sustainability

MDPI

Article

Becoming a Global Citizen through Participation in the Global Storylines Program

Šárka Křepelková [1,*], Jan Činčera [1] and Roman Kroufek [2]

[1] Department of Environmental Studies, Faculty of Social Studies, Masaryk University, 60200 Brno, Czech Republic

[2] Department of Preschool & Primary Education, Faculty of Education, Jan Evangelista Purkyně University in Ústí nad Labem, 40096 Ústí nad Labem, Czech Republic

* Correspondence: 357875@mail.muni.cz; Tel.: +420-549-49-3482

Received: 10 June 2019; Accepted: 25 July 2019; Published: 1 August 2019

Abstract: This study investigates the effect of the Global Storylines educational program which aims to increase primary school students' sustainability competences and their awareness of global problems. To obtain the data, we organized seven focus groups with a total of 52 students (25 girls, 27 boys) of an average age of 8.55 years, and conducted 7 interviews with 8 teachers (all women). The findings demonstrate the program's likely effect on students' improved inter- and intra-personal skills, better social climate in the classes, and students' increased sensitivity to global issues noticeable in local communities. However, the program's effect on student self-efficacy in mitigating the presented issues in real life does not seem to be supported. Further, this study analyzes the constraints perceived by the teachers in implementing the program in primary schools. The teachers found the program rather time-consuming and the topic more appropriate for older students. Finally, the study discusses the implications of these results for implementing and running the program in the future.

Keywords: educational drama; education for sustainable development; global citizenship education; Global Storylines

---

1. Introduction

Tackling contemporary global issues is hardly imaginable without motivated young people who understand the complex nature of these issues and who are competent at adopting adequate measures [1]. These global citizens are then able to express empathy and share a sense of belonging to the global community [2]. Such a goal poses an important task for educators at all levels, from kindergartens to universities.

However, teaching global issues brings with it significant challenges. Global issues tend to be complex and are usually the result of a set of socio-environmental and political interactions whose understanding requires a perspective that goes beyond the scope of one field. While primary school students usually already have a basic awareness of these issues and may even feel their urgency, the students' understanding of particular causes and effects is often loaded with misconceptions [3–5]. This situation may be attributed not only to the complex nature of global issues, but also to the fact that the main source of students' information about global issues seems to be the media rather than formal education [6,7].

Another risk in teaching global issues is posed by their emotional charge. As Nagel [8] highlights, inappropriate exposure of young students to global issues may create learned despair. This happens when students feel so threatened that they feel no hope for the future and expect an upcoming catastrophe. As Randall [9] argues, these feelings may lead to apathy or the application of self-defense mechanisms that block any effective action. This assertion is supported by Grund and Brock [10],

who found that respondents with a high level of perceived desirability of sustainable development are also highly skeptical about the probability of such development. In addition, these respondents do not act in a more pro-environmental way than the other respondents. Similarly, Fritsche and Hafner [11] have shown that existential threat has a negative effect on biocentric motivation towards the protection of nature. Another aspect was reported by Lowe et al. [12]. According to them, framing climate change as a disaster in the film *The Day After Tomorrow* increased viewers' anxiety and their motivation to act on climate change, but it also reduced their belief in the likelihood of the events portrayed. Furthermore, the film left viewers unaware of what they should do to mitigate climate change.

In light of this, Sobel [13] strongly discourages teachers to pay much attention to global issues before students are able to grasp their complexity and cope with the associated emotional burden in order to protect students from "ecophobia". This phenomenon, defined by Sobel as fear of environmental problems, was found in the responses of the majority American students of 10–12 years of age who were investigated by Strife [14]. According to him, the students tended to have apocalyptic and pessimistic feelings about the environment and the future. Similar findings were reported by Barazza [15] in a group of 7–9-year-old American and Mexican students and by Mabelis [16], who found that the majority of the 8–16-year-old Dutch students who were examined were pessimistic about the future for the Netherlands due to their perception of environmental problems. In their reaction to the destruction of nature, various defensive mechanisms appeared, such as powerlessness, trivialization, or selective perception of information (seeing only what one wants to see).

Meeting these challenges is one of the goals of the global citizenship education approach. This approach tries to respond to contemporary globalization issues by linking civic education, human rights education, and peace education to promote the concept of "global citizenship" [17]. This concept consists of three dimensions: a) knowledge and awareness of global issues and their social, political, cultural and economic dimensions, b) universal values like justice, equality, dignity and respect, and c) skills for questioning one's own situation critically, systematically, and creatively, and taking different perspectives on analyzed issues [17]. The implementation of this approach into teaching practice seems to be constrained by teachers' ambiguous attitudes. While the teachers considered the global citizenship education to be important [18], they perceived the growing trend of isolationist and nationalist thinking in contemporary society, supporting the concepts competing with global citizenship [19]. Furthermore, the teachers also reflected on their own lack of knowledge about global issues and their lack of experience with sound teaching methods [20]. In light of this, supporting cooperation between teachers and non-governmental organizations focusing on global citizenship education may improve the situation. In particular, teachers could participate in in-service training programs focusing on effective instructional strategies and methods of global citizenship education [19].

A transformative learning theory may be considered a framework offering a sound approach leading to the fulfillment of the objectives of global citizenship education. This approach is aimed at developing students' autonomous personalities, with a critical attitude towards themselves and the world. To achieve this, students are supposed to identify perceptions, values, and feelings that form the basis of their "frames of reference" and inform the way they perceive and interpret selected social phenomena. Through the process of identification and critical reflection, the frames of reference are challenged and transformed [21]. In the context of global citizenship education, students may challenge and reformulate their frames of reference towards global issues, and reinterpret their understanding of their own relationships with the world and the social, cultural, economic, and political forces shaping their lives. As a result, they may reconsider changes in their behavior on both personal and social levels [2]. This kind of learning is no longer just a field of adult education; it is becoming an effective learning approach for all ages [2]. The basic elements of transformative learning in childhood are, among other things: awareness and control of one's own emotions, empathy towards others, the use of imagination to construct narratives, and abstract thinking [21]. All these basic elements can be developed through dramatization as a learning method.

Dramatization, together with role playing and problem-based learning or cooperative learning, is one of the recommended effective child-centered methods to meet the objectives of global citizenship education [22,23]. It may be assumed that an educational drama offers a safe environment, allowing children to identify and challenge their frames of reference which are relevant to potentially threatening global issues. However, this assumption has not been adequately tested yet.

This study investigates the learning approach used in the Global Storylines educational program which presents selected global issues to primary school students in a safe way through a co-created drama play.

Global Storylines

Global Storylines (GSL) is an educational program based on student active participation in a thematically-focused educational drama [24]. The program was developed in Scotland in an effort to apply an interdisciplinary and respectful learning approach promoting students' global citizenship [25]. GSL may be described by a set of distinctive features, including participative, project-based and experiential learning promoting global citizenship and awareness of global problems in the contemporary world [26]. It is an integrated approach using drama as an educational method [27]. The program is based on the constructivist learning model [28], in which students enter into the story with their world conception, and their learning is based on their skills and abilities [26].

The keystone of GSL is a story that is experienced through storytelling and dramatization. In the story, a class of students becomes a community facing an upcoming challenge that reflects a selected real-world issue (e.g., immigration, depletion of resources, water scarcity, etc.) presented by a specific story scenario. The students are supposed to cooperate to find the solution in order to achieve a common goal [29,30]. Each student plays a concrete role of a particular community member and is supposed to gradually identify with his or her character [27]. To solve the issue, students regularly vote and decide which of the possible solutions would be best for their community (e.g., to accept or reject the incoming immigrants). Through dealing with the issues, students learn to understand the relevance of the issues and their own responsibility for their decisions [31]. While teachers are supposed to lead the process according to the guidelines for each of the scenarios, they should cede control over the class and respect students' choices [31].

The application of educational drama and storytelling is at the core of the GSL program. As McNaughton [27] assumes, making and telling stories is an innate human ability. All cultures have stories that describe and transfer values and traditions by using symbols and allegories. Stories can inform and explain abstract or complex topics of human action in an entertaining way. As Moon observes, a "story can tap into imagination and emotions and meaningful connection between existing areas of knowledge that can be neglected in conventional practice" [32] (p. 96).

Dramatization is a fundamental aspect providing non-traditional instruments and an environment suitable for various kinds of learning, e.g., audiovisual, symbolic and kinesthetic. Dramatization arouses students' interest in the topic and influences the making of knowledge and the changing of beliefs and attitudes, as well as inspiring a commitment to behavioral change [33]. For the best effect of dramatization, especially of the type of dramatization called process drama, it is advisable to start with the implementation with pre-school students. Dramatization enables students to acquire skills in dialogue, collaboration, and creative problem solving [34]. The drama activities help students to develop ways of expressing emotions and promote students' understanding of the actions of other people, as well as of what to expect from others [35]. Students can explore various social topics and their own attitudes toward these topics, both when they are in the role and out of it [36]. Working in a fictive community can help with the formation of human identity [32]. A fictive environment also offers a safe distance [37] from which one's values, prejudices, and fears can be explored and resolved [24]. Students obtain, analyze, and present complex information in creative ways that attract attention and excite emotions [33]. This creates good conditions for real-world actions later [36]. In addition, dramatization is supposed to develop students' critical thinking because it employs a combination

of different strategies as well as promoting cooperation, partnership and a higher level of students' participation in the formation of the learning process.

The effectiveness and impact of dramatization as a learning method with primary school students have been examined by several authors. Fleming, Merrel, and Tymms [38] have found a significant effect of dramatization on students' progress in mathematics, as well as on students' self-concept as compared to the control group. The positive effect of dramatization has also been documented in language teaching. Drama shifts the didactic discourse to one that is more authentic and encouraging, leading to a more successful second language acquisition [39]. The nature of drama also develops students' skills in imaginative writing and motivates them to write in general [40].

However, these findings are still a matter of discussion, as the evidence of the educational effect of this dramatization-based approach is rather limited. McNaughton [41,42] has analyzed the benefits of GSL as an ESD-relevant approach. She has found that the GSL program has an impact on increasing students' empathy with people suffering due to deforestation in tropical areas. The GSL program also positively influenced students' cooperative skills and their ability to express their opinion and listen to the opinions of others. Further, students were able to put all the relevant information together, make a synthesis, and then, after taking all the possibilities into account, make a decision. They were able to explain the impacts of deforestation, provide examples of how their own behavior may influence the issue, and argue for increased rainforest ecosystem protection [42]. On the basis of further findings, McNaughton [24,27] argued that the GSL program influenced students on both the affective (values, empathy, and respect) and competence (critical thinking) levels. According to McNaughton, dramatization provided a thinking frame for better contact with, and a better understanding of, environmental issues in real-life situations. Evaluation of the implementation of the GSL program in the Czech Republic has shown the following effects: improvement in students' autonomy, participation and cooperation; improvement in students´ motivation to learn; improvement in self-esteem and mutual respect; and, last but not least, positive changes in teacher–student relationships [26,31].

An effective implementation of the GSL program represents several challenges. According to McNaughton [24], students' reflection on their experience was perceived as the most demanding task by teachers, as it was supposed to work as a tool for linking the story with a real-life issue. It was also crucial to stress the role of the students as active partners in the whole process, in contrast to passively receiving information [43,44]. The GSL program assumes that the learning process that emerges through drama is of an interdisciplinary nature, that the students learn from their own experience, planning and experiments, and that they regularly reflect on both their own and other students' actions [45–47].

Despite these earlier findings, there is still a lot of uncertainty regarding both the process and the outcomes of GSL in terms of its application within the ESD framework. While McNaughton [42] reported a positive effect of GSL on students' global problem awareness and empathy towards marginalized groups, it is not clear whether the program also encouraged students to act towards mitigating the presented problems and whether using this program with younger students does not rather promote students' fear of the future and their apathy. Moreover, the implementation of GSL poses still further questions. Considering the program's ambition to keep a balance between students' opportunity to participate in shaping the drama through their own decisions and following the predetermined story scenario with expected learning moments may cause tension which, to date, has not been adequately investigated. It is clear that the GSL program assumes a high competence of the teachers involved, requiring them to facilitate the process of presenting emotionally-loaded issues in ways that would be acceptable for young students, linking the drama experiences with real-world issues, and protecting the students from becoming afraid and forming misconceptions. These were the topics for the research study presented.

2. Materials and Methods

This study examined how participating in the GSL program influenced both students and teachers. The aim of the study was to answer the following questions:

- What are the benefits of the GSL program for the students and the teachers, especially for the students' empowerment and the teachers' competence in dealing with global issues that are noticeable in local communities?
- What constraints emerged to the successful implementation of the GSL program?

Seven Czech elementary schools were involved in GSL projects in the school year 2017/2018. Each school could choose one of three possible story scenarios, dealing with either the issue of immigration (*The Giant of Thistle Mountain*), water scarcity (*The Water Source*), and resource depletion (*Our Crop, Our Land*). In the classes of the participating students, fulfilling the scenarios took approximately between half the school year to the whole school year. The teachers had two training workshops: the first took place before they started with the implementation of the GSL program in their classes, and the second, which focused on sharing their experience and overcoming emerging constraints, was scheduled several weeks later.

When each class finished the story scenario, qualitative data were collected separately from the students and from the teachers. The data from the students were obtained in focus groups. In comparison with other qualitative methods, focus groups provide significant advantages when used with school children. Focus groups support group interaction [48] regarding the extent of the consensus and the diversity among the participants [49,50]. The members of the group should, therefore, feel comfortable with each other and engage in discussion [48,49]. This means more safety for the students in comparison with an individual interview with an unknown person. Moreover, teachers feel more comfortable about leaving a group of students with an interviewer than about individual interviews. Last but not least, focus groups provide a lot of data in a relatively short time. On the other hand, students may be influenced by the other members of their focus group, and may not express their opinion if it contrasts with the prevailing opinions of the others.

We asked the participating teachers to select the students for the focus groups. The sampling criteria were gender and age balance, assumed willingness to speak openly, and active participation of the students in the project, [while not only students with pre-supposed positive feelings about the program had to be selected]. Altogether, we organized one focus group (6–8 students each) at each of the sampled schools, with a total of seven focus groups of 52 students (25 girls, 27 boys) of an average age of 8.55 years. Each of the focus groups lasted approximately half an hour. We asked the students to identify and describe particular moments from the program that were significant for them, to describe their role and the extent of their participation in the program, to assess what they learned thanks to the program, and to analyze what links and similarities they found between their "story" and the real—both local or global—world. All interviews were conducted without teachers to provide the students with the feeling of confidentiality. The data were anonymized, recorded, and transcribed. In the process, we coded the data segments using an open-coding method, followed by grouping the codes into broader categories [50,51]. The credibility of the findings was assessed by presenting the findings and discussing them with the teachers involved in the program, as well as with the program coordinators [5].

All of the teachers involved in the GSL project in the 2017/2018 school year were interviewed, individually or in pairs (in one case). Altogether, seven interviews with eight teachers were conducted (all of them were with women teachers). The Global Storyline program was taught by female teachers in all the participating classes, so no male respondents were included. The participation of only female teachers may have caused a gender bias in study. The teachers were asked to reflect on the storyline process as they perceived it, on their expectations and fears, and on whether these came true or not. The teachers described how they saw the students' participation in the storyline, the level of success in transferring the storyline into reality through reflection, and the benefits of the project both for them

and for the students. The interviews were semi-structured, the teachers participated actively, and in general, they said more than they were asked about. The data were analyzed in the same way as the data from the students.

The applied procedure has its limitations. The diversity that emerged in the student groups (students of different grades participated in the project) and the variety in the way the GSL program was implemented (ranging from 6 to 9 months) imposed significant constraints on the analysis. Further, the sample of students may have been influenced by the teachers' non-reported intention to present a favorable picture of their work, and it is reasonable to suppose that the selected sample consists of students who were generally positive about the project. Because of this, the students may have provided answers which were more positive than their real feelings.

Another limitation of the study was the gender bias, because male teachers' perspectives could not be provided. A more diverse sample of teachers, including also male teachers and teachers with previous experience with the GSL program, would have offered a more complex picture of the impact of the GSL program on students regarding dealing with global issues.

3. Results

3.1. Benefits of the Global Storylines Program for Students and Teachers

Generally, the students talked about their storyline experiences, they enjoyed the GSL project, and they were motivated to see what will happen next. The teachers said that the students participating in the GSL project were more active in other lessons, too:

"It also manifested in other lessons. The children divided the tasks on their own, they were more active."

(5th grade female teacher)

The effect of the GSL program on students' empowerment was observed by some of the respondents, while it was not mentioned by others. Because a qualitative method was used, it cannot be estimated how much the students really felt empowered. However, some of the students' responses clearly demonstrate such an effect:

"I took away that an eleven-year-old can also behave like an adult person".

(boy, 11 years old)

"I like it because we can say something, and then it can develop further from that. We can affect the process a little bit."

(girl, 9 years old)

A crucial element of the GSL program which indicated a high possible impact on perceived students' empowerment emerged in the voting. When students experienced that they were unable to promote their opinion in their "community", it could have negatively impacted their belief in their ability to make a change:

"For somebody who did not succeed in the elections, it can be a lesson for the future. If their candidate failed, they will know they experienced it. When they know they experienced it in childhood, they will experience it in the future, and they will not get engaged."

(boy, 11 years old)

Generally, the age of the students seems to be salient, as all the reflections on being empowered came from older students, while similar comments from younger students were missing. The respondents also tended to link their empowerment with the experienced scenario rather than with real-world issues.

Some of the students emotionally reflected on the "real" aspects of their stories:

> *A girl, 9 years old: "I didn't like that we played...that we were in families and (...), bad news, we left our homes. Then it was packing and then leaving. And I did not like it."*
>
> *Interviewer: "And could you tell me why?"*
>
> *Respondent: "Because if it happened in real life...it would be horribly...horrible."*

While it is difficult to interpret this response, it seems likely that at least some of the students were affected, and their sensitivity to the presented issues was increased. However, these findings were rather marginal, as most of the respondents reflected mainly on what was going on in their scenario.

In addition, the GSL program seems to have encouraged some, though not all, of the respondents to plan their own action to mitigate the presented problem on the level of their community. They were able to understand the global topic in the story and find some connections or some experience related to their home or the local community, but the action remained on the level of their familiar territory. Some of them framed this experience as "training for adulthood", for when the opportunity for a real-life action may come. This feeling of "postponing" the real-life action until adulthood was further supported by the fact that, in contrast to the GSL scenario, some of the classes did not finish the last part, in which actions seeking to mitigate the presented issue were introduced.

Not only the students but also the teachers seemed to have developed their competence due to their experience with the GSL program. They reported obtaining new information and extending their horizons of global awareness. They also developed their teaching skills, particularly for leading a reflection session and implementing drama education. Further, they reported getting to know their students better because they could see them in a different light than they were used to. They had a lot of experiences together when the students who are usually quiet were suddenly able to defend their opinions against the whole class, or they just talked about the things they were experiencing in their lives:

> *"During working on the project, one experienced a lot of beautiful moments because the children are full of fantasy and, simultaneously, they also speak about the things happening in their real lives. I got to know them from another side. … and could realize that some of the reactions of the children are caused by their experiences in real life."*
>
> (3rd to 5th grade female teacher)

In addition, the teachers developed a higher self-confidence and confidence in the students. In particular, through allowing students to participate in shaping the story, they started to trust more in their students' skills. They could see that their students were able to manage difficult situations, and they could also see themselves as being able to manage an unknown and unusual teaching method in their teaching practice:

> *"Several times, I encouraged myself to go through with it and get immersed in the process. That it will work. And it worked. So I gained more courage."*
>
> (4th grade female teacher)

The benefits that were beyond the scope of the evaluation questions but that were also mentioned by the respondents included the development of relationships, teamwork, and communication skills. The respondents were able to get to know each other better, and themselves, too. They were able to express their own point of view among a group of peers. The GSL program seems to have enabled the development of knowledge, skills, and attitudes that were based on the dramatization method chosen.

3.2. Constraints to Implementation of the Global Storylines Program

From the teachers' perspective, the constraint that was often mentioned was the appropriate age for undertaking the storyline. There were two examples that illustrated the two extremes. On the

one side, the scenario *The Giant of Thistle Mountain* was evaluated as too fairy-tale-like and too easy for older students. On the other side, the other stories (*The Water Source* and *Our Crop, Our Land*) were evaluated as being too complicated for younger students. Particularly, the younger respondents were unable to link the story with reality, and in their reflection, they mostly focused just on the most emotional experiences.

Therefore, one reason why students were able to deal with the global issues only in the safe environment of the drama could be the complex nature of some of the stories and the presented global issues. Being overwhelmed by the issues, some of the students felt unable to relate them to the real world by relying on their own effort:

> *"I always knew that the world is not fair, but this proved it totally."*
>
> (boy, 10 years old)

> *"Some people are homeless, some of them caused it themselves, but some of them had no chance to influence it."*
>
> (girl, 11 years old)

At the same time, the process of thinking about global issues could have been further complicated by emerging social dynamics issues. The necessity of solving problems with classmates might actually have limited the students' capacity to reflect on the presented issues and link them with their own lives:

> *"I also didn't like when we wrote various ideas on paper in the groups—for example, the questions for the giant specialist—it did not work with some people in the group. They did not invent anything, looked at what had been written above, and so on."*
>
> (girl, 9 years old)

Nevertheless, most of the students reported that they were satisfied with their role in the story, and that they had an opportunity to shape the story on the same level as their teachers. While the students reported that they would appreciate even more opportunities for their own decision-making, they also questioned their own ability to find a consensus with their classmates. However, some students said that they felt they were being manipulated by their teachers:

> *"The teachers said they would be the mayors. Then they told us we would vote but … they were just a little bit lying to us … They promised it to us, but we got [a vulgar word meaning "nothing"]."*
>
> (boy, 9 years old)

Some level of manipulation was perceived also by the teachers themselves. One of the teachers reported that, due to being inexperienced with this method, she deliberately compromised an opportunity for student decision-making to ensure that the predetermined scenario would be followed:

> *"We wanted to vote the mayor of the city. But in the story guide there is written that the mayor is a teacher, so I did it so that it would end up in this way."*
>
> (3rd grade female teacher)

The teachers tended to be more manipulative at the beginning of the storyline, and then again at the end when they needed to finish with a desirable outcome. The level of the participative approach applied by the teachers seems to have been influenced by the amount of the teachers' experience with dramatization and with the GSL program, and also by their belief in the students' capacity to simulate the situations. Generally, the teachers at least slightly manipulated the story to follow the given scenario, and they admitted that they led the main line of the story and let the students decide the sub-steps.

On the other hand, the teachers mentioned that gaining personal experience with student participation was an important element of the program, and, in the end, it yielded one of the biggest benefits. They were mainly afraid to entrust control to the students because they had not had this experience, and they were not confident that the students could cope with this leading role. Eventually, the teachers found out that they could have confidence in the students. Indeed, the fact that the students were able do more than they had expected was the teachers´ biggest realization:

"The role of the teacher is not always in the way that the teacher must be the most important one. It is good to let the children be the creators of everything. This is my realization."

(4th grade female teacher)

The benefit of gaining experience with student participation was the development of the teachers' confidence in two ways. First, when the teachers realized that the students were able to cope with more tasks or more difficult tasks than the teachers had expected, the teachers were able to grant the students more confidence in their work in general. Second, there was an increase in the teacher's confidence that they could allow more space for the students' growth.

Reflection was another element that posed a constraint at the beginning, and for some teachers, it turned into a benefit over time. Reflection is a keystone in the transfer of the story experience into real life. The first step is the ability to get out of the role and to distinguish between the story and reality [24]. Some of the teachers needed to find a suitable method, for example, using props or community circles. The teachers reported that reflection was hard for them:

"We needed to work on the reflections because we did not do well at the beginning or we did not have enough time to think about them."

(3rd to 5th grade female teacher)

"To be able to ask good questions. This is, I think, very good and very important. And I practiced a lot due to the application of this method. Because when I look back on October, I had all the questions written, and I strictly followed them, and I always went for advice to my colleague to see if she had something better than me. Nowadays, I do not do that, I do not need it."

(4th grade female teacher)

The teachers also reported their hesitation regarding how to lead the reflection, and what should be the output of that process. Not all students seemed to have the ability to participate in this kind of reflection, mainly because of their age. Some of the teachers recognized a lack of their own experience and competence in leading a reflection session.

When the teachers succeeded in using reflection skills, they realized the big benefit of the reflection method for the students' learning:

"The reflections gave me a lot. Talk with the children, talk with the children about the problem, do not let it go, observe the others, do not ignore any idea that comes. Because what seems to be not important at first can be big on second thought. I think I will think often of it."

(4th grade female teacher)

The benefits for teachers consisted of a number of new skills that they acquired, e.g., letting the students participate in the learning process, and using reflection on the experiences and dramatization as learning strategies that can be used in traditional teaching as an activation tool. These strategies were new for some of the teachers, and initially they did not know how to use them well; but with time, they gained the skills and learned to like using them:

"The dramatizations. That was also a big task we had in front of us. We both agreed that it is not our area, but it is necessary and good. That is the horizon that has been extended. I very much like it [dramatization] with the children. It will be wonderful to have more space for it in teaching."

(4th grade female teacher)

Transferring the story experiences into real life was rather rare. This depended on the time the teachers had to finish the story, and on the initiative of the particular teacher. In some cases, the teachers waited to see what the students would come up with:

> *"We have some tips, but we will see what the children will come up with. We want to respect their ideas if they are realistic and we are able to help with the realization in some way. So we are leaving it up to the children."*
>
> (4th grade female teacher)

A frequently mentioned constraint regarding the implementation of the program was related to the time it required. The teachers were worried about being able to fulfill both their regular teaching syllabi and to devote enough time to the storyline and to the students' ideas.

> *"When we started to plan and work, we suddenly recognized that the students had invented a lot of ideas what else to do. They took a plunge into the story, and I had only one hour. So I took one more hour ... They were so interested that the story became longer than I had expected."*
>
> (3rd grade female teacher)

Integrating the GSL program's methods into common lessons seemed to be another constraint. Many teachers set aside separate time for the storylines. Only a few parts were linked with learning in other lessons, and the teachers mentioned that the possible connections occurred during the process or upon completion of the GSL project. It seems that the potential for making these connections is bigger than what was accomplished.

> *"When we learned how to write the letter, I directly applied it in the curriculum in writing. And maybe in civics, when we learned about careers that seem not to exist today because we have not so modern a village as in the story. ... We made connections with the school curriculum when it was possible to cover some of the work that it is obligatory for us to do."*
>
> (3rd grade female teacher)

4. Discussion

Based on the findings, it is probable that the GSL program develops students' interpersonal competence as well as teachers´ motivation to improve their teaching skills. These findings largely correspond with previous evaluations of the GSL program [26,31,41,42].

Other benefits, namely students' empowerment and motivation to participate in responsible actions to mitigate global issues, seem to be less supported, and it is likely that they depend on the specific aspects of the implementation of the GSL program in schools. However, in agreement with what McNaughton [42] has found, these benefits did occur.

While we did not find any evidence of ecophobia, learned despair, or other negative consequences associated with exposing young students to serious global issues [8,13], it was obvious that some of the students felt the emotional burden of the presented issues and struggled with accepting them. Since dealing with emotions is one of the main objectives of dramatization as a teaching method [35], this experience should be appropriately reflected on and discussed with the students. Although they were not frequently mentioned, it is also probable that some of the defensive mechanisms described by Randall [9] or Mabelis [16], notably questioning the reality of the presented issues, could have played a role.

The reason why the number of these kinds of reactions remained limited seems to be connected to the implementation strategy used by the teachers. Similar to what McNaughton [18] found, the reflection sessions were a "hard job" for the teachers, and the reflections that were applied appear to have been limited mainly to what was going in the scenario, while the attempts to transfer this experience to real-world issues were rather rare. Although this could be explained by the reported relative

inexperience of the teachers, it could have also functioned as a safety barrier, protecting the students from being exposed to the unbearable emotional burden of the issues. As a result, the experienced stories became safer for students but less powerful in the original intention to develop students' empowerment regarding dealing with real-world issues. Given this situation, it could be argued that it is necessary to carefully consider the realistic aims of such global-issues-oriented programs for students in this age category.

The results of the analysis suggest that the participation level in decision-making and providing enough opportunity and space for student involvement in the story are the key factors affecting the students' involvement in the whole GSL program. Providing the students with some level of autonomy seems to have a positive impact on the teachers' self-confidence and teaching competence, which corresponds to the findings of Cheon, Reeve, Lee, and Lee [52].

The students' perception of their level of participation seems to be rather ambivalent. Most of them appreciated the autonomy they were granted, but they also commented negatively on the manipulative strategies occasionally applied by the teachers in their effort to keep the story aligned with the given scenario. It may be argued that this ambiguity should not be considered as a failure in the program's implementation, but that it is inherently embodied in the program itself. The aim to have the story co-created by students and to open some of the issues, while at the same time following the imposed procedure, may be a source of tension, which was observed by the students. It could also be argued that this tension affected the way in which the program influenced the students: their feeling of participating in the decision-making empowered them, while their feeling of being directed demotivated them. This kind of relationship between students' autonomy and empowerment has been reported in other studies [53]. As a result, we may see that there are two mechanisms limiting the effect of the GSL program on students' empowerment: limiting the transfers between the story and the real world reduces students' opportunities to realize the reality of the issues, and limiting the space for shaping the story on their own reduces students' motivation to deal with the issues.

Therefore, the GSL program seems to be particularly effective in developing students' competences in cases when most of the competences may be associated with sustainability [54]. However, the GSL program is less effective in fulfilling other sustainability-relevant goals. Given the young age of the students, setting less ambitious goals of the Global Storylines program may be a more sound strategy to follow.

5. Conclusions

Teaching global issues at elementary schools is a contested area with potential opportunities as well as challenges. This study analyzed the effectiveness of the Global Storylines program, focusing on the development of young students' sustainability competences. While the GSL program successfully affected students' interpersonal competence, its effect on students' empowerment seems to be less supported, even though it was evident in some cases. This opens the question of how to develop sustainability competences for these types of students, and in particular, what educational goals are relevant and realistic for them.

While Global Storylines is a promising program, the outcomes of educational interventions aiming to develop elementary school students' sustainability competences should be further investigated.

Author Contributions: Š.K. was responsible for conceptualization of the study, data curation and writing the original version of the manuscript. J.Č. cooperated on conceptualization of the study, data analysis, and writing the manuscript. R.K. cooperated on writing the manuscript and linking its findings to relevant literature.

Funding: The research was founded by the EU project "CIVIS—Focused on Civic and Social Competence", grant number EU: CZ.02.3.68/0.0/0.0/16_011/0000672.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

References

1. UNESCO. *Issues and Trends in Education for Sustainable Development*; UNESCO Publishing: Paris, France, 2018; p. 276.
2. Toh, S.; Shaw, G.; Padilla, D. *Global Citizenship Education: A Guide for Policymakers*; APCEIU: Seoul, Korea, 2017; p. 71.
3. Rickinson, M. Learners and learning in environmental education: A critical review of the evidence. *Environ. Educ. Res.* **2001**, *7*, 207–320. [CrossRef]
4. Pruneau, D.; Gravel, H.; Bourque, W.; Langis, J. Experimentation with a socio-constructivist process for climate change education. *Environ. Educ. Res.* **2003**, *9*, 429–446. [CrossRef]
5. Niebert, K.; Gropengießer, H. Understanding the greenhouse effect by embodiment–Analysing and using students' and scientists' conceptual resources. *Int. J. Sci. Educ.* **2014**, *36*, 277–303. [CrossRef]
6. Yurttaş, G.D.; Sülün, Y. What are the most important environmental problems according to the second grade primary school students? *Procedia Soc. Behav. Sci.* **2010**, *2*, 1605–1609. [CrossRef]
7. People in Need. *One World at Schools. Questionnaire Survey Report at Schools in 2012 Compared to Year 2009*; People in Need: Prague, Czech Republic; Millward Brown: London, UK, 2012.
8. Nagel, M. Constructing apathy: How environmentalism and environmental education may be fostering 'learned hopelessness' in children. *Aust. J. Environ. Educ.* **2005**, *21*, 71–80. [CrossRef]
9. Randall, R. Loss and climate change: The cost of parallel narratives. *Ecopsychology* **2009**, *1*, 118–129. [CrossRef]
10. Grund, J.; Brock, A. Why We Should Empty Pandora's Box to Create a Sustainable Future: Hope, Sustainability and Its Implications for Education. *Sustainability* **2019**, *11*, 893. [CrossRef]
11. Fritsche, I.; Hafner, K. The malicious effects of existential threat on motivation to protect the natural environment and the role of environmental identity as a moderator. *Environ. Behav.* **2012**, *44*, 570–590. [CrossRef]
12. Lowe, T.; Brown, K.; Dessai, S.; De França Doria, M.; Haynes, K.; Vincent, K. Does tomorrow ever come? Disaster narrative and public perceptions of climate change. *Public Underst. Sci.* **2006**, *15*, 435–457. [CrossRef]
13. Sobel, D. Beyond Ecophobia: Reclaiming the Heart in Nature Education. *Nat. Study* **1999**, *49*, 4–12.
14. Strife, S.J. Children's environmental concerns: Expressing ecophobia. *J. Environ. Educ.* **2012**, *43*, 37–54. [CrossRef]
15. Barraza, L. Children's drawings about the environment. *Environ. Educ. Res.* **1999**, *5*, 49–66. [CrossRef]
16. Mabelis, A.A. Children's Opinions about the Loss of Nature. *S. Afr. J. Environ. Educ.* **2005**, *22*, 123–136.
17. Wintersteiner, W.; Grobbauer, H.; Diendorfer, G.; Reitmair-Juárez, S. *Global Citizenship Education. Citizenship Education for Globalizing Societies*; Austrian Commission for UNESCO: Klagenfurt, Austria, 2015.
18. NCDO. *Global Citizenship in Primary and Secondary Education in the Netherlands*; NCDO: Amsterdam, The Netherlands, 2012.
19. Buchanan, J.; Burridge, N.; Chodkiewicz, A. Maintaining Global Citizenship Education in Schools: A Challenge for Australian Educators and Schools. *Aust. J. Teach. Educ.* **2018**, *43*, 51–67. [CrossRef]
20. Larsen, M.; Faden, L. Supporting the Growth of Global Citizenship Educators. *Brock Educ.* **2008**, *17*, 71–86. [CrossRef]
21. Mezirow, J. Transformative learning: Theory to practice. *New Dir. Adult Contin. Educ.* **1997**, *74*, 5–12. [CrossRef]
22. Opertti, R.; Kang, H.; Magni, G. *Global Citizenship Education Tools and Piloting Experiences of Four Countries: Cambodia, Colombia, Mongolia and Uganda*; IBE-UNESCO: Geneva, Switzerland; APCEIU: Seoul, Korea, 2018.
23. Rogina, A.; Benedek, G.; Haddad, K.; Trdin, T. *A Handbook on Global Education, Theatre Pedagogy and Peer Education*; Humanitas–Centre for Global Learning and Cooperation: Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2018.
24. McNaughton, M.J. From Acting to Action: Developing Global Citizenship through Global Storylines Drama. *J. Environ. Educ.* **2014**, *45*, 16–36. [CrossRef]
25. Bell, S.; Harkness, S.; White, G. (Eds.) *Storyline: Past, Present and Future*; Enterprising Careers University of Strathclyde: Glasgow, Scotland, UK, 2007.
26. Marova, I.; Slepickova, L. I like dealing with things as an adult–Global Storylines as a form of global education. *Lifelong Learn.* **2016**, *6*, 9–25. [CrossRef]
27. McNaughton, M.J. We Know How They Feel: Global Storylines as Transformative, Ecological Learning. In *Learning for Sustainability in Times of Accelerating Change*; Wals, A.E.J., Corcoran, P.B., Eds.; Wageningen Academic Publishers: Wageningen, The Netherlands, 2012; pp. 457–476.

28. Selly, N. *The Art of Constructivist Teaching in the Primary School: A Guide for Students and Teachers*; David Fulton Publishers: London, UK, 1999.
29. Wals, A.E.; Corcoran, P.B. (Eds.) *Learning for Sustainability in Times of Accelerating Change*; Academic Pub: Wageningen, The Netherlands, 2012.
30. Aviram, R. *Navigating through the Storm: Reinventing Education for Postmodern Democracies*; Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2010.
31. Vadurova, H.; Slepickova, L. Global isues and inclusion in elementary education: Global Storylines approach and its benefit for students and teachers. In *Present Trends in Inclusive Education Oriented to Students with Special Educational Needs in Czech Republic and Abroad—Theory, Research, Practice*, 1st ed.; Zámečníková, D., Vítková, M., Eds.; Masaryk University: Brno, Czech Republic, 2015; ISBN 978-80-210-8098-0.
32. Moon, J.A. *Using Story in Higher Education and Professional Development*; Routledge: Oxon, UK, 2010.
33. Curtis, D.J.; Howden, M.; Curtis, F.; McColm, I.; Scrine, J.; Blomfield, T.; Reeve, I.; Ryan, T. Drama and Environment: Joining Forces to Engage Children and Young People in Environmental Education. *Aust. J. Environ. Educ.* **2013**, *29*, 182–201. [CrossRef]
34. Brown, V. Drama as a valuable learning medium in early childhood. *Arts Educ. Policy Rev.* **2017**, *118*, 164–171. [CrossRef]
35. Brouillette, L. How the arts help children to create healthy social scripts: Exploring the perceptions of elementary teachers. *Arts Educ. Policy Rev.* **2010**, *111*, 16–24. [CrossRef]
36. McNaughton, M.J. Relationships in Educational Drama: A Pedagogical Model. In *Key Concepts in Theatre/Drama Education*; Schonmann, S., Ed.; Sense Publishers: Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2011; pp. 125–131.
37. Bolton, G.M. *New Perspectives on Classroom Drama*; Nelson Thornes Ltd.: London, UK, 1992.
38. Fleming, M.; Merrell, C.; Tymms, P. The impact of drama on pupils' language, mathematics, and attitude in two primary schools. *Res. Drama Educ.* **2004**, *9*, 177–197. [CrossRef]
39. Dora To, L.W.; Phoebe Chan, Y.L.; Lam, Y.K.; Tsang, S.K.Y. Reflections on a primary school teacher professional development programme on learning English through process drama. *Res. Drama Educ. J. Appl. Theatre Perform.* **2011**, *16*, 517–539. [CrossRef]
40. McNaughton, M.J. Drama and Children's writing: A study of the influence of drama on the imaginative writing of primary school children. *Res. Drama Educ.* **1997**, *2*, 55–86. [CrossRef]
41. McNaughton, M.J. Educational drama in the teaching of education for sustainability. *Environ. Educ. Res.* **2004**, *10*, 139–155. [CrossRef]
42. McNaughton, M.J. Learning from participants' responses in educational drama in the teaching of Education for Sustainable Development. *Res. Drama Educ.* **2006**, *11*, 19–41. [CrossRef]
43. Bruner, J.S. The act of discovery. *Harv. Educ. Rev.* **1961**, *31*, 21–32.
44. Bruner, J.S. *Actual Minds, Possible Worlds*; Harvard University Press: Cambridge, MA, USA, 1996.
45. Bolton, G.M. *Acting in Classroom Drama: A Critical Analysis*; Trentham Books Ltd.: Stoke on Trent, UK, 1998.
46. Kolb, D. *Experiential Learning: Experience as the Source of Learning and Development*; Prentice-Hall: Englewood Cliffs, NJ, USA, 1984.
47. Huckle, J. *Educating for Sustainability: A Guide for Primary Schools*; National Primary Trust: Birmingham, UK, 2002.
48. Rabiee, F. Focus-group interview and data analysis. *Proc. Nutr. Soc.* **2004**, *63*, 655–660. [CrossRef]
49. Morgan, D.L.; Krueger, R.A. When to use focus groups and why. *Success. Focus Groups Adv. State Art* **1993**, *1*, 3–19.
50. Patton, M.Q. *Qualitative Research and Evaluation Methods*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2002.
51. Saldana, J. *The Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*; Sage: Thousand Oaks, CA, USA, 2015.
52. Cheon, S.H.; Reeve, J.; Lee, Y.; Lee, J.W. Why Autonomy-supportive Interventions Work: Explaining the Professional Development of Teachers' Motivating Style. *Teach. Teach. Educ.* **2018**, *69*, 43–51. [CrossRef]
53. Cincera, J.; Boeve-de Pauw, J.; Goldman, D.; Simonova, P. Emancipatory or instrumental? Students' and teachers' perception of the EcoSchool program. *Environ. Educ. Res.* **2018**, 1–22. [CrossRef]
54. Wiek, A.; Withycombe, L.; Redman, C.L. Key competencies in sustainability: A reference framework for academic program development. *Sustain. Sci.* **2011**, *6*, 203–218. [CrossRef]

© 2019 by the authors. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).