The ‘What is a joyful school day?’

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Problem and context

Danish society and primary schools have undergone significant digitalisation over the past 30 years, leading to the introduction of digital platforms and personal learning tools. Simultaneously, there has been a steady increase in digital monitoring and assessment, with adaptive teaching aids, tests and various measurements becoming part of students' daily lives. This digitalisation has also greatly impacted children and young people's everyday life, leisure and culture, and schooling today aims to provide opportunities to acquire technological empowerment.

A major challenge in Danish primary schools is that many children and young people do not enjoy school and desire more varied and motivating teaching and learning. Studies indicate that this dissatisfaction is partly due to increased pressure on achievement, where digital assessments of students' learning negatively affect their wellbeing.

This learning story is related to the Danish case study titled "Small data and playful learning - Playful data as key to computational empowerment and wellbeing".

How the Learning Story Addressed the Problem (The Experiment)

This learning story follows a teaching experiment with a class of form level 6 children of age 12. The purpose of the experiment was for the teacher and students to learn more about what constitutes a joyful school through a playful, investigative and experimental approach. At the same time, the goal was to acquire technological dexterity and empowerment by designing digital studies of the classroom learning environment.

The experiment involved the students collaborating to enhance their shared learning environment by playfully engaging with data. This aimed to foster a more supportive and enjoyable school experience. It involved students actively participating in the collection of digital data and creatively assessing their learning environment, thereby promoting ownership and wellbeing.

The experiment was built upon the following content and actions.

1. Students investigated what they experienced as a good and engaging school day (15 min). This involved reflecting on their own school memories and identifying what made them joyful, often using LEGO to build scenarios representing those memories in a playful way. This helped them clarify what to look for and measure in later investigations.
2. Students designed studies with small digital datasets about the learning environment (30 min). In this phase, students identified how to investigate what characterises a joyful school day. They used half-sentences to define aspects like collaboration with friends and discussed how to measure these, and considered what signs to look for and what types of data would be useful.

The teacher also discussed data collection methods used in other fields (like biologists observing lemmings) and asked students about any data collection they were familiar with in their own school and everyday life.

3. Students experimented with different digital technologies (60 – 90 min) to gain knowledge and technical capability for developing and implementing their small data study. The teacher chose Makey Makey and LEGO Spike for this. The students worked in pairs in a 'technological learning lab' setting, experimenting with the technologies through three different roles: the Discoverer, the Researcher and the Inventor, and sharing their findings through peer feedback.
4. Execution and evaluation of the digital data study (30 min). During this final phase, students developed their first research design, agreeing on what to investigate, how, and with which technology. They brainstormed ideas, selected the most interesting and realistic ones and built measuring devices or prototypes using Makey Makey or LEGO Spike. The final prototypes were discussed in class, focusing on the purpose, what was measured and how the measurements could be used to create a better learning environment. This final discussion revealed the knowledge, insights and language that both students and the teacher had gained by working with small data and wellbeing.

Working with a playful approach involves an exploratory, experimental and creative way of tackling open tasks with multiple solution options in meaningful situations together with others. It is a project-based approach where creators work on projects that matter, collaborating and sharing with peers, and experimenting and testing.

Lessons learned

Working with playful approaches requires the teacher to be aware of several things.

- Avoid long teacher instructions. Instead, use open-ended tasks with no right or wrong answers, where the teacher and students are curious to investigate phenomena together. Short recaps are better, which incorporate student knowledge and skills.
- When working with a school memory, some students benefit from an example (e.g., from the teacher) as they may lack the language for the emotional part of memories. Building memories in LEGO can offer new ways of expression.
- Working creatively, creating and investigating takes time, even for students used to playful work. This type of teaching requires a flexible schedule that allows students to immerse themselves.
- In all phases, it is essential for teachers to allocate sufficient time to realise the full potential of the learning design. However, there is significant value in the initial discussions about what constitutes a good school day, how it can be measured and evaluating the shared learning environment. These conversations help develop new understandings and a shared language for future investigations and projects. Simultaneously, they provide the teacher with unique

insights into what is valuable for students' everyday school life and what learning environment and teaching approaches should be prioritised.

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