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The Story and Song Centered Pedagogy: Teaching Empathy in the classroom

Parfait Adegboyé Bassalé
Portland State University

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The Story and Song Centered Pedagogy (SSCP)

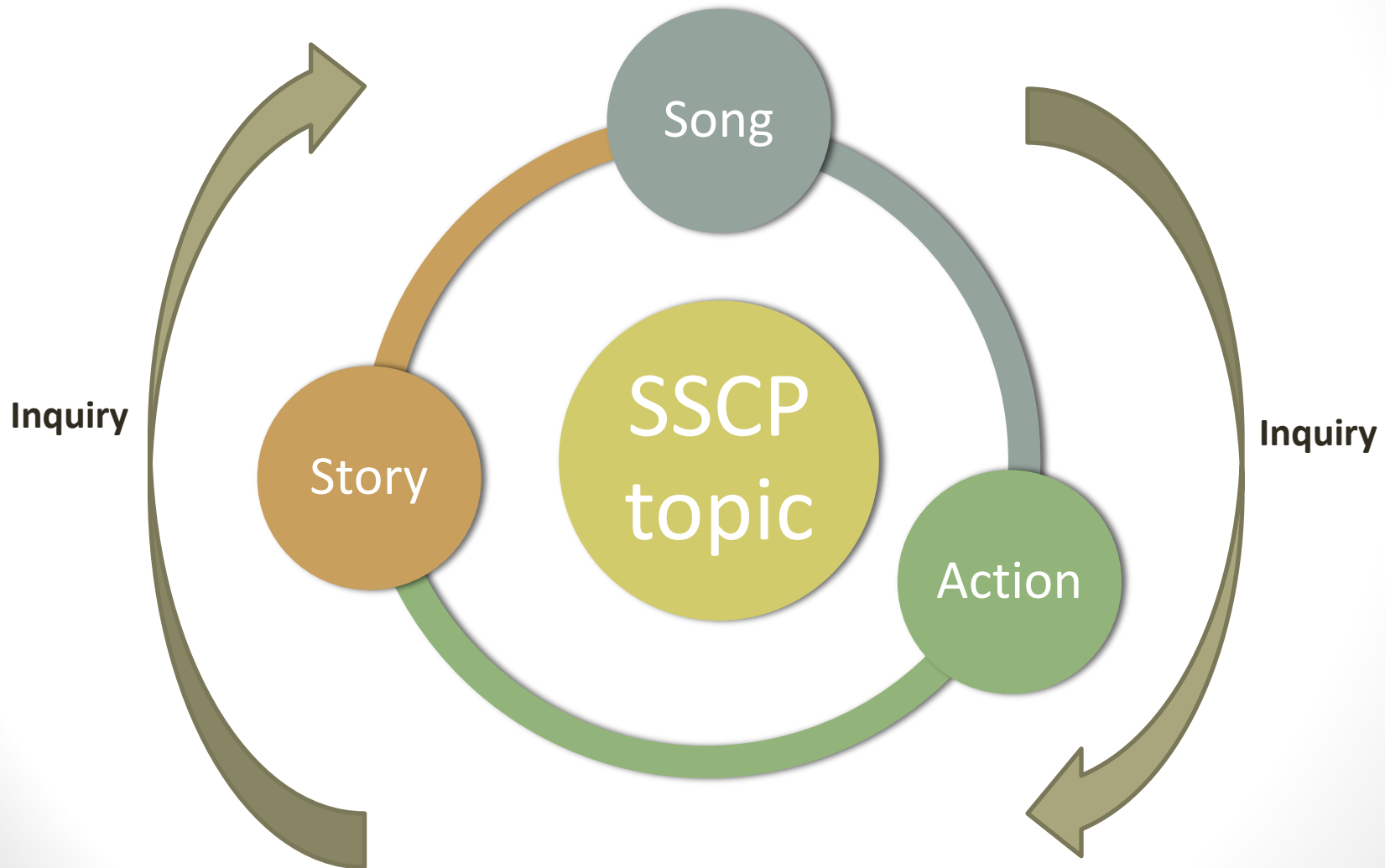
By Parfait Bassale

What is it?

The Story and Song Centered Pedagogy (SSCP) is an educational framework that uses **songs**, **stories** and **reflective inquiry** to increase **empathy**.

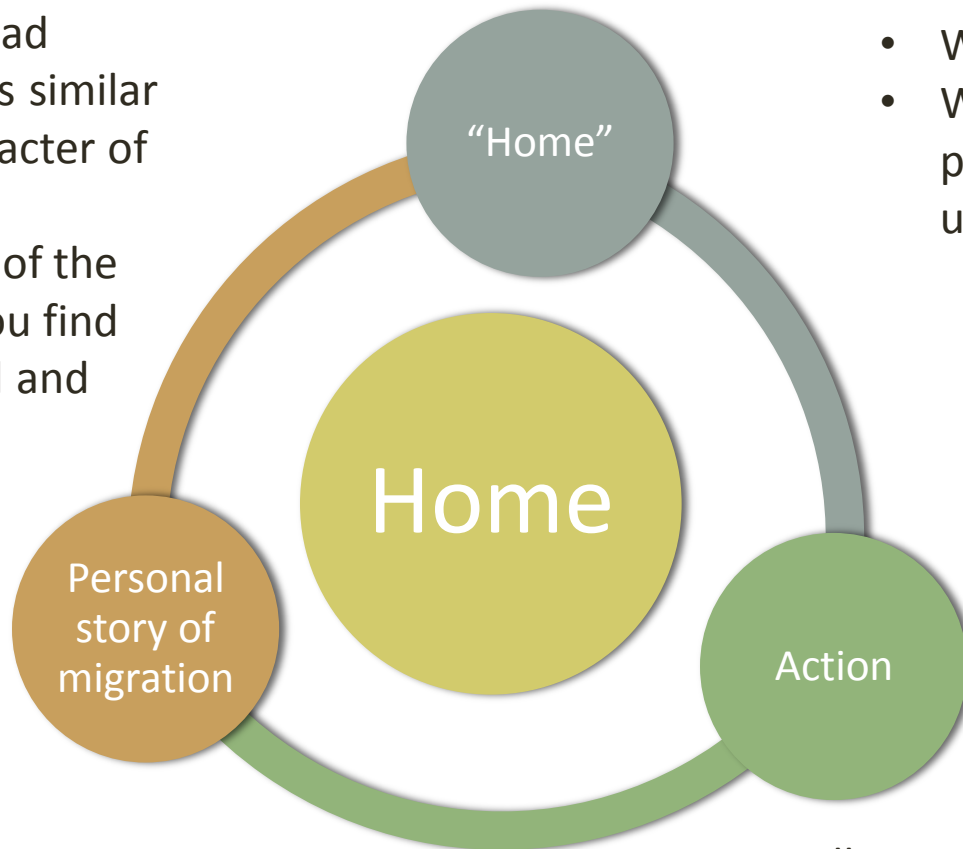
“Sing me a story that moves me, makes me think and causes me to care”

What does it look like?



What does it look like?

- Have you had experiences similar to the character of the story?
- Which line of the song did you find meaningful and why?



- Where is home? Why?
- What are the reasons why people make a place unwelcoming?

- How will you make someone feel welcomed?
- How will you transform an unwelcoming environment?

Who cares about Empathy?

Defining Empathy

A subject's **emotional experience** and **conscious response** by means of **cognitive processing** (perspective taking) of the unconscious mirroring of feelings and thoughts of another person's experience.

*“Empathy is not only a **condition**, it is an **action** motivated by **affect** and **cognition**.”*

(Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011)

Who cares about Empathy?

Modes of arousal

Primary modes of empathic arousal

- Mirror affective responses of what is observed
- Reproduce affective response of past experiences that were encoded
- Ex: Mimicry

Higher modes of empathic arousal

- Cognitive activity
- Transform automatic neurobiological affective responses
- Other-centered
- Ex: Language mediated association

Measuring Empathy

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980)

Deconstructs Empathy into 4 sub-constructs:

- 1. Perspective Taking**
The ability to take the psychological point of view of another person
- 2. Emotional Concern**
The tendency to feel sympathy and/or concern for others in negative situations
- 3. Personal Distress**
The tendency to experience distress and/or discomfort when witnessing another person's distress.
- 4. Fantasy**
The tendency to imaginatively transpose oneself into fictional situations

Measuring Empathy

Interpersonal Reactivity Index (Davis, 1980)

Key relationships

More Perspective Taking  More Emotional Concern

Less Perspective Taking  More Personal Distress

Ground for the SSCP

*“Empathy is not only a condition, it is an **action** motivated by **affect** and **cognition**.”*

(Gerdes, Lietz, & Segal, 2011)

Ground for the SSCP

Stories

Stories serve as **bridges** into other people's lives. Through mirror neurons and **cognition** they are a **safe** way to experience what others have experienced. They help convey desirable behavior **(Action)**.



Ground for the SSCP

Songs

Music has the capacity to **convey** and **affect** emotions like no other communication tool. When paired with lyrics and when used within the context of storytelling, it **amplifies** one's emotional experience and allows for introspection.



Ground for the SSCP

Reflective inquiry?

Reflective Inquiry helps **engage** an audience cognitively and helps **model** both the “perspective taking” and “action taking” processes.

Definition of perspective taking

The process of cognitively seeking to understand the context surrounding another person's experience.

The study

Procedure

- Roosevelt High School, 2 class periods, 73 participants
- 55 minutes interventions
- Personal story of migration from West Africa to the USA
- Lyrics available
- Pre and Post intervention surveys

Objective:

- Intervene on Perspective Taking and Emotional Concern subscales (higher mode of empathic arousal)
- Characterized by an increase in the post-survey scores

The Results

- 48 useable surveys (paired pre and post intervention surveys)

Statistical methods

- Paired samples t-test; Descriptive statistics of the pre-, post-scores and their differences were generated for each subscale. Mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum and quartiles were reported

Results

- No statistically significant variation for Perspective Taking (mean difference=0.37, p-value=0.6328) and Emotional Concern (mean difference = -0.21, p-value=0.7092) subscales.
- **Statistically significant decrease in Personal Distress scores** post intervention (mean difference was 1.1 and the p-value 0.0330 (less than 0.05))

The Results

Results

- Highest correlation between Fantasy scores and Emotional Concern scores' differences: 0.56 with a statistically significant p-value (less than 0.0001)
- Correlation between Perspective Taking and Emotional Concern, although weak (0.32), was statistically significant (p-value =0.0267).
- Correlation between Perspective Taking and Fantasy scores' differences was statistically significant but weak: 0.36, p-value=0.0112

Conclusions

What does this mean?

- **Significant decrease in Personal Distress scores**

According to Hoffman (1984) a decrease in Personal Distress is caused by significant cognitive activity.

SSCP triggered significant cognitive activity to cause a decrease in Personal Distress scores. This matches the description of high modes of empathic arousal.

Conclusions

- **Key correlations between sub-constructs maintained**

More Perspective Taking  **More Emotional Concern**

More Fantasy  **More Emotional Concern**

More Perspective Taking  **More Fantasy**

Limitations & future research

- What if we use less songs? One song?
- Who was affected by the intervention? Why?
- How lasting are the effects of the intervention?
- Are all students starting with the same levels of empathy?
- How will this fit within the K-12 educational system ?
- How do I alter the protocol to get amplified results?
- Would a qualitative approach give a more comprehensive result?

Application

- The Colombe Project
 - A Peace Education Enterprise
 - Providing SSCP curriculum and resources to youth organizations
 - Ongoing research on the SSCP
 - www.colombeproject.com



Thank you