

CONNECTING THE PAST THROUGH STORY: A NEW ZEALAND EXPERIENCE

THE NEW ZEALAND EDUCATIONAL CONTEXT

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To ensure curriculum aims and objectives are being met, there are two monitoring systems in place. Schools and teachers are regularly monitored by the Educational Revue Office.

Sampling, only, of student national progress is conducted by a National Education Monitoring Project (NEMP) New Zealand.

Developing a connectedness with their past community and its people is important so that students may better understand the present society in which they live. *The Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* recognises this through two strands, Time, Continuity and Change, and Culture and Heritage. Yet in the most recent NEMP report (22) in 2001 stated that the results of students' social studies assessment "*showed quite limited knowledge and understanding of New Zealand history*" (p49) and "*about half of the Y8 students showed little understanding of the importance of cultural traditions for immigrants from other cultures*". (p27)

AN IMAGINATIVE APPROACH TO LEARNING

To overcome students' lack of historical conception, the presenter considered that a narrative approach that engages student's imagination with a past community might develop effective student learning rather than a more traditional approach. The presenter drew upon the Storyline approach because it lends itself to curriculum integration, while engaging students' imagination through narrative. Within a planned structure, layered exploration takes place as students become participants in the story.

They construct meaning to past events, which they help to create through imagination, inquiry and discovery.

The teacher's role is to create the context; present a series of problems referred to as critical incidents, allow students to take 'ownership' of the problems or issues that arise in the story, stimulate and scaffold student inquiry with questions.

THE STORYLINE

In 2002 the presenter developed and trialed with Year 7-8 (11-13 yrs) students and their teachers, an integrated study of an often overlooked 1870s migrant group of settlers to New Zealand from Scandinavia. The students' diverse and imaginative solutions to problems that arise during 'their' family's journey from Norway to Norsewood, and the subsequent application of knowledge and skills in a new setting, is encouraging.

Nineteenth century European immigration is a common topic studied in New Zealand schools. It is, however, quite often about generic, surface experiences of English migrants. This storyline, though, was woven through the study of a specific group of Norwegian families who travelled to New Zealand in the 1870s as assisted passengers on a New Zealand Public Works scheme to clear dense forest and build roads and bridges. Tangible evidence of this migrant wave can be located in our local communities with Scandinavian place names, surnames and cemeteries.

As teacher-director I developed a storyline structure of a beginning, several episodes with critical incidents along the way that move the story forward, and a culminating celebratory fieldtrip to conclude. Once written I wanted to implement the storyline with students to discover how students would respond. Teachers, Kaye Webber, Alison McRae, William McPhail and Kay Meredith, at Palmerston North Intermediate Normal School agreed to work with me to develop this Scandinavian storyline with their students. Meetings were held with them to explain this learning approach and to share ideas and resources.

Within the four classes in this study were approximately 110 eleven to thirteen year old children, with a wide range of abilities and some disabilities, along with students whose first language is not English. Through storyline these students were able to operate at their own levels, because of the nature of the multi-layered storyline approach and the planned activities.

This Scandinavian storyline uses story narrative and language. Throughout, the story uses what Egan refers to as 'the binary opposites of abstract conflicts', understood by these students because they are grounded in the reality of the story and the setting. Binary opposites explored included good/ bad experiences and decisions, security of the familiar/ fear of the unknown; excitement and anticipation/melancholy; lost/ found.

The role I undertook was to maintain continuity through a framework only known by we teachers, and to encourage imaginative thinking and inquiry to be able to make decisions and to create solutions. I used story with its recognised conventions, voice and language to draw students in, and to assist them to make connections with their community's past, and to imagine that world. The storyline was supported by primary and secondary evidence. Their classroom teachers supported and developed that inquiry to reach conclusions and evidence of learning.

The students were able to weave their own threads of experience and understanding into the story as they were challenged to construct meaning to the migrant's story, and the family that they created for themselves. In so doing, they had an emotional imaginative engagement with these characters.

Frieze

An important element of Storyline is to create a class frieze of the setting (settings in our case) and families, that documents the sequence of events. The frieze is a bridge between abstract thinking and the world students are creating. It assists students to visualise and organise their thinking. Along the journey, the frieze becomes a focus for group decisions and the work accomplished. Throughout, students are able to reflect backwards and forwards to retell their family and group stories - and they do. Ultimately it became a demonstration of their achievements in role, and as student participants.

Portfolios of Individual Work

Portfolios are common for Storylines, but this was also their regular pattern in this school.

Encouraged by their teachers, students collect examples of their work as the storyline develops. This document enables students to reflect upon ways in which they have learnt, teachers to assess student progress and needs, and for their parents to share at the conclusion.

Critical Incidents

Along the journey, the teacher introduces critical incidents. These enable the teacher to steer the direction of the story, as well as embracing student's ideas, while adhering to the planned framework. They were introduced by the director-teacher as part of the narrative.

NORWAY TO NORSEWOOD

EPISODE ONE: NORWAY *Creating the Setting and Context*

I began, *'I'm going to tell you a story, and you and your families will be part of that story. We are going on a journey.'* I drew a shawl around my shoulders. A boy whispered, *'She's a real storyteller,'* demonstrating to me the potential of props and artefacts to transport us to another place and time. *'Long, long ago, over a hundred years ago, in 1872, you and your family travelled from Norway by ship, across the seas for 110 days, to just over the Ruahine Ranges, to work and to settle. This is how it happened ...'*

Students explored the Norwegian setting using atlases before creating families of their own. They selected suitable names from a list provided by teachers and were able to discover the development of Norwegian surnames with the help of a website.

Critical Incident: Immigration Officer nails New Zealand migrant recruitment poster in the village. Students entered into decision making in character, although usually, at this stage, only from their own character's persona, rather than the whole family.

Questions were raised by them such as:

Do we go or stay? Why should we go?

Who else is going? How will we get there? What will we need?

How much are we allowed to take?

What do we gain from going? What do we get if we go?

Will our family left behind cope without us?

Once a decision was made to leave, preparations were undertaken. A letter of inquiry was sent to the New Zealand immigration officer, and an acceptance letter with contract information was returned by him. After discussions about what they would need to pack, students created a suitcase and contents, including something special to remind them

of 'home'. Students shared the contents with each other and explained the memories their special article would evoke.

The Frieze was commenced.

EPISODE TWO: SETTING OFF and SHIPBOARD LIFE.

There was much discussion in character while walking for two days and nights to the ship at Christiania (Oslo). There was anticipation and all kinds of concerns. They recorded such feelings as being: *nervous; apprehensive; rushed - lots of packing to do; frightened of getting seasick; frustrated - might forget something you will need; tired - can't get to sleep I'm so excited; longing to get there.*

They began to realise the importance and power of the captain, verbally testing out imaginary scenarios. They became aware of their lowly status as steerage passengers and the limitations of their accommodation, and they wanted to know:

Where are the toilets?

How can we find out what the rules are?

What will living conditions be like on the ship?

What food will we be provided with?

How will food and water get to cabins during a storm if hatches are down for a long time?

Do the 1st class passengers come to the church services too, since we are meant to be separate?

Would the reverend be 1st class?

What provisions are there for women having babies? What about privacy?

How did the baby die? How did they get a coffin for the sea burial?

How can we stop ourselves from being bored?

Will there be any recreational activities?

How would you send a letter? Would there be islands for carrier pigeons to land on?

Do we travel by wind? How do we direct the ship?

How long will the voyage take - are there any landfalls?

Critical Incident: *'All aboard!' The captain is satisfied all the supplies, the luggage, and first class passengers are on board, so we can embark now.'*

Families responded to the master-at-arms call, "All aboard!" Heads of families signed on all their families appropriately, and located their sleeping quarters from a plan.

During the voyage there were opportunities for a range of shipboard activities. Initially one class measured out the size of the Hovding ship in the playground from information from a website. Other activities made available but not taken up by all classes, included Danish folk dance taught by other migrants onboard, Norse folk tales told to remind them of home, rope knotting, diary entries, and seascape impressions. Imaginative suggestions were forthcoming to get letters delivered to friends in Norway. There were also available for research articles, stories and illustrations of nineteenth century voyages others had taken.

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EPISODE THREE: ARRIVAL IN NEW ZEALAND

Critical Incident : 'Land ahoy!'

As we imagined the voyage around New Zealand to reach landfall at Napier, and we stood upon the deck with bags already packed, students anticipated what to expect.

What will we see after the mountains and clouds?

What shall we do when we first arrive?

What can we expect in New Zealand?

What are the dangers? Can we do anything to protect ourselves?

On arrival in New Zealand menfolk set off on foot for the 100 km to Norsewood, while women and children were accommodated in barracks until temporary shared housing was erected at their new settlement by the menfolk. The walk through dense virgin bush (forest), with only birds and insects present, was recreated by students in the haiku they wrote.

The smooth tranquil trees

Leaves rustle peacefully

The hushed silence snaps

Michael

Misty gloom surround

Vines entangled, trap their world

Birds flying freely

Kyle

Crisp cool fresh thick air

Sinking in the soggy mud

Dark gloomy dense bush

Laura

EPISODE FOUR: DEVELOPING SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The Scandinavian families were provided with a section of forested land, basic tools and rations. There was no town, no accommodation, and theirs was subsistence living with just a small income from the males' part-time government road and bridge building. Gradually women would barter surplus butter and produce at the store.

Critical Incident: *'Where do we live?'*

Students problem solve and demonstrate in various ways, timber felling and land clearance, building their houses and developing a community. Some develop needlework and woodwork skills to make their house into a home.

The teachers decided to read parts of *'Johanna's World'* to provide background information specific to Norsewood and the first settlers. This became a very personal experience for them all as the translator of the Norwegian version is the now elderly, retired principal of their school. He visited to answer questions and to tell of meeting Johanna in his youth, and of life in old Norway.

We are fortunate in that the invention and development of photography mirrored the establishment of European settlement in New Zealand. During this episode, students learnt to 'read' photographic images, to go outside the frame of the picture, to imagine what may have happened before and after the shot, and were encouraged to engage their senses to imagine the smells, sounds and touch.

In this school's busy timetable, it turned out that little time was available for the decorating of homes utilising traditional skills. In fact, this reflected the reality of the first ten years of most of these Norwegian migrants. Instead, the illustrated timelines students individually created of the clearing of their own land and building their homes, clearly demonstrated their understanding of the processes and the people's

experiences.

EPISODE FIVE: BUSHFIRE.

Critical Incident: *Fire! Fire! Fire!*

Students became caught up with the story of the day fire came to the now established community, when the felled trees were burnt off as usual, but the autumn rains that usually doused the flames failed to arrive.

When asked, '*How would you and your family be affected?*' the students decide to remember this event through their writing. Here are some examples of their poetic writing, demonstrating the extent they have been able to 'become' the characters.

NORSEWOOD FIRE

*The wind whistles over the Ruahine Ranges
To ignite the smouldering log.
Smoke stings eyes
Panic and fear
We run for the Te Whiti clearing
Ben*

NORSEWOOD INFERNO

*It was a normal morning.
I was sitting on the porch
Watching my children walk to school
When I saw a lick of flame
Reaching over the hillside.*

*I grabbed my children,
Forgetting about our possessions,
Just thinking about our lives*

*I ran for the lower half of Norsewood
Warning the neighbours as I ran.
When we were safe
I prayed my husband would have escaped
The terrible blaze.*

*When all seemed lost,
The Heavens opened
And the rained drummed down upon us*

*As we wandered through the place
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We wondered, was it worth coming to Norsewood
Leaving our homes in Norway?*

Jacon

THE FIRE CRISIS

*The strong scent of smoke,
The fire blazing, Panic raging,
Running, for our lives.*

*Grab my possessions,
Chuck them on the sandy road,
Burning nostrils torture every one,
Watery eyes affecting people.*

*Hearing mighty trees crashing down,
Shrieking of rampaging animals,*

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*Hearing mighty trees crashing down,
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Screaming and panicking,
Feet rushing to the nearest clearing ...*

Nicole

EPISODE SIX: A CONCLUDING EVENT

Most students had never visited Norsewood, just an hour away, but since cut off from the main highway. Four classes, their teachers and some parent helpers, travelled by bus to Norsewood to explore and discover the present, and to make links to the past. During the day students walked through the small remaining stand of bush; they followed a village trail noticing Scandinavian street names and Johanna's house; they visited a small cheese factory where goat cheeses are produced traditionally; the small museum was full of 'their' families' relics. At the cemetery they found headstones of their teacher's ancestors, a student's family headstones, as well as Johanna's headstone. They were struck by all the Scandinavian names, some the same as the ones they had chosen for their family.

REFLECTIONS ON LEARNING and ASSESSMENT

HANNAH'S REFLECTIONS on her FAMILY

	<i>Plus</i>	<i>Minus</i>	<i>Intriguing</i>
<i>ANDERS</i> <i>(father)</i>	<i>Leaving the hard hard work of Norway and getting more land to farm</i>	<i>Not knowing NZ language</i>	<i>There was much more land, although it was bush</i>
<i>HANNA</i>	<i>Making new friends;</i>	<i>Not knowing the</i>	<i>New Zealand is a</i>

<i>(mother)</i>	<i>good to see children growing up happy</i>	<i>language and struggling to communicate</i>	<i>very green beautiful country</i>
CHRISTIAN <i>(son)</i>	<i>Being old enough to be working and be counted as an adult</i>	<i>Because of not working, not being able to meet new friends</i>	<i>Many of the people who came had been their friends</i>
SARA <i>(daughter)</i>	<i>Travelling on the sea and being on a ship</i>	<i>Leaving friends and family behind in Norway</i>	<i>The people in New Zealand might be friendly to them</i>

I think the pioneer families would have needed these qualities:

- *Leadership*
- *Courage*
- *Endurance*
- *Strength*
- *Optimism*

Throughout this storyline students developed and demonstrated curiosity, imagination and understanding. By the conclusion most students had developed, to a greater or lesser degree, the ability to:

- frame a range of questions
- increasingly conduct independent inquiry
- effectively use a selected range of resources
- make informed judgements based on evidence
- record appropriately
- reflect upon their own learning
- convey information to others

They demonstrated this with the questions they raised to direct their inquiries; through group and whole class discussions; recorded responses; and the ongoing class frieze. Teachers were able to conduct formative assessment during this time, to meet identified needs through scaffolding and co-construction, and to ensure identified curriculum objectives were being met.

Students built up their personal portfolios with work samples, which included their inquiry questions, poems and other writing, an illustrated sequence of building their home in the New Zealand 'bush', and other work. These demonstrated learning

throughout the storyline and served as reflective tools for themselves, a vehicle for formative and summative assessment by the teachers, and for reporting to parents at the conclusion.

Egan points out, "*imagination...is a capacity to think in a particular way. It is a way that crucially involves our capacity to think of the possible rather than just the actual.*" Most students not only captured the reality of the trials the pioneers overcame, but they also explored possibilities for their families, moving well beyond their own experiences. They imaginatively found solutions to problems that arose, just as those Norwegians who could visualise what might be, decided to migrate and managed to thrive beyond the deprivations.

SELECTED RESOURCES

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