Preparing for Storythread?

Pullenvale Environmental Education Centre
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Our Website:  www.pullenvaeec.eq.edu.au
The PEEC Storythread Pedagogy

Storythread: Connecting Students to Self, Others and Natural Places

Storythread is a ‘pedagogy of place’ that uses a range of engaging stories and ‘blanket roles’ to enable students to make deep connections to themselves, others and natural places. We have discovered that if students are to develop a deep and authentic understanding of the knowledge, values and practices needed to live sustainably in the world then making an emotional reconnection with nature is a powerful place to begin.

STORY
Throughout the four chapters of each Pullenvale Environmental Education Centre (PEEC) Storythread students and teachers are both audience and participants in environmental stories (crafted by PEEC) about characters – real and fictional – living in harmony and sometimes in conflict with a number of real places.

THREAD – The PEEC ‘Blanket Roles’
Students begin their Storythread journey by receiving an invitation from the PEEC teachers to take on a specified real-life ‘blanket role’ (shared persona) e.g. Inside/Outside Nature Kid, Nature Detective, Environmental Advocate. The students’ unfolding journey at school and in the same real places where the stories are set deepens their engagement with the ‘blanket role’ which is the thread (of the Storythread). They observe, inquire, predict, influence and reflect through scaffolded dialogues that shape their future knowledge, values and actions.

PLACE
The natural places explored can include gardens, individual trees, parks, remnant forests right through to remote wilderness areas.

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The Blanket Role: Engaging, Exciting and Empowering Students

A ‘blanket role’ is a role shared by the whole class. At PEEC we have adapted this educational drama convention so that we can expand its use beyond fictional story and drama situations. Why? Because it works! We have found that taking on a real-life ‘blanket role’ in association with our PEEC stories in order to solve a real-life environmental problem engages, excites and empowers the students. By thinking deeply about the characters in the PEEC stories and how they model what it means and doesn’t mean to embody the ‘blanket roles’, students reflect on themselves as people and learners.

Taking on a real-life ‘blanket role’ does not, however, guarantee an automatic expert status. We position the students in an empowering role that invites them, like the characters in our stories, to become part of a shared learning journey that extends beyond the life of the PEEC Storythread experience.

While there is a defined ‘blanket role’ for each of our programs, ultimately they are all different facets of the single overarching PEEC ‘blanket role’ i.e. Connected Kid a life-long learner, leader and active citizen who values and respects the connections between self, others and place.

Connected Kid

- Catchment Custodian (Year 7)
- Environmental Advocate (Year 6)
- Entomologist-in-training (Year 4)
- Wildlife Investigator (Year 2)
- Inside/Outside Nature Kid (Prep)
- Bush Kid (Year 5)
- Environmental Advisor (Year 3)
- Nature Detective (Year 1)
The Ten Essential Steps: Leading Students Deeper into the ‘Blanket Role’

CHAPTER ONE
(PRE-EXCURSION)
Engage with the PEEC Story and begin Training in the ‘Blanket Role’
1. Enrol the Students in their ‘Blanket Role’
2. Actively Engage the Students, in their ‘Blanket Role’, with the PEEC Story
3. Use the Story and the ‘Blanket Role’ to Teach the Curriculum
4. Receive the Invitation to Visit PEEC and Step into the Story in the ‘Blanket Role’
5. Prepare for the Excursion in the ‘Blanket Role’

CHAPTER TWO
(EXCURSION)
Step into the PEEC Story and Apply the Knowledge, Values and Actions of the ‘Blanket Role’
6. Attend the Excursion in the ‘Blanket Role’

CHAPTER THREE
(POST-EXCURSION)
Conclude the PEEC Story and Reflect on the ‘Blanket Role’
7. Reflect with the Students on What Was Learnt on the Excursion Day About the ‘Blanket Role’
8. Work Together to Communicate with a Character from the Story in the ‘Blanket Role’

CHAPTER FOUR
(CULMINATING ACTIVITIES)
Respond to the PEEC Story in the ‘Blanket Role’ and Take Action to Make Life Better in Your Place
9. Lead the Students, in their ‘Blanket Role’, to Create a Plan for Their Place
10. Support the Students to Take Action for Their Place in their ‘Blanket Role’

Storythread and the Australian Curriculum

The ‘Blanket Role’ provides an excellent tool for teaching the content of the Australian Curriculum in an authentic and purposeful way:

- Once the students are enrolled, the need to develop the knowledge (head), values (heart) and actions (hands) of the ‘Blanket Role’ provide a context and purpose for deep learning.
- Students, as they train in their ‘Blanket Role’, are inspired and guided by the characters in each PEEC story to develop the knowledge, values and actions they identify as essential to taking on their ‘Blanket Role’.
- The students’ growing understanding of what it means to take on the ‘Blanket Role’ then becomes the reason for them to engage deeply with the curriculum.

Learning both inside and outside the classroom in the ‘Blanket Role’ enables students to deepen and expand their understanding of curriculum content and ideas (subjects, General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum Priorities), apply their learning to real situations and places and continue growing as life-long learners, leaders and active citizens.

In summary, Storythread supports teachers and schools in implementing the Australian Curriculum by offering teachers:

1. Opportunities to deepen and personalise students’ understandings of the curriculum intent, ideas and processes carried within the Australian Curriculum and C2C Units.
2. An imaginative way of focusing on the Cross-curriculum Priorities of Sustainability and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures.
3. Access to a creative, values education process that supports the development of the General Capabilities (specifically critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding).
Key Concepts and Processes that Underpin Storythread

An Ethic of Care Towards Self, Others and Place

Our primary goal in using the Storythread pedagogy is to help your students improve their ability to understand and value themselves, others and the places around them so they can live more respectful, sustainable and connected lives. To help us achieve this we have created a simple values statement that underpins your Storythread experience and everything we are attempting to accomplish together:

*Speak and Act with Respect Towards Self, Others and Place*

We know, however, that for this statement to be more than just words, students need multiple opportunities to think about and practise this ethic both inside and outside the classroom. Working together in this way will allow us to make the most of your Storythread experience.

The Nesting Model

The Nesting Model is a visual representation of the ‘nesting systems idea’ that underpins systems theory and attempts to describe the way in which everything is connected. As such, it makes sense of the statement above and why it is important.

This model has been used successfully by many teachers over a number of years as a reference point for knowledge and values discussions about how students are connected to the people and places around them, and the impact of their behaviour and actions.

The Inner and Outer Work of Sustainability

All PEEC Storythreads draw on a range of powerful experiential teaching tools to explore the inner and outer work of Sustainability (Senge, Laur, Schley and Smith, 2006) as a way of enriching and extending the Cross-curriculum Priority of the Australian Curriculum.

The ‘inner work’ of sustainability is about slowing down in order to experience and reflect on the connections between people and places. This emotional reconnection with nature leads to new connected ways of thinking, valuing and acting.

The ‘outer work’ of sustainability is about living more lightly on the Earth by taking action to reduce our ecological footprint in practical ways e.g. by conserving water or recycling.

Put simply, if we care about a place we will take action to protect it.

Indigenous Wisdom

At PEEC all Storythreads promote the key organising ideas of Country, Place, People and Culture that underpin the Cross-curriculum priority area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and culture in the Australian Curriculum. PEEC’s focus on understanding and maintaining respectful connections between Self, Others and Place supports this Indigenous Vision.

PEEC has been committed to maintaining and strengthening respectful connections to Indigenous thinking and history through dialogue with key Indigenous mentors over many years. Some of these mentors include:

- The Jaragill Community (1991); Mary Graham (1992); Erin McDonald with the EATSIPS process (2011), Uncle Ernie Mal Collinge, Auntie Lurlene Henderson and Uncle Bert Button (2012). Ideas drawn from each of these inspiring individuals have influenced and impacted on our stories and teaching.

Reference:
Experiential Teaching Tools that Underpin Storythread

Research by the University of Queensland into the role and impact of Outdoor and Environmental Education Centres identified a powerful form of place-based pedagogy (‘Pedagogy of Place’) that delivers learning for sustainability through Experiential Teaching.

The Key Elements of this pedagogy are:
- Being in the Natural Environment
- Full Sensory, Mind & Body Engagement
- Learning By Doing
- Life Learning in Real Places
- Exploring Local Contexts & Places
- Adventure & Challenge

The key Experiential Teaching Tools are:
- Investigations
- Attentiveness
- Creative response
- Interpreted walks and journeys into nature
- Story and drama
- Deep reflective responding
- Games and play

While all of these Experiential Teaching Tools are used by PEEC staff throughout our excursion days, those that transfer most easily to a school setting and are used to structure our Teacher Resource Booklets are listed below and explained further on the following pages. Chapter One activities are centred around these teaching tools and are designed to engage the students’ minds, emotions and bodies in the belief that all learning is mind-body and emotions are critical to learning (Lackney, 2006).

• Story, Drama, Games and Play
Activities assist students to think deeply about the ‘Blanket Role’, promote development of the General Capabilities (specifically critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding and intercultural understanding) and address the Cross-curriculum Priority of Sustainability.

• Attentiveness in Nature
Attentiveness is a key skill of each ‘Blanket Role’, and a skill that is either demonstrated or needs to be developed by the PEEC story characters. It is also a skill that is essential for engaging with the curriculum inside and outside the classroom.

• Deep Reflective Responding
Activities across all four chapters of each PEEC Storythread encourage students to reflect deeply and meta-cognitively on their thinking, learning, actions and future directions with regard to their ‘Blanket Role’ and the curriculum.

References:
Clarke, M. (May 2004) Falling in love again, ABC Radio National Science Show interview by Alexandra de Blas

Story, Drama, Games and Play

The story form is a cultural universal; everyone, everywhere enjoys stories. The story, then, is not just some casual entertainment; it reflects a basic and powerful form in which we make sense of the world and experience (Egan, 1988, p.2).

Woven through each PEEC Storythread is a STORY (either fiction or non-fiction) that introduces and carries the environmental issues, ideas or themes.

The story is a powerful medium that can excite and engage students both intellectually and emotionally. It provides opportunities to explore environmental themes and issues through the characters’ perspectives and encourages deep thinking and discussion.

Engaging with the characters in an environmental narrative and reflecting on the impact of their choices and actions on the environment, gives students a vehicle for discussing and reviewing their ‘Blanket Role’ and their own environmental values and understandings. Significantly, students are then able to transfer learnings from the story experience to their own contexts.

The DRAMA component of Storythread is essential as it can transform your PEEC story, breathing life into it and bringing it off the page and into the classroom.

Through active engagement in drama activities such as those outlined in our Teacher Resource Booklets, students are encouraged to explore their ‘Blanket Role’ by working together, thinking deeply and creatively, discussing ideas and solving problems. This hands-on, embodied learning enhances the students’ connection to the story and the characters, as well as their ability to reflect on the actions and values of both the characters and themselves in their ‘Blanket Role’. It is also a fun, interesting way to learn!

Attentiveness in Nature

What is attentiveness?
Anyone who is trying to understand the world, such as scientists, artists, architects, historians and researchers uses the skill of attentiveness all the time. It means

Taking the time to pay attention and really observe in detail what is actually going on around you by listening with your ears, but also with your eyes, nose, skin, heart, mind and imagination.

It is a great way to think deeply, and really get to know and understand yourself, others and the places around you.

Attentiveness is not a new idea. Indigenous cultures from around the world have used this skill for thousands of years. At Pullenvale EEC we have been deeply influenced by Aboriginal ideas about ‘deep listening’ in nature and the ideas of the biologist Mary Clarke who talks about ‘profound attentiveness’.

Reference:
Clarke, M. (1st May 2004) Falling in love again, ABC Radio National Science Show interview by Alexandra de Blas
We focus on two main kinds of attentiveness:

1. **Active exploring** - occurs when students are moving around discovering and investigating.

2. **Deep listening** - requires stillness and allows students to notice the minute details they can easily miss.

**Why is developing the skill of attentiveness important to your students?**

- It allows students to experience their schoolgrounds and local area as a powerful, engaging *outdoor classroom*.

- Learning outside the classroom through attentiveness enables students to apply the *curriculum* to real situations and places, and therefore deepens and expands their concrete (embodied) understanding of curriculum content and ideas.

- Meaningful activities centred around attentiveness engage the students’ minds, emotions and bodies as part of an *integrated learning* experience.

- Attentiveness is a **key skill of each ‘Blanket Role’** as demonstrated by the PEEC story characters.

- If we are going to *reconnect our children with the natural places around them*, it is essential that students are given the opportunity to develop the skill of attentiveness.

*When we care enough about life to learn about our place, we understand more about our neighbours. We create the potential to nurture compassion for all beings.* (Thomashow, 1996 p. 197)

### Deep Reflective Responding

Across all four chapters of PEEC Storythreads, teaching and learning focuses on more than remembering, recounting or reproducing knowledge and facts. Students are encouraged to demonstrate the ability to reflect deeply and meta-cognitively on thinking, learning, actions and future directions with regard to their ‘Blanket Role’ and the curriculum.

At the higher levels of reflection students will make inferences and draw conclusions regarding the relationship between the concepts explored and their own life experiences, thoughts, behaviours and insights. They will demonstrate the ability to transform their ideas in order to formulate personal theories and make effective suggestions regarding the application of their learning in other areas of their lives both now and in the future.

Throughout our Teacher Resource Booklets and on our Storythread excursion days, Deep Reflective Responding is encouraged through discussion, writing and drawing, drama strategies and thinking tools.

We have also found that *Philosophy in the Classroom* strategies work well within the Storythread framework as they promote deep thinking, reflection and discussion about the world as well as respect for others and their ideas.

### Helpful Resources and References

#### Picture books
- Armstrong, S. (2002) *If the world were a village*, NSW: Allen & Unwin
- Seuss, Dr. (1971) *The lorax*, London: Collins

#### Reference texts

#### Storythread
What is Storythread?

NOTES


Environmental Education

• Australian Sustainable Schools Initiative – www.deh.gov.au/aussi
• Children and Nature Network – www.childrenandnature.org
• CitySmart, Brisbane City Council – greenheartcitysmart.com
• Kids’ Place Maps – www.kidsplacemaps.wa.edu.au
• Special forever: An environmental communications project - specialforever.org.au

Drama in the Classroom


Thinking Tools

• The Thinking Toolbox CD – www.tmela.com.au

Websites

• Atlas of Living Australia - ala.org.au
• ABC - http://www.abc.net.au/science/
• Aus Identities - www.ausidentities.com.au
• Brisbane Catchments network - wwwbrisbanecatchments.net.au
• Land Art for Kids - http://landartforkids.com/
• Planet Ark - www.planetark.org.au