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The Storyline Approach in Teacher Education

For many primary student teachers, English at school was characterized by a diet of textbooks, public teacher correction and peer ridicule. Such students approach English in teacher education with a lack of enthusiasm, even dread. If we are to produce competent, enthusiastic professionals, this must change. In English didactics, the objectives at Kristianstad University are 1) that students develop language proficiency and theoretical knowledge 2) understand how English can be taught creatively and be able to demonstrate this in practical and written assignments.

Classroom relationships are often said to lie at the heart of successful language learning (Stevick, 1980). One example of a relational pedagogy, which fosters cooperation and mutual support, is Storyline, in which a fictive world is created in the classroom. A story develops as learners, in small groups as characters in a story, work on a range of meaningful tasks, combining theoretical and aesthetic subjects. At Kristianstad University, student teachers work for two weeks intensively on a Storyline about families moving into a new street in a fictive English town, using English in different ways. At the same time, they analyse what they are learning and how. This has a number of benefits. By working with Storyline, as opposed to just reading about it, the students experience its pedagogical benefits, and not just for the teaching of English. At the same time, their proficiency develops, not least because they are working closely and intensively together on motivating tasks in a supportive classroom atmosphere.

Hattie (2009) contends that achievement is higher where there is enjoyment. Storyline helps to raise achievement levels because it engages affectively and cognitively, helps to forge closer classroom relationships and through practical work makes visible abstract content (for example, educational and linguistic theories), thus facilitating student learning, as this paper will demonstrate.

Hattie, J. (2008). Visible Learning. London: Routledge Stevick, E. (1980). Teaching languages: A way and ways. Massachusetts: Newbury House