the students' reflections, examples of which are provided below.

In itself, the act of reflecting can play an important part in an individual's continued learning, providing a chance to take stock of what has been achieved, and to identify one's future goal or goals. As Harvey, Baumann and Fredericks (2019) make clear, reflection is not only a cognitive process, but very much an affective one: emotions can work as a catalyst for reflection, at the same time as reflection can activate emotion. While the authors maintain that “the role and functions of the affective domain in higher education remains relatively unstudied” (2019, p2), the potential influence of affect

on reflection becomes apparent when we consider, for instance, how the effectiveness, or otherwise, of group work is likely to colour an individual's view of the entire learning experience. This is especially important to remember with regard to TSA, where the same groups work closely together for the period of the Storyline, and evaluations may provide deeper insights into a student's perceptions of their learning than might be the case in a more traditional course.

The questionnaires are subjected to content analysis based on the questions that were asked and coded accordingly. These are to do with development as a user/learner of English; as a teacher; how cooperatively the group worked; what they could have done differently; and the individual's contribution. Key words are identified; for example, in the extract below, words *confidence*, *dare*, *afraid*, *character*, and the phrase linking *fun* and *learning* in the mind of the writer are significant. These words also illustrate the way in which the cognitive and affective domains of reflection are intertwined.

Certain themes emerge from the data. One is that students often write that they have learnt as much about teaching in general as about teaching English, and that they have learnt more from this course about teaching than they have learnt in the more general pedagogy courses. These general courses are taught in lecture form. A common theme over the years concerns the enjoyment of working with TSA – the fun – and the way that that impacts on their courage in speaking English and their willingness to do so.

I think Storyline is fun and when it's fun it is a chance to learn. Since we started, I feel I have more confidence to speak in front of others. Previously I have not dared to talk to others because I have been afraid of saying wrong, but it became much easier when I had the character in front of me.

This highlights the role of the puppet, mentioned previously, and also the realisation that fun and learning are closely connected. In the quotation shown below, another student highlights an important aspect of speaking a foreign language.

I am not normally the one who says something during the lessons and to do it in English is even harder, I thought. But I was actually wrong. In some ways it did feel more comfortable speaking English due to the fact that everybody knew that not everything had to be said in the right way.

All too often, students have the attitude that if they are going to say something, it has to be correct. This may be attributed to what they have experienced at school or it might be a personal characteristic. Such an attitude can prevent a person from speaking, and if they do not speak, they are not going to improve their skill in the spoken language. As teachers of young learners, they need to understand that while the youngest children may be uninhibited about speaking English, this changes as they approach puberty, or even earlier. It is therefore important that learners are encouraged to speak, regardless of how accurate it is. One way to do this is to give them a reason to talk – where they have something they want to say and need to express in English. A diet of textbook exercises and 'talk to your partner about' tasks will not fulfil that function, and where

translation exercises predominate, then this only underlines the fact that there is a right and a wrong.

That references to the use of the spoken language are so common serves to emphasise not only how students are often inhibited in speaking English, but also how working with TSA, even for a short period of two weeks, can make a difference. Here is one last quotation on this subject, which underlines the dual aspects of process and progress, and the way in which emotions can change from negative to positive as the learner becomes aware of progress. We have the juxtaposition of *terrifying* and *enjoyable*, the variety of task type as a reason given for language development, and we can note, the reference to *confidence* once again.

At first it felt a bit terrifying to have to speak and write only in English, but as the days went by, it felt easier and easier. By doing all the different tasks in the Storyline, I feel like I have practised so many different ways to use the language. Really enjoyable to feel the progress in my language skills and the increasing confidence.

My next quotation is interesting because it deals with group work, which is so central to TSA.

I've noticed how you take on a different role when you work in a different group. One of my base group members is doing more in her Storyline group than she does in the base group.

As mentioned at the beginning of the chapter, the students are randomly grouped for the course in TSA. Normally, they would work in a self-selected base group, created at the start of their first term, usually on the basis of where they live, and which they use for group study. By the second term, some groups are working well, but others less so, which is not surprising, considering they did not know each other when they formed the group. Group work is the source of many student complaints, usually because some members do not take their share of the work, or that others dominate. However, this quotation illustrates very well the fact that learners take on a certain role in a certain group. This may be a positive or negative role. If they find themselves in a different group constellation, they may display different characteristics: someone who does little in one group may be proactive in another, as in this example. It could be because the work is motivating; that the student prefers the people in the new group; that there is room in the new group for the individual to be proactive in a way that was not possible in the usual group; or that no one else was proactive so this person felt they had to do it. The important point for student teachers to realise is that their pupils need to work in various group constellations in order to be able to display and develop different facets of their personality, as well as their skills and knowledge in the respective subjects.

When it comes to evaluating how well their group worked, students usually write that the group worked well together, though one or more members may have done less than others or displayed a negative attitude. The students are usually able to identify ways in which they personally contributed to the group – often by making suggestions or taking responsibility for a particular part of a task. In some cases, the students write

that the group worked cooperatively, with each member taking responsibility for the final group effort. Not surprisingly, members of such groups are the most satisfied with the course.

My final quotation underlines the value of reflections such as these both for the teacher/researcher and the student. As teachers we gain insights not only into what our students think they have learnt, but also how and why; for the student, the being part of something, coupled with awareness of language development, is motivational for their future studies and also delivers an important pedagogical message about the nature of TSA, which can never be adequately conveyed through lectures and reading alone.

I felt a part of something, which I never have before. I felt I could make a difference

Conclusion

During the two courses that the students take in English, we also work with grammar and phonetics, literature, creative writing and developing speaking skills in various ways. Regarding the teaching of English, we deal with the theory of how young learners learn and how we can relate this to classroom practice in ways which are meaningful and motivating. As well as TSA, this includes using children's literature in the language classroom, where the students themselves work on tasks that can be adapted to the young learner classroom. Throughout their courses in didactics, a common thread is that they are learning through and not just about different approaches, methods and techniques.

A criticism by the schools' inspectorate has been that English as used by learners outside the classroom is separate from what is taught at school, despite a curriculum requirement to work with pupils' interests and experiences. Classroom teaching is still highly reliant on published materials. Yet if schools are to equip pupils with English, which is considered a basic skill for the twenty-first century, then teachers need a wider repertoire and the self-confidence to use it. Our student teachers experience for themselves the benefits and the challenges of TSA. In addition, the upper primary teachers have a four-week teaching practice in which they design and work with TSA in their pupils' English lessons.

Almost forty years ago Stevick argued that more important than materials and methods, is what goes on within and between people. To me, this means that a fundamental requirement for learning is an atmosphere in which learners are relaxed with themselves and each other. Stevick later defined "what goes on" as the "presence or absence of harmony" (1980, p.5). Any Storyline teacher observing their class at work will understand what Stevick means and how this state of harmony is related to learning. By both being able to experience TSA from the inside as learners and assess its pedagogical potential as teachers, student teachers are equipped to create Storyline topics which will maximise the learning opportunities of all their future learners.

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