

NOTES ON USING A STORY-LINE APPROACH TO LEARNING

Children love stories. As soon as their teacher utters the words 'once upon a time...' the atmosphere in the classroom changes. Day-dreamers start to tune back in.

The story-line approach to learning uses this natural love of stories to make learning experiences more immediate and immersive for all class members. When children place themselves as characters inside a story, they imaginatively and emotionally connect with their learning in a new way. Furthermore, the story-line approach creates a larger space for children to express their personal response to learning.

How does it work? At the outset of the topic, the teacher sets the scene and explains the 'rules of the game'. The class are told that when they (and the teacher) are wearing their 'signifiers', they are in role and should act as such. However, when the teacher takes off his or her signifier, this will be a sign to the class to do the same and to come out of character. This simple rule allows the teacher to control the parameters of the learning experience.

It is important to put plenty of effort and time into scene-setting and characterisation at the beginning of the topic. This will encourage the children to imaginatively engage with the project! If their teacher is enthusiastic and prepared to playfully suspend disbelief, pupils will usually do the same with gusto. This creates a strong sense of ownership about the whole project.

Story-line creates the opportunity for children to respond creatively to what they are learning. This should be encouraged, but it is important to remember that the teacher should control and direct the over-all direction of the story. For example, in the 'Hive Story-line', pupils may become interested in further exploring ideas about a future with no bees. The teacher should decide for him or herself to what extent this should be pursued before returning to the next part of the story. Too much deviation from the narrative thread of the topic can make it difficult to keep the learning coherent and well-paced.

Finally, it is hoped that this playful, imaginative style of learning shapes the way that children view the real world they live in. In the 'Hive Story-line', for example, the most significant response to learning comes when the children engage with their local MP and plan how to make changes to their school grounds.

I hope you enjoy using this approach and that it adds a useful tool to your on-going teaching practice. The effort and imagination you put into story-line as a teacher will be repaid many times over in increased motivation, deepened learning and just good fun!