

Teacher Education: Developing language proficiency, self-confidence and motivation through the Storyline Approach, Sharon Ahlqvist

Introduction

Many prospective primary teachers enter teacher education with trepidation as well as excitement and expectation. The trepidation might be caused by the prospect of the demands of the academic workload in terms of both cognitive understanding and time-management. It might be due to the thought of meeting new people and having to produce work in groups as well as individually. For some, there is also the spectre of learning how to teach a subject of which they have negative experiences from their own school days. It could be that the student had reading and writing difficulties, or found mathematics hard to understand. For others, the subject which has negative associations is English. A core subject in the national curriculum, Lgr11 (National Education Agency, 2011), English has been compulsory in teacher education since the reform of 2011, with students of lower primary (school grades 1-3) and upper primary (grades 4-6) required to study 15 and 30 academic points respectively. The problem that teacher educators face is this: since primary teachers are required to be qualified to teach English, how can this best be achieved where prior negative experiences may be obstacles to learning?

Reasons vary why student teachers sometimes experience nervousness, occasionally even dread, at the prospect of studying English, but they manifest themselves in a similar way, namely a lack of self-confidence. It might be that the student was never a high achiever in the subject, perhaps because of low language aptitude, or that dyslexia affected performance in not just the written language, but even the spoken (since impairment in phonological processing can cause problems in both understanding and in producing sounds correctly). It might be that the student failed to fulfil their potential in English because they thought the subject was boring and motivation to learn was low. In other cases, students have had negative experiences of being laughed at by their peers for making a grammatical or pronunciation error, or being publicly corrected by the teacher. These are phenomena which are known to have a negative effect on the self-image of the developing learner, their motivation and ultimately their learning (for instance, Dörnyei, 2001; Mihaljevic Djigunovic, 2009).

The situation of a student teacher who approaches the subject English lacking self-confidence and with negative feelings (such as anxiety or lack of motivation), is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, anxiety is known to have a negative impact on learning (see, for example, Horwitz, 2001). Secondly, motivation, or lack of it, is also considered to impact on an individual's learning (see, for example, the extensive contribution to the field of motivation in second language learning by Zoltan Dörnyei, the most recent work of which is Dörnyei, Henry & Muir, 2016). Thirdly, the future

teacher has the responsibility to teach every subject with enthusiasm in order to engender positive attitudes and, thus, enhanced learning in their pupils.

My response, as a teacher educator in English didactics, is to take a two-pronged approach: to use limited seminar time to involve the students in practical classroom tasks at their level and to connect the practice to the theory – to the theoretical readings which have been assigned. Thus, the students experience for themselves the learning benefits of a range of pedagogical approaches, which they analyse, adapt and justify in terms of theories of second language acquisition in the young learner classroom. The adaptation stage, which includes reviewing the didactic possibilities of what they did themselves in the seminars and applying this knowledge to create new age- and level-appropriate tasks is often carried out in the students' base groups during timetabled group study periods. Not least, by using the language both in doing, discussing and writing about tasks, the students develop their proficiency in the spoken and written language. The awareness, not only of gaining practical, research-based knowledge about the teaching of English, but also of their own increasing competence in the language, leads to enhanced self-confidence and motivation, as student self-evaluations show. Some examples are included later in this paper and I will discuss them then.

To put this in context, I will now briefly outline the content of the two courses which students take in their second and fifth terms of study. Students who are training to teach children up to grade three take two 7.5 point courses. The first comprises grammar and phonetics as well as the didactics component, Storyline. The second comprises subject didactics for lower primary, including the use of stories and children's literature, and assessment. Those who are training for upper primary take two 15 point courses. The first consists of grammar, phonetics, oral proficiency and subject didactics, including children's literature. The second consists of Storyline, creative writing, adapting textbooks and assessment. The Storyline project is the same for both groups of students, is carried out over a period of three weeks and involves collaboration with colleagues who teach art, music and drama. At the start of all the didactics course, I ask students to set themselves a personal goal for the course and to evaluate it at the end.

I will now go on to describe the Storyline project, beginning with an overview of the origins and characteristic features of the Storyline approach. (For additional information see www.storyline-scotland.com/storyline-international). This will be followed by a consideration of aspects of relational pedagogy, cooperative learning and second language learning which illuminate the results both of this project and of other Storyline work, both academic studies and teachers' own reported experiences.

The Storyline Approach

Storyline originated in Scotland in the 1960s as a response to the need for interdisciplinary teaching in the primary curriculum. A social constructivist approach to teaching and learning (Falkenberg & Håkansson, 2004), Storyline integrates the practical and theoretical subjects of the curriculum. Learners work in small groups, as characters in a story, which typically develops over a period of four to six weeks. A

setting is established and the learners create characters for this setting, taking on the role of the characters over the period of the Storyline. Problems (known as *incidents*) arise in the story and are dealt with by the characters, taking the story on to the next stage. Working together on open, so called, *key questions*, the learners collaborate on a range of tasks, which drive the story forward and which are linked to the curriculum content. Characteristic features are that practical work is displayed on a frieze, showing the developing story, heralding changes, providing a record of what has gone, and not least, treating the learners' practical and written work with respect. Apart from being on public display, the artefacts often form the basis for further tasks. For instance, written character descriptions might become the basis for a quiz about the people in the story. To complete the quiz, the learners have to read the descriptions and find the answers to the questions. In language teaching terms, the learners' own writing becomes the basis for a reading comprehension task. Thus, the work produced is not only treated with respect, which is motivating for the learner, but also serves as an occasion for learning in the zone of proximal development or ZPD (Vygotsky, 1978). For instance, the answer to a particular question might be a vocabulary item which the teacher wishes the learners to learn. Noticing the word is considered to be a pre-requisite to learning it. (Schmidt & Frota, 1986).

From a language teaching point of view, Storyline is similar to task-based teaching, a definition of which is that learners work on real-world tasks, which use language but which have a concrete outcome or product (Nunan, 2004; Van den Branden, 2006; Willis & Willis, 2007). Grammar arises in context from the task and the core vocabulary of the topic is recycled naturally (Nunan, 2005). Where Storyline differs from task-based teaching is the narrative framework within which all tasks are carried out. In short, when they work on a Storyline topic, learners work with all aspects of English – different genres of speaking, listening, reading and writing, as well as the competences of vocabulary and grammar – in a meaningful context, which is highly motivating. In speaking and writing tasks, they have an opportunity to automatise their declarative knowledge (what they know about the rules of grammar and syntax, for instance) through practice (see Lyster & Masatoshi, 2013, for a discussion of skills building theory), a process which has been linked to increased self-confidence (Dörnyei, 2009). The contextualizing of English teaching is in line with the specifications of Lgr11, that learners should be given the means to develop all-round communicative and intercultural competence, in order to increase their future global opportunities in social, educational and professional spheres.

Storyline has been used at all ages of the school system, in many parts of the world and in both first and second language teaching. (See www.storyline-scotland.com/storyline international for details of projects in various parts of the world). As an interdisciplinary pedagogical approach, one of its greatest strengths is in bringing together the subjects of the curriculum in a meaningful way. The creating of characters, and the identification of the learners with their characters, is an additional feature of the approach which can positively impact on learning. The learners care about their creations and when speaking in role, they are relieved of the anxieties that might

pertain to speaking as themselves. There are implications here for the language learner classroom at all ages, including the classroom in which future teachers are educated. With its ingredients of drama, imagination, thematic work and stories, all of which are considered important in the young language learner classroom, Storyline has particular advantages. For instance, young learners learn holistically (Kirsch, 2008) by being exposed to and by using the target language without analysis of its component parts. A grammar item can be introduced in context as it is needed in the task – *needed* being the key word here – and where it is consequently more likely to be understood and remembered. Topics such as a wild life park or shopping centre relate to the young learner’s world (see Ahlquist, 2014 for more on possible topics) and are appropriate for the language classroom. One of the most versatile and popular topics concerns families living on a street in an English town. This provides a framework for natural use of language learnt in these early stages: the family, personal description, hobbies, pets, colours, numbers, days of the week and so. The learners take on the roles of families who move into a newly built street in a fictive English town, and it is the creation of families which seems to have a particular appeal to young learners. This is important, because, as Philp and Duchesne (2008) point out, young learner collaboration is about more than language practice, it is instrumental in creating the social climate in the classroom.

When all the families have moved in, one house remains unsold. This provides the opportunity to integrate other curriculum subjects, The family who eventually move into the last house might come from another country and have another religion from their neighbours. The teacher might also work with aspects of sustainable development within this framework – recycling, carbon footprint, anti-social neighbours, who move into the remaining house, and so on. Storyline, Our Sustainable Street, was the subject of a study which I conducted some years ago in a mixed-age class of grades five and six (Ahlquist, 2011) and it is the one which I currently use on the teacher education programmes.

Storyline in teacher education at Kristianstad University

Briefly, the students are randomly grouped and create the characters in families who have just moved into the new street. The key questions which structure the story are:

1. Who are you?
2. What is your house like?
3. How can we live in a more sustainable way?
4. What can we do about the problem of rubbish being dumped in our street?
5. How can we deal with the problem of the anti-social neighbours?
6. What makes our street ideal?

In the different key questions, the students are involved in speaking and writing as if they were the character. They listen for information in specific contexts – such as directions to reach their street. They watch a video on climate change and on the basis of the information in it, discuss how each family can adapt their lifestyle. This is part of a

project in which the families modify their lifestyle in order to live in a more sustainable way. In key question 5, the families interview the mother of the new family about the family's behaviour. During this seminar, the class work with and evaluate a number of drama techniques. In the last key question, the students take a known melody, write and perform their own lyrics, celebrating their street, as part of a competition. During the course of the three-week period, not everyone does the same thing all the time, nor do they always work in the same group. For example, working in different groupings, some write a letter of complaint to the council about the rubbish, others design a park, and out of role, one group creates a radio phone-in programme on the rubbish issue, while another writes a newspaper article about it.

The learning outcomes of the course are that the student:

- Should be able to demonstrate their knowledge of the English language with regard to phonology and grammar
- Be able to explain the rules of English grammar
- Be able to explain how the Storyline approach can support and contribute to pupils' language development in English and how this can be assessed
- Be able to explain in their own words the theories of second language learning relating to young learners
- Be able to plan a Storyline topic linked to the syllabus for English and which includes drama and art and which will support the learning of pupils of different proficiency levels

Assessment is partly by means of a group examination in which each group is given a curriculum subject (physical education, mathematics, etc) and asked to devise another key question for the story, integrating the subject. The second part of the assessment is individual and written: planning a Storyline suitable for school year 6 and which includes a description of how the pupils' work would be assessed.

At the same time as working through the Storyline, from time to time we pause the action to analyse what is going on pedagogically. Biggs and Tang (2011) highlight the importance of breaking up talk with practical tasks. Although this refers to lectures, the point is nevertheless valid where the reverse working style has been the case, that is to say, that the students have been working practically or communicatively with the language. *Doing* requires cognitive and socio-affective strategies, while *reviewing* is metacognitive. Opportunities to focus on the didactic questions of *what* was done, *how* and *why*, and with what results are important stepping stones in developing students' understanding of how learning occurs, and why it may sometimes fail to.

Some of the issues we take up follow now. For instance, when the families introduce themselves to their neighbours, they are asked to prepare a question for the audience based on the content of their introduction. Some groups are asked to state the question before the introduction, others to ask the question only when they have completed their introduction. The class then discusses the impact on the learner and on learning, depending on when a question is asked – before or after information on the content has been given. Another topic for discussion concerns the physical model of the character.

As mentioned earlier, we work in collaboration with the art department. Practical work includes making a model of the character. This can then be used when the students are speaking in role. We talk about the difference it makes using a model when speaking, or not, and the difference between speaking without notes or reading from notes.

A common feature of the Storyline classroom at all levels is the sound of laughter as learners collaborate on their tasks. The most common word used by learners of all ages to describe Storyline work is 'fun'. This is significant for several reasons. One can be related to Goldman's (1991) work on instructional conversations, which found that students were motivated to participate where the classroom atmosphere was perceived to be non-threatening. Secondly, Hattie (2009) concluded that enjoyment leads to higher achievement. Thus, enjoyment in the classroom is not to be seen as an added extra, but as an emotive state which promotes the understanding and the learning of subject content. The link between learning and the motivating nature of working together, creating a fictive world, using art work to help make abstract concepts, such as in mathematics and language, concrete is documented in terms of the few academic studies (for instance, Mitchell-Barrett, 2010) which have been conducted, but also in the many anecdotal accounts of classroom teachers.

Student teachers are no exception. At the same time as developing their English skills and competences, the students are also learning about teaching – not just the teaching of English and not just the pedagogical benefits of Storyline – but about aspects of teaching which go beyond these: the importance of classroom atmosphere and personal relationships and responsibility, the way in which Storyline creates an atmosphere of inclusion and why this is important; the reasons why some academic content is remembered while other parts are not; the impact of personal engagement on learning. The course takes place over three intensive weeks, with demands on time and attention made not only in seminars but at home in preparation for those seminars. As Marton and Säljö (1976a and 1976b) make clear, students' learning strategies are influenced by the demands of the task and the atmosphere in the classroom. Where demands are high and classroom atmosphere supportive, there are good pre-conditions in which learning can occur. If we return to the trepidation which some students experience at the prospect of doing an English course as part of teacher training, we can say that lack of self-confidence, lack of enthusiasm and absence of motivation feature to varying degrees. At the end of their three week course, these issues have almost always been resolved and the students have another strand to their pedagogic bow.

I would now like to link practice to the theoretical literature and to place this short course in the context of pedagogy at university level and the theories of relational pedagogy, cooperative learning and second language acquisition, all of which are concerned with what occurs in the classroom in terms of observable behavior and the emotions which influence that behaviour.

Theoretical insights to support the use of Storyline in teacher education.

The Higher Education Ordinance stipulates that students should be able to demonstrate both subject knowledge and an understanding of the theoretical concepts which underpin the subject. It further stipulates that students should take a critical stance in their learning, and also be able to work independently as well as with others. As regards teacher education, the training plan for primary student school teachers at Kristianstad University requires that, among other things, student teachers should be able to show that they have the ability to create conditions for all pupils to learn and develop. This is a requirement of the curriculum (Lgr11), as is the stipulation for interdisciplinary teaching and group work.

As mentioned previously, the Storyline approach has its roots in social constructivism. The starting point for all key questions is where the learner is, often ascertained by small group or whole-class brainstorming tasks and the use of mind maps. Essential to success in group tasks is the interaction between the group members. Where the group has been composed of different linguistic proficiency levels, the less proficient can be supported by those who are more proficient. The challenge for the teacher in creating the task is to ensure that all pupils are able to develop within the ZPD, which in the field of second language acquisition (SLA) is defined as 'the difference between the learner's developmental level as determined by independent language use and the higher level of potential development as determined by how language is used in collaboration with a more capable interlocutor' (Ohta, 1995: 249). At the same time, if the teacher has considered carefully the range of talents in his/her class, the groups will consist of learners who are not just good at language, but who have talent in the practical or aesthetic subjects. These learners may well be those who do not excel at the academic subjects such as English, but whose talents both become visible to their peers and are a valuable asset to the group, with all that this implies for raised self-esteem in learners whose self-esteem is low (Crandall, 1999).

Interpersonal relationships in the classroom

Before going on to consider the implications of group work for learning, I would like to place the discussion in the context of classroom relationships. In the field of relational pedagogy, as Aspelin (2006) points out, face-to-face communication through interaction is dependent on both the cognitive and the emotional. Referring to the work of Scheff (1997), he highlights how an individual's feelings are affected by the sense of how he or she is valued by others. There are two dimensions to this, surface and micro. 'At the former level the participants give impressions of accepting each other' (2006:236). But beneath the surface, 'this solidarity is not real but illusory.' There is a clear message here for group constellations: the contribution that each member makes should be essential and its fulfilment is the responsibility of a particular individual, preferably the one whose talent is best suited to it. This is one way of promoting genuine rather than illusory acceptance.

While Aspelin is referring specifically to the relationships between teacher and learner, the same claim can be made about relationships between individual learners, as I do above. The extent to which good relationships are facilitated depends to a great extent on the way in which the teacher chooses to work in the classroom. As Hattie (2009) found and as research into classroom-based second language learning finds (for example, Enever, 2011; Heinzmann, 2013; Murphy, 2014), the teacher is one of the most important influences on an individual's learning. A traditional, teacher-fronted, textbook approach will do little to promote communication and understanding between the learners. Good relationships are not achieved overnight, but are the result of a process, and they play a vital role in the classroom. As Aspelin (2012) referring to National Education Agency (2009) makes clear, an increased emphasis on individualization does not have a positive effect on learning, but personalization does. One way to create conditions in which personalization becomes a classroom reality is through mutually dependent group effort.

The extent to which learners are permitted to work in this way and the nature of the tasks they are given are both in the gift of the teacher. To permit group work is to lose some control. To permit group work which is going to extend over a number of lessons or weeks is to cede even more control. It requires of the teacher a self-confidence to accept the role of facilitator (in itself a challenge, according to Dörnyei, 2001), self-confidence in their ability to take back control should it be necessary and a belief that one's learners can be trusted to complete a task on their own. This requires good planning both at macro and micro level, and it requires the careful creation of tasks that make demands on all individuals in the group, within a time limit and which motivate them to rise to the challenge. Further, it requires that teachers have sufficiently high expectations for all their learners, which is reflected in task design. The work of Christine Rubie-Davies (2015) highlights the often subconscious pre-conceptions and prejudices of teachers (based, for example, on the race, social class or gender of pupils), how these colour their expectations of learner achievement, and the positive and negative consequences for learning of these expectations. Rubie-Davies makes the point that learners are very much aware of a teacher's differing expectations and are influenced by these, especially at a younger age, but also in situations where older learners change from a familiar to an unknown environment, such as moving from primary to secondary school, from secondary to upper secondary or on to university. The move from familiar to unfamiliar includes beginning a course in how to teach English in the young learner classroom. Student teachers should be in no doubt that their instructors have the highest expectations of them and faith in their ability to meet these expectations, individually, in groups and as a class.

Small group collaboration

The work of Brigid Barron (2003) considers the effects of socio-affective factors on group success, specifically why groups at similar levels produce different results. Maintaining that groups can achieve more than individuals working alone (a view

supported within the field of SLA by Donato, 1994; Wells, 1999; Ohta, 2000; Swain, 2000; Donato, 2004; Van Lier, 2004), and also that an individual's learning is positively affected by the group effort, Barron argues that little attention has been paid to the reasons why groups differ. If, as she maintains, the successful completion of a collaborative task requires 'joint attention at solution-critical moments' (2003: 310), then a potential difficulty will arise if learners are not at the same state of readiness, in terms of understanding the material and the actions or thoughts of other group members, to engage with the problem. Another obstacle to successful task completion can be that an individual's contribution is not heard or is not heeded. In other words, Barron maintains that there are two aspects to solving problems in group collaboration: one concerns the content and the other, the relationships in the group. These two aspects 'are negotiated simultaneously and can compete for limited attention' (p310). Barron's work, with upper primary-age children, shows that in the more successful groups, the members are all focused on the task (including being physically clustered around the material), attention is paid to the ideas of all, and attempts made to integrate these into the discourse. In less successful groups, some may not be focused on the task, some members' ideas are rejected without reason or some individuals do not contribute. Less successful groups also demonstrate behaviours such as competitive interaction, self-focused problem solving and turn-taking issues. Citing research in the field of friendship impact on group collaboration, Barron notes that friends are more likely to participate in trans-active exchanges: they share experiences and have an investment in the friendship. She points out that successful interaction is a skill acquired over time (a point made about children by Fisher, 2005) and that ways to do this are assigning competence tasks to low-status pupils and designing tasks which use the skills and expertise of the group members. This is precisely what can be achieved by careful planning of the groups within a Storyline topic. For example, Håkonsson and Madsbjerg (2004) report on the increased self-confidence in low-proficiency learners when speaking in role as an expert.

Collaboration, according to Barron, is not just a tool for learning, but a basic human skill and therefore relevant at all stages of the education system and beyond. No one aspect of education has been more researched over the last century than collaborative or cooperative learning, which is considered to be a highly effective pedagogical approach (Hattie, 2009). Though the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, Johnson and Johnson, prominent researchers in the field, prefer the term *cooperative learning* and identify five basic elements: positive interdependence, individual accountability, promotive interaction, social skills and group processing (when the group examine if they are working effectively towards their goal). They find social interdependence theory, which 'focuses on relationship variables that reside among parties' (Johnson and Johnson, 2015:33) to be the most influential in the field of cooperative learning, characteristic features of this theory being:

1. The giving and receiving of help (both task-related and personal)
2. The giving and receiving of feedback, both on task and behavior
3. Exchanging resources and information

4. Encouraging each other's achievement
5. Mutually influencing each other
6. Processing and maximizing the group's effectivity

Barron's work, discussed previously, has found the above to hold true in upper primary learners who were working on maths problems and under experimental conditions. She raises the question as to whether the approach would be equally successful under normal classroom conditions and on topics other than maths problems. The work of Johnson and Johnson, as well as other researchers in the field of cooperative learning, has found this to be the case. There is agreement that engagement in the task is a factor in successful learning, that one indication of engagement is time spent on task and that cooperators are more likely to spend time on task. Social interdependence theory also 'assumes that the causes of an individual's behavior are in the intersection among individuals, changing constantly according to the way one's actions affect the actions of others' (p33). This emphasises the dynamic nature of group interaction and how this may have varying consequences for learning depending on the kind of cooperative learning implemented: informal and temporary during a particular class, longer term in the base groups for work outside the class, or for a shorter or longer period of time in the form of project work – such as a Storyline topic.

One assumption of social interdependence theory is that social skills are a given, but while Barron and Fisher, cited earlier, would argue with this where children are concerned, it is also the case that many older learners, including adults, lack the skills required for successful group cooperation. Tendencies to dominate, ignore others' contributions or to sit back and let others do the work are regular features of university students' complaints about group tasks and can have detrimental effects on the results of those tasks. This can happen during Storyline courses – absence, leaving early from group study, or failing to pull one's weight may be less likely to occur in self-selected groups. On the other hand, as teachers, students will be required to work closely with others as an integral part of their working life and they will not be able to choose who to work with. It can also be added that friendship groups may not necessarily lead to enhanced learning either. Christine Howe (2015) challenges the view that higher levels of learning necessarily result from collaboration since these occur when there are different perspectives, facilitating conceptual understanding and generic reasoning. Where learners share the same opinions, where they are unwilling to challenge their friends or to display lack of understanding before them, different perspectives may not emerge and discussion remain limited. An additional problem, highlighted by Williams and Burden (1996), is that if a group fails where an individual learner working alone could have succeeded, then demotivation may set in, with negative attitudes towards the subject, teacher and classmates, resulting potentially in a negative impact on future learning.

To summarise so far, relationships between learners and teacher, and between learners themselves can be considered to have a potentially positive or negative effect on learning in the classroom. Vygotsky's theory of mind (1978) highlights the importance

of collaboration and social interaction for learning within the ZPD. Group work thus has a valuable role to play in fostering the relationships which support and promote collegiate learning through cooperative tasks that require the input and effort of all group members. Mixed ability groups, including all talents, are considered preferential, though personality factors are known to affect how well a group works (Storch, 2001). One purpose of the Storyline course for student teachers is for students to experience the approach for themselves (how Storyline works, what and how learners learn), including the benefits and challenges of cooperative group work. They work with practice in the context of the educational theories and the insights from these theories which illuminate their own experiences both as a learner and as a student teacher who, by this stage in their education, has had some periods of teaching practice. Student evaluations often highlight that what they have learnt is not just in English or in teaching it, but that they have obtained insights into how children learn in general and therefore how they as teachers should, or should not, teach.

Linguistic proficiency

One important aspect which has not yet been discussed is a third reason for working with Storyline, and that is to develop the students' own proficiency in English, which happens as they work intensively with the story over a period of three weeks. I would now like to consider the particular benefits for language learning of working with the Storyline approach. A starting point for this is the words of one of the most influential applied linguists of the twentieth century, Earl Stevick, who contends that, in second language learning, 'success depends less on material, techniques and linguistic analyses and more on what goes on inside and between the people in the classroom' (Stevick, 1980:4). Although Stevick's view is in line with research discussed relating to relational pedagogy and cooperative learning, it is the case that until the 1990s, most research in the field of second language acquisition focused on cognitive aspects rather than the socio-affective and that classroom-based research was limited.

In some ways this is very strange since the importance of affective factors has been recognized since the formulation of Hymes' (1972) notion of communicative competence, and a theoretical acceptance that anxiety can interfere with language learning has existed since the 1960s. Further, one of the most prominent applied linguists of the late twentieth century, Stephen Krashen, has long argued that a learner's emotional state can promote or impede learning, using the metaphor of an affective filter (Krashen 1982), the filter being raised when the learner is anxious, afraid or bored. Anxiety has been defined respectively as trait anxiety (a facet of personality and thus stable), state anxiety (transient) and situation-specific. Horwitz (1986) argues that, along with public speaking, language learning falls into the latter category.

With regard to adults, Horwitz maintains that 'any performance in the L2 is likely to challenge an individual's self-concept as a competent communicator and lead to reticence, self-consciousness, fear or even panic' (1986:128). In fact, research into young language learners shows that anxiety can set in during the upper primary years and become intensified during the teenage years. The period of puberty is a time when

learners are very aware of themselves and others, are in the process of creating a self-image which is influenced by what their peers think about them. As mentioned at the beginning of this article, the fear of being publicly corrected by the teacher or laughed at by peers is a further cause of anxiety, which in the worst cases, accompanies the learner as they enter teacher education. High anxiety correlates with low self-esteem. In many cases, students have not been used to group work, but have been taught traditionally, based on textbooks or other texts. Oral communication, which according to Horwitz provokes anxiety more than any other classroom activity, has often been in whole-class since group work has been minimal. Whether poor proficiency is a cause of anxiety or whether it is the result of anxiety is, as Horwitz points out, difficult to ascertain, and perhaps not the most important factor. What matters more is surely to make the learning situation less stressful. Cao, in her study of factors which contribute to willingness to communicate (WTC) in the classroom, identifies three strands: individual characteristics, the classroom environment and linguistic proficiency. She points out that though these are separate strands, they interact in a way that is dynamic and situated. A learner might become more willing to communicate in a small group situation and where they feel their input is valued. In a situation where they lack confidence to speak out or feel that their contribution is not valued, there will be a reverse effect on their WTC.

While different people prefer different kinds of tasks, what the teacher must try to ensure is a varied repertoire of task-type and materials. Following Gardner's (1993) work on multiple intelligences, if teachers work with movement, with the aesthetic subjects, with the visual and auditory, with individual and group work, then everyone has a chance of being satisfied some of the time. In addition, variety in itself is motivating and may influence a learner's WTC, as discussed above. Whatever the task and type of material, the task should be well-structured with clearly defined learning outcomes and the learners should know on what they will be assessed.

Conclusion

In the view of applied linguistics researchers working within a Vygotskian sociocultural theoretical framework, cognition and emotion are inextricably linked (Swain, 2013). This theoretical standpoint has significant implications for the classroom, not least the second language classroom, where both knowledge and proficiency are simultaneously put to the test, and where a learner's ability to perform is so closely tied up with their self-image; anxiety may both affect a performance and be affected by it. Working with the Storyline approach in teacher education serves two functions: students learn to work with task-based education in a story framework at the same time as they develop their own language proficiency across the skills and within the competences of grammar and vocabulary. While doing so, they experience the energized and supportive classroom atmosphere which evolves as the students work together on creating the fictive world. They experience the benefits and also the challenges of cooperative group work. Below there are some student reflections of their learning development, as both

learner of English and student teacher, as a result of the Storyline project work. They highlight recurring themes in student reflections, which, interestingly, echo the comments of pre-teenage learners, based on my 2011 study, my students' reports on working with Storyline during teaching practice and the results of my recent study with 16 year-olds (spring, 2016), as yet unpublished.

Student 1

I think Storyline is fun and when it's fun it's 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.

Student 2

At first it was 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.

Student 3

I felt a part of something, which I never have before. I felt I could make a difference. Language proficiency, self-confidence and motivation are inextricably linked. Self-confidence in one's ability to use English and the motivation to do so pre-suppose not just a level of proficiency in the language, but a proficiency of which the learner is aware. Recurring themes in student self-evaluations are exemplified here, namely the development of language proficiency over the course of the Storyline, and the self-confidence which results from this. Statement number 3 is particularly poignant: *I felt a part of something which I never have before. I felt I could make a difference.* If through experience, students reach this awareness of how Storyline helps to promote classroom conditions in which learners feel secure enough to use the language, then equipped with the practical knowledge of how to design their own, the experience of doing it (which is the course assignment), followed by a teaching practice in which they put planning into action, they will have learnt not just about the teaching of English, but about how and why children learn what they learn in the classroom. The course in Storyline conforms to the requirements of the Higher Education Ordinance: students demonstrate both subject knowledge and an understanding of the theoretical concepts which underpin the subject; they take a critical stance to their learning, and work both independently and with others. In accordance with the university's training plan for primary education, they show that they have the ability to create conditions for all pupils to learn and develop.

As a closing point, it can of course be said that what is relevant for teacher education, can for the same reasons, also have relevance and benefits for other higher education programmes which combine theoretical knowledge with practical application. One of

these would be business management; another, nurse education. These contexts currently remain to be explored.

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