

The State of Play: How is learning taking place in a WIA environment

A tool that enables educators and other stakeholders to explore, discuss, evaluate, and even select and implement pedagogical approaches and create learning situations relevant to a WIA.

The tool is inspired by an activity proposed by Jane Edwards (2018) in her book “*Socially-critical Environmental Education in Primary Classrooms. The Dance of Structure and Agency*”.

We present a revised form of this tool, which includes criteria relevant with a WIA approach to teaching and learning (fig. 1 – please see at the end of the text!). The tool includes eight criteria, namely:

- 1) Learning through collaboration and co-operation
- 2) Learning within social and environmental context
- 3) Participatory learning
- 4) Culturally responsive and inclusive learning environment
- 5) Action-oriented learning
- 6) Constructivistic/experiential learning
- 7) socio-critical/reflective learning
- 8) interdisciplinarity

Suggested uses of the tool

The degree to which an educational practice conforms to each of these criteria, on a scale from 0 (not at all) to 1 (closely), can be used to construct a ‘state of play’ diagram for a specific educational practice, a project, or the whole institution.

The tool can also be used as part of the educational development of educators or other stakeholders, in two versions:

- i) Participants in a professional development seminar can be asked to design an educational intervention, or an educational project on a specific theme. Then, their peers in the seminar can evaluate the suitability of the educational proposal for a WIA context by constructing the “state of play” diagram.
- ii) Participants in a seminar can be provided with the following three fictional scenarios and they can construct the “state of the play” for each scenario. Then they can compare their diagrams and discuss points of agreement and disagreement.

Scenario 1

The teachers have decided to design a project for third graders focused on the local plants growing around their school. The programme will include elements from science (such as food chains and ecosystems) as well as other subjects like geography and language. A member of the local community will be invited to share traditional uses of native plants, and there will be guided walks with experts who will explain the role of plants in local ecosystems.

Pupils will select plants they can grow in the school garden. Working in groups, they will choose a topic to explore and present their findings as posters, which will be displayed for parents and other visitors to view. The planting will be done with possible support from parents and other members of the community.

Main Pedagogical Features

- Teachers define the learning objectives and the evaluation process.
- In some cases, students have flexibility in how they achieve these objectives.
- Teachers take into account students’ interests and existing knowledge.
- The project is primarily focused on building knowledge that deepens students’ understanding of the environment.
- The programme maintains strong connections with the school curriculum and integrates content from multiple subjects.

- There is communication with members of the wider community, and visits are organized to local community areas.
- The programme offers opportunities for pupils to explore their community's environment and develop insights into the natural world.
- Learning takes place mainly through exploration, problem-solving, and collaborative activities.
- Students have the option to choose some activities, always within the framework of the programme's objectives.
- A final assessment is conducted, evaluating both the outcomes of the work and the skills developed throughout the project.
- Parents are involved in some of the activities.

Scenario 2

At a local community meeting that includes students, some pupils suggest ideas for an environmental project. Following the meeting, mixed-age student groups develop more concrete proposals. One group suggests creating community gardens featuring local plants, particularly in underserved areas of the neighborhood.

With support from teachers as needed, the group begins by working together to deepen their understanding of the project. They consult with experts, local residents, gardeners, and landowners. Their programme involves collecting seeds of native plants, designing garden layouts, and developing nurseries.

Throughout the process, teachers provide ongoing assessments for students and their parents, focusing on the skills being developed.

Key Pedagogical Features

- Learning takes place through active participation in the community.
- Student decision-making is a central element throughout the entire process.
- Students come to understand that knowledge is built through experience and both individual and collective reflection.
- Learning is a shared journey between students and teachers.
- Collaboration is a core aspect of the learning process.

- Student groups are made up of different age levels and also include members of the wider community.
- The programme goes beyond the standard curriculum, enriching it with deeper learning opportunities.
- Teachers monitor the programme to ensure that students develop essential skills, gain insight into the relationship between society and nature, and reflect on the impact of their own actions.
- Assessment is primarily formative, supporting ongoing growth and development.

Scenario 3

A teacher designs a course for sixth-grade students with the goal—aligned with the curriculum—of helping them understand the concept of scientific inquiry. To support this, the teacher selects appropriate books and websites to help students explore the question, “How does science work?” A parent who is a scientist is invited to give a classroom talk about their work, providing real-world context.

Students will share their initial ideas with the class, and the teacher will guide a whole-class discussion to help refine and deepen their understanding. Following this, students will conduct a survey of local plant life in the neighborhood. The teacher prepares guiding questions to help students focus their research, considering available class time and the school's laboratory resources.

At the end of the project, students will complete a written report based on the teacher's instructions.

Main Educational Features

- The teacher defines the topic and content of the project.
- The project adheres closely to curriculum guidelines.
- Knowledge is acquired through reliable, approved sources.
- The teacher maintains control over all aspects of the project, including content, purpose, and assessment.
- Grades are assigned based on the criteria set by the education system.

