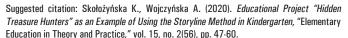
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Educational Project "Hidden Treasure Hunters" as an Example of Using the Storyline Method in Kindergarten

KEYWORDS ABSTRACT

storyline method, educational project, activating teaching methods, preschool education, student activities Thisarticle presents the Storyline method using the example of the authors' educational project entitled "Hidden Treasure Hunters", carried out from January to February 2020. The project was created in cooperation with the Student Scientific Group called "AGO" (Faculty of Educational Studies, AMU, Poznan) and one of the public kindergartens in Poznan, Poland. The main aim of the project was to arouse the children's cognitive curiosity and ability to work in a team by offering them various activities based on the Storyline method. During the workshops, the children were to play the roles of detectives who conducted an investigation concerning the professions of a paleontologist, a traveller, a miner, an astronaut, and a diver. The first part of the article describes the Storyline method in the context of work with preschool children, highlighting their social and emotional development. The next part presents the description of the project and a detailed plan of the workshop concerning a paleontologist's profession. The last part of the article presents the authors' conclusions and reflections on the effectiveness of the Storyline method in preschool education. In conclusion, the article's aims are to present students' activities and creativity in the perspective of practical work with children and to inspire future and current preschool teachers to use their own creative potential in educational work.



Introduction

Preschool children reveal "personal, hidden resources which, in future, shall become the basis for shaping important competences" (Michalak 2006: 8). That is why the most important task of a kindergarten teacher is to stimulate all the child's developmental aspects through, i. a., using different teaching methods. In contemporary didactics, the emphasis is placed on activating methods that facilitate the child's independence, commitment and personal experience and, in this way, increase the effectiveness of the educational process.

The value of gaining knowledge and developing children's practical skills, as well as shaping proper attitudes, is emphasized in the UNESCO report entitled *Learning: The Treasure Within*, according to which organizing contemporary education should be based on "four pillars of education that will be the basis of a person's knowledge for the entire life: learning to know, i.e. acquire tools of cognition; learning to do, i.e. influence one's environment; learning to live together, i.e. cooperate and coexist with others (...); and learning to be" (UNESCO 1998: 85). The need to develop all the abovementioned aspects of knowledge takes into account the student's practical activity in the context of the impossibility to internalize all the information given by the teacher.

The activities thatencourage the child to act on their own facilitate the development of his/her brain, which "learns through constant stimulation" (Michalak 2017: 22), because constantly inflowing stimuli result in the creation of new neural connections. Adults should stimulate children's development in a responsible manner because overstimulation results in symptoms such as stress, asense of pressure and rivalry (Piorunek 2016: 16). This also results in a threat to some students with special educational needs in the context of concentration and attention disorders(Kowolik 2005: 15). Thus, in kindergarten education, scientists emphasize the role of education and care atthe highest level (Michalak, Misiorna 2008: 204). Teachers' role is to plan educational activities in all areas of education to help children develop their creativity and inner motivation to learn. One of the ways to achieve this objective is the application of the Storyline method while working with preschool children. According to this method, the child becomes an active subject who shares his/her experience and, in this way, co-organizes (along with their teacher and peers) classes (Mitchell-Barrett 2010: 17).

A preschooler's social and emotional development

In a child's early years, when he/she takes up many initiatives in order to know themselves and their nearest environment, the child's personality, self-esteem and self-assessment are shaped. The child's first activities are oriented at themselves, but later he/she starts to adjust to people and things located in their nearest surroundings (Smykowski 2005: 184-185). At this time, the child is very sensitive in terms of emotions, which results from the flexibility of the nervous system. Such emotional development is connected with preschoolers' natural needs, as these children learn to "interpret situations and influence them, (...) master social principles of expressing emotions (taking into account place and time), and share emotions with others" (Smykowski 2005: 193). Shaping their personality and self-esteem is strictly related to children's social development. At kindergarten, the child internalizes the proper ways of functioning in a given environment, i.e. he/she learns a new role and develops his/her social competences. Also, there is a close connection between the child's emotional and social functioning, i.e. the mechanisms of emotional regulation influence the quality of interpersonal interactions (Czub, Matejczuk 2015: 20).

The preschool period is characterized by changes in the way the child functions in a peer group. Children discover their resources and then share them with others during peer tutorial and peer cooperation. The teacher, who arranges "open situations" in the educational space, makes it possible for children to construct knowledge on their own (Falkiewicz-Szult 2014: 171). Gaining knowledge and shaping skills while working in a group facilitates the children's intellectual development as they are given the opportunity to get to know different perspectives of a given problem (Shaffer 2006: 371-372).

The holistic approach to the child's development implies considerations on his/her subjectivity and the right to respect and freedom, all of which should be taken into account in the activities taken up by a kindergarten teacher. Respecting the above-mentioned rights involves the proper preparation of the child's environment. While preparing such a space, the teacher has to make sure that it encourages children to work on their own (Falkiewicz-Szult 2014: 173). In the context of planning and organizing preschool children's educational process, the teacher's important competences include "praxeological competences, communication competences, working in a team, creativity, IT competences, and moral competences" (Domagała et al. 2020: 376). Praxeological competences, related to, i. a., the ability to use different teaching methods, require internalized theoretical knowledge on this subject. Examples of the classifications of teaching methods that can be applied by the teacher include, i. a., the division of the methods of knowledge assimilation (lecturing methods), methods of the independent acquisition of knowledge (problem-solving methods), valorization methods, practical methods (Okoń 1987: 254-273), or the distinction between information and heuristic methods (Więckowski 1993: 232). At present, specialists emphasize the meaning of using problem-solving and discovering methods that develop the creativity and independent thinking of children due to the requirements of the constantly changing world (Wojciechowska 2014: 305).



The Storyline method in preschool education

The Storyline method, which is also called the "Scottish method" or the "method of an educational story," was created in the 1970s in Scotland by Steve Bell and Fred Rendell. Their new approach to education was inspired by the Report of the Scottish Department of Education (*Primary Education in Scotland*) published in 1965. The authors of the report emphasized the need to place the student atthe centre of the educational process (Chowaniak 2012: 278). The Storyline method is an offer for teachers who respect students' subjectivity because it replaces "you must" with "you can" (Jadkowski 2004: 40). The basic assumptions of this method are based on the concepts of Jean Piaget, Lev S. Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner. At present, it is also assumed that the method is the answer to the constructivist approach in the process of teaching and learning. The teacher's creative task is to create a thematic programme that encourages children towards active learning in a group, with the use of, i. a., narration, plot, role-playing, problem-solving, creative thinking, group discussion, and visualization (Jąder 2009: 44).

The main objective of using the Storyline method while working with preschoolers is to shape their social competences. When they perform group tasks, they develop the ability to negotiate, discuss things with others, present their points of view, and value their own and others' ideas (Michalak, Misiorna 2008: 205). Our observations and experience indicate that some kinds of activities offered during workshops carried out according to the assumptions of the Storyline method require children to break their own barriers connected with performing in front of peers. A presentation of the fulfilment of a common idea shapes the ability to listen to other people's opinions about the child's work, which not only teaches the child to critically approach his/her actions, but also to develop the ability to "constructively assess others' views" (Chowaniak 2012: 278). During the workshops, the children are committed to presenting episodes of a given story, and they suggest modifications of specific tasks on their own. This is connected with the basic assumption of the Storyline method, according to which telling a story and children's experiences are the context for the process of learning (Mitchell-Barrett 2010: 15). The method in question makes it possible for the children to play an active role in organizing the activities, because "the development of the story that is being told depends on their involvement" (Michalak, Misiorna 2008: 208). In the Storyline method, it is important that the actions of the student and the teacher aim at active learning and teaching through partnership.

The structure of each scenario consists of episodes, i.e. the main parts of the story that is being told, and the key questions. The *story* used in the method is the central part, creating the context for the learning process (Michalak, Misiorna 2008: 206). The introductory episode plays an important role because it aims at arousing the child's

particular emotions that motivate him/her to act (Chowaniak 2012: 279). According to our observations, the key questions asked during the workshop orientthe children towards solving a given problem. Moreover, they maintain the children's motivation for a long time. In the educational process, it is important for teachers to use questions oriented at arousing the learners' interest, which encourages them to think critically and to "discuss and exchange ideas with others" (Filipiak 2012: 158). It depends on the selection of an educational objective that not only refers to checking the students' knowledge but also develops their ability to compare, analyze, generalize or evaluate various issues. The last element typical of the Storyline method is the ability to freely apply the subject of the activities, which motivates children to create unique scenarios. Within this scope, they are obliged to comply with the following principle: the acceptance of the subject selected by the children. This is important because the children play an active role in the process of lesson planning.

Creating an educational project according to the assumptions of the Storyline method

The Student Scientific Group "AGO" at the Faculty of Educational Studies of the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznan fulfilled an educational project in the academic year 2019/2020 entitled "Hidden Treasure Hunters" in cooperation with Public Preschool No. 100 "Wesoły Domek" ["The Happy House"] in Poznan. The project participants included one kindergarten group of 25 children aged 5-6.

The basic aim of the project was to carry out five workshop sessions according to the Storyline method. During each lesson, the children took the role of detectives trying to develop a problem presented in the story. During the 'detectives' investigation', the children learnt the work of people representing unusual professions: a paleontologist, a traveller, a miner, an astronaut, and a diver. Trying to answer the question "What does a paleontologist/traveller/miner underground/ astronaut in space/diver on the bottom of the Baltic Sea look for?", the children took up many different activities that involved movement, art and music.

The main element of all the lessons was a story presented at the beginning of each workshop. The story provided the context of a problem situation, and the presented letters from the representatives of particular professions constituted its particular episodes. The letters were designed to arouse the children's cognitive curiosity and motivate them to solve particular tasks. Each scenario was prepared in a way that encouraged the child to find a solution to the problem in the way that was the most appropriate for him/her. Different kinds of activities made it possible for the children to play the role of an active scientist who is free to choose what he/she wants to do and



to take responsibility for his/her choices. The main idea of the project was polysensory teaching oriented at the individual needs of particular children.

The project was based on the cooperation of academic teachers, preschool teachers, students and children. During the classes, the meaning of peer cooperation was emphasized. Such cooperation aimed to arouse children's internal motivation, which is one of the most important components in the process of learning. According to our observations, while conducting such classes we can increase the motivation of the participants who, additionally, motivate one another to solve consecutive episodes of a given story. The following is the scenario of the lesson that started the cycle of workshops within the "Hidden Treasure Hunters" educational project.

Workshop entitled "Detectives' investigation. What does a paleontologist look for?"

Duration: 90 minutes

General objectives:

making the children interested in the world of nature; developing the children's visual and auditory perception; shaping their ability to work in a group.

Detailed objectives:

The child:

- knows what a paleontologist's work consists of;
- enumerates a few dinosaur species (triceratops, tyrannosaurus, stegosaurus);
- classifies a given dinosaur species as a herbivore or carnivore;
- matches a picture with the proper silhouette, improvises the movement and sound of a given dinosaur;
- measures length using different units;
- makes an art project and participates in games that involve movement;
- uses the knowledge of the principles concerning working in a group.

Lesson plan:

Episode I: "A mysterious man"

The teacher tells the children a story about a mysterious man with glasses and a hat, dressed in a brown vest and holding a hammer, a paintbrush and a magnifying

glass in his hand. The teacher admits that he/she does not really know who the man is because the mysterious person did not have enough time to introduce himself. The teacher adds that the man was in a hurry and that he asked the teacher to give the children a letter in which everything is explained.

The content of the letter: "Dear Hidden Treasure Hunters, my name is Cezary Fossil and I am a paleontologist. I am writing to you because someone told me you are the best discoverers. If you agree to take up another challenge, you will learn a few dinosaur species, understand why dinosaurs died out and check what paleontologists do and why they need 'keen eyes'. Are you strong enough to perform the tasks that await you? 3...2...1... Let's start with a dance! Cezary Fossil."

Episode II: "A discovered fossil"

The children receive another letter from the paleontologist to be read by the teacher.

The content of the letter: "Hello again, Hidden Treasure Hunters! Do you already know what paleontologists do and what they look for? (Pause for the children's replies.) Great! I am a scientist and I analyze dinosaurs that appeared in the Triassic. I dig in the ground and I find fossils, i.e. pieces of organisms that turned into stones. Such pieces include bones, feathers, traces and imprints of various creatures. What do you think: what can we learn on the basis of a discovered fossil? As a paleontologist, I have to be very careful while working, because I cannot overlook anything. Even the smallest detail can provide us with useful information, so, dear Hunters, I shall give you an exercise that may help you check your 'keen eye'. You will see what I have prepared for you! Best regards, Cezary Fossil."

Episode III: "Dinosaur extinction"

The teacher reads aloud another letter from the paleontologist.

The content of the letter: "Dear Hidden Treasure Hunters! I am impressed by the way you made those dinosaur skeletons. You already know that some dinosaurs, e.g. the diplodocus and apatosaurus, were herbivores, and others, e.g. the tyrannosaurus and spinosaurus, were carnivores. The former ate leaves, grass and young branches, while the latter ate meat. The times when dinosaurs lived were very dangerous. Do you know what threats awaited dinosaurs? (Pausefor the children's replies.) Many of them had to beware of predators, such as the tyrannosaurus or spinosaurus, which were searching for and eating eggs with baby dinosaurs. At present, snakes, tortoises and birds hatch from eggs. Also, at that time, earthquakes and volcano



eruptions were frequent. Dear Hidden Treasure Hunters! Check how big a T-rex, the king of dinosaurs, was. After you finish the task, you will get a reward! Your paleontologist, Cezary Fossil."

Chart 1. An example scenario with the use of the Storyline method

EPISODE	KEY QUESTIONS	STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES
I. A mysterious person	1. Why Cezary Fossil did write a letter to you?	1. Dance to the song "Veo, Veo". The children make a 'train' and move to the rhythm of the song. They respond to the changing tempo.
	2. What do you know about dinosaurs?	2. <i>Hidden dinosaurs</i> . The children sit in a circle and give a bowl with ice-balls to one another. Inside the balls there are little dinosaur figurines. The students present their knowledge about dinosaurs to others.
	3. Why does Cezary Fossil need the tools mentioned by the teacher (a ham- mer, a paintbrush, a magnifying glass)? 4. What might the subject of the story told by the paleontologist be?	3. Time-machine based on J. G. Thulin's Movement Story Method. The children are scattered around the classroom and they try to move according to what they hear in the story: "A long, long time ago (about 230 million years ago), there were huge reptiles called dinosaurs. Now, we will try to jump. 1 2 3 What happened? Can you see what I see? When we turn around, we can see a SPINOSAURUS which is looking for food, trying to catch another animal. The spinosaurus is very big, so, just like it, we have to move very slowly, stumping our feet. We are passing next to some trees and we can see a TRICERATOPS! It is a herbivorous dinosaur. You know what? It is standing next to a very tall tree and it cannot reach some leaves. Let us try to reach them, perhaps we can make it Yes! We did it!There is another herbivore next to the triceratops. It is a DIPLODOCUS which throws some leaves from the tree. Look how they twirl in the air. And suddenly Oh no! We have to hide! A TYRANNOSAURUS is approaching us – it is a huge dinosaur which eats other animals. Let us crouch to hide from it. We cannot move! We did it! It is time to go back. Let us jump. 1 2 3 and here we are in our kindergarten".

EPISODE	KEY QUESTIONS	STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES
II. A discovered fossil	1. What can we learn on the basis of a fossil?	1. A keen eye or dinosaurs in the dark. The children sit in a circle. They pick up cards with silhouettes of various dinosaurs and then they match them with pictures of those dinosaurs.
	2. Could people meet animals? 3. When did the	2. "Brainstorming". The children try to answer the question: "What can we learn on the basis of a fossil?" after reading letter 2. They can use a children's encyclopaedia.
	3. When did the dinosaurs die out?	3. Timeline. The teacher shows the children a timeline and tells them about the history of dinosaurs: "Do you know when dinosaurs lived? (Pause for children's replies.) Do you think they could meet a man? At first, the only life on Earth was in water. At the beginning it seemed that nothing changed, but some very important things developed in the water: living organisms which had a specific sensitivity. What do you think: whatcan we call those organisms? (Pausefor children's replies.) They were cells. These cells joined one another and, in time, they became bigger and bigger. Finally, they turned into fish. After many years, fish evolved, which means that they adjusted to new living conditions. They started to change. Their fins changed into legs. They needed less water and they developed the ability to breathe. Life appeared on land and fish turned into amphibians. After many, many years, amphibians also started to change. They did not have to be close to water, because they no longer laid their eggs in water. Their skin was no longer so sensitive to the sun. Do you know what amphibians turned into? (Pausefor children's replies.) After the amphibians, a very important era came. We call it the age of reptiles. Can you name any reptiles? (Pausefor children's replies.) Dinosaurs, who lived 237 million years ago, in the period called the Triassic, were reptiles. Look at the timeline. The arrow points to the period in which dinosaurs started dying out. Some scientists suspect that it resulted from a meteorite which crashed on the Earth and caused a series of changes on our planet. Dinosaurs were not able to adjust to those new conditions and they became extinct. Have a look at our timeline. At that time, mammals appeared. They could not develop earlier, because dinosaurs dominated the planet. Now their time had come. For many years mammals also developed and new species appeared. Who can we see at the very end of the line? (Pausefor children's replies.) Only now does mankind appear: this is the first time a man's f



EPISODE	KEY QUESTIONS	STUDENTS' ACTIVITIES
	4. Why does a paleontolo- gist have to be very careful and focused on his/ her job?	4. Dinosaur skeletons. The children are divided into 3 groups and pick up colourful pieces of paper. The members of particular groups sit at the tables on which large sheets ofpaper with drawings of dinosaur skeletons are placed (tyrannosaurus, stegosaurus, triceratops). The children are given white paint and, using a finger or a paintbrush, they paint the bones white. Each group is to think of the way in which a given dinosaur moved, the sound it made (grrr, roar, rraaaaaow), what it ate (the symbols of a leaf or a piece of meat are in the picture), and what it liked doing. Then, the children sit around their pictures. Particular groups present their dinosaur skeletons and describe the dinosaurs in front of the whole class.
III. Dinosaur extinction.	1. What could herbivorous and carnivorous dino- saurs eat?	 "Brainstorming". The children try to answer the question: "What dangers did dinosaurs have to face?". Volcano eruption. In 5-people teams, the children build a volcano using a tray, a bottle, a plastic bag or aluminium
	2. What threats did dinosaurs have	foil, red dye, soda, and vinegar.
	to face?	3. A tyrannosaurus' foot. The teacher shows the children a dinosaur foot of about 0.5 metres, cut out from paper. The chil-
	3. How long was the foot of	dren measure how many of their feet can be contained in this large foot, and then they calculate how many children can
	a tyrannosaurus?	stand within its outline. The children specify the length of a dinosaur foot using other things, such as crayons, feathers, blocks, etc.



Photo 1. "Dinosaur skeletons"

Photo 2. "Keen eyes"



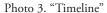




Photo 4. "Workshop materials"

Conclusion

Playing and having fun are crucial activities in a child's development. They were also the basis of our workshop scenarios because of their potential in the context of the fulfilment of various didactic and upbringing tasks. The activities that involved movement, art and music influenced the children's commitment to the games, which had clearly specified educational objectives. The use of the Storyline method within

the "Hidden Treasure Hunters" project was a challenge for us and it helped us develop our creativity while planning attractive educational activities for preschoolers. The fact that we used the conceptof a detective's investigation to solve various problems and riddles made it possible for the children to get to know the jobs of a paleontologist, a traveller, a miner, an astronaut, and a diver. The children gained such knowledge through performing the tasks described in letters from the representatives of these particular professions. The main axis of each lesson was a story, each of which aroused good emotions in the children.

The use of the Storyline method, in which one of the basic assumptions is the child's active role in co-organizing the classes, motivated us as the people who conducted the lessons because during the classes we answered the needs and ideas of the children who got involved in the story that was being told. The students could feel responsible for the lesson and they could influence it, so they were truly motivated to perform the activities. Also, each child wanted to participate in solving the riddles, e.g. by opening the letter. The success of the lessons depended on the children's involvement in the development of each story, which was achieved through stimulating the preschoolers' curiosity through the key questions that are of fundamental importance in the Storyline method.

The "Hidden Treasure Hunters" educational project is an example of an initiative that aims at supporting cooperation between various institutions in the local environment, e.g. between a university and a kindergarten. Such cooperation was taken upon the initiative of the students who are interested in using activating methods in the process of education and who want to improve their skills by putting them into practice. Watching children's behaviour and actions inspires us to investigate the Storyline method and its influence on the educational and upbringing process, with particular emphasis on the social and cognitive development of preschool children.

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