



Implementing the Primary Strategy is an opportunity for professional development.' With these words, Dr Maureen Lewis, the Eastern Region Director for the *Primary Strategy*, urged teachers, at a recent conference in Essex, to regard the recently-released Primary Strategy support materials as resources to be used and developed in order to create improved learning opportunities for teachers as well as pupils.

She stressed that *Excellence and Enjoyment* has clarified key principles of learning and teaching rather than prescribed particular teaching methods. As she reminded us, a central aim of the *Primary Strategy* is to provide a guide for teaching that will help children develop into more confident, enthusiastic and effective learners who are prepared for a future that is increasingly hard to predict. Teachers are being encouraged to be innovative and creative as they implement the new strategy.

Imagination and learning

Tim Taylor and **Brian Edmiston** explain how teachers using 'the mantle of the expert' approach to education can harness children's imagination to transform their engagement with learning

The units outlined in the support materials, she emphasised, should not be used as formats for teaching, but rather regarded as starting points for teachers to adapt and extend in their particular situations while recognising the different needs of the children in their schools.

As a primary teacher, completing my tenth year in the classroom, I enthusiastically welcome this new initiative. I do so not only because the *Primary Strategy* recognises that children's education needs to be engaging, challenging, imaginative and exciting, but also because the strategy is an affirmation of teaching as a creative process through which we can develop our professional expertise.

I embrace the challenge of implementing the *Primary Strategy*. I feel encouraged by the government to think differently about how we might teach and design learning opportunities in our classrooms. I am gratified that there is now a clear recognition that we cannot use a 'one size fits all' approach to learning and teaching. I feel energised by a call to explore systems of teaching which aim at helping children develop the sorts of knowledge, skills, understandings and attitudes to learning that they will need to prepare for their future.

Toward innovation in our teaching

For the past three years I have collaborated with my colleagues at Tuckswold First School as we have begun to

use a highly innovative and creative approach to education that can transform children's engagement with learning. The *Mantle of the Expert* approach (as Brian Edmiston outlines in the accompanying commentary) has been developed over several decades by Dorothy Heathcote, one of Europe's most original and far-sighted educational thinkers and practitioners. We have been using this approach in different ways and at different times with children across the entire age range from Reception to Year Three. Tuckswood is a one-form entry school in the centre of a council estate in Norwich. We have 105 children on role with about 40% of children receiving free school meals. My class is mix of Years 2 and 3.

We were introduced to the *Mantle of the Expert* (MoE) approach when we observed Luke Abbott teaching an INSET course. Luke is a lead senior adviser for teaching and learning in Essex. We were so captivated by the educational possibilities of his teaching that we applied for funding from the Best Practice Research Scholarship in order to begin a teacher-research project into how we could use MoE in our classrooms. Luke was our consultant.

As a staff, with the leadership of Sue Eagle our head teacher, we have always been interested in developing ways of teaching and learning that engage children emotionally and require them to act with reason. For ten years we have been developing our use of philosophical enquiry through the *Philosophy for Children* programme (P4C) which is a method for encouraging children to think for themselves. We know that this approach influences all areas of children's learning because we have seen continuing enhancements to children's reasoning skills, independence and confidence as learners. We were delighted with the way children worked together in our Friday morning philosophy sessions. We wanted to see that same high level of commitment and collaboration going on throughout the week.

In the past three years, MoE has become an important part of the way we teach. None of us uses MoE all of the time and it suits some teacher's styles more than others. However, teaching using the *Mantle of the Expert* approach has been exciting and challenging for all of us. The curriculum is, to a large extent, integrated so that learning takes place in meaningful contexts where the children are engaged and motivated by the work.

Recently, we obtained funding from the DfES Innovations Unit to expand our teacher-research programme. Along with Emma Hamilton-Smith, one of my Tuckswood

colleagues, I have established a group with eleven other teachers from five Norfolk schools and one teacher from Suffolk – all of whom are committed to meeting regularly in order to share and learn from reflections on our practice. Luke Abbott, who has agreed to continue to support and collaborate with us, has been joined by his long-time colleague Dr. Brian Edmiston, a professor of education at Ohio State University in the USA, who often visits the UK.

Meaningful contexts for learning

Dorothy Heathcote (1991) has always stressed that learning will only be meaningful to children when they experience intrinsic purposes for their classroom activities. She notes that children spend most of their school life 'practising' for a future that seems to have little relevance to their present lives and doing tasks designed by adults that seem to have no real purpose other than to be finished. As Bolton (2003, p126) puts it, Heathcote bemoans the fact that children 'exist in a limbo of learning which relies solely on the de-functioning maxim that *one day, you'll be good enough to really do it, but never today*'. This echoes the words of educational philosopher John Dewey: 'I believe that education, therefore, is a process of living and not a preparation for future living'. He expands on this theme, writing:

'I believe that much of present education fails because it neglects this fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life. It conceives the school as a place where certain information is to be given, where certain lessons are to be learned, or where certain habits are to be formed. The value of these is conceived as lying largely in the remote future; the child must do these things for the sake of something else he is to do; they are mere preparation. As a result they do not become a part of the life experience of the child and so are not truly educative.'



The *Mantle of the Expert* approach requires that pupils and teacher interact as colleagues to create a learning community with meaningful contexts and purposes for classroom activities. MoE operates in contexts that are meaningful primarily in a fictional world which is experienced and created over time through

sequences of activities. Children function as if they operate with the *frame* of imagining themselves to be a particular group of *experts* who run a fictional, collegiate enterprise dealing with the needs of their clients.

This year I've been using *MoE* to explore with my class the effects of the first century Roman invasions on the indigenous Iceni Celtic people. The children work as if they are archaeologists and at times I work alongside them – also as if I am an archaeologist. At the beginning of the drama they all agreed that they would operate as if they had been commissioned by the *Norfolk Archaeological Society* to excavate a recently discovered Iceni site and give their opinion on whether or not it might be the previously undiscovered tomb of Boudicca and her daughters.

To introduce the world of archaeologists to the children I read a letter that I had created, as if written from the Society to a group of archaeologists. The letter was displayed in the classroom and, over the next few weeks, the children asked to refer to it repeatedly in order to seek guidance about how to approach activities ranging from labelling a map to drawing an artefact or to making an imagined phone call. The letter was an example of how the needs of a client can create long-term purposes for many short and long-term classroom activities that build a fictional world when experts enquire and act on behalf of clients.

Agreeing to the fiction

It is important to stress that when using *MoE* we are never tricking children. The idea is not to kid the children into believing that they are actually archaeologists or that the clients are real when they are not. Just as we cannot make children play, we cannot make them imagine that they are experts. However, when sequences of *MoE* activities do engage the children then they will sustain work that can extend over several weeks or months.

For young children *MoE* is similar to pretend play; they are aware that they have agreed to act and interact as if they have entered a fictional world. They know it is their responsibility to maintain the pretence of interacting as if they are the people whose lives they are imagining. As Heathcote notes: 'This system seems to me much closer to real play, which the children invent for themselves and stop when they tire of it' (Heathcote and Bolton, 1996, p. 18).

Over the past three years I have gradually extended the length of time that I have used *MoE*. Once an enterprise is up and running I have found that it tends to be self-sustaining. I have found that introducing a new *MoE* activity is the most challenging part of it. However, I have discovered that when the initial activities feel exciting, dangerous or mysterious the children become engaged more quickly and more intensely.

The archaeology project

After reading my letter from the *Norfolk Archaeological Society* the children were interested in the idea of excavating a tomb – especially when we brainstormed and looked at books about what we might find in the ground. All of the children were eager to draw and label pictures of whatever they would like to find: swords, arrows, jewellery and pottery. Many were drawn into the idea of digging because they might find skeletons.

As a follow-up to the drawing activity, I wanted the pupils to encounter an image of what the tomb might have looked like once it had been uncovered by the archaeologists. Maddi Chase, a colleague of mine, had drawn three life-sized skeletons on a large sheet of paper. We placed these on the floor of the hall during lunch time, and surrounded them with the drawings previously made by the children. The idea was that the sheets of paper would collectively represent a tomb with artefacts that could have been laid there by the Iceni people. As with the ancient Egyptian civilisation, archaeologists have actually speculated that artefacts may have been placed in royal tombs to accompany the dead person journeying to the spirit world.

Though we had worked hard to create an interesting image of a tomb, we had to work even harder to engage the children as archaeologists. After lunch they were excited about the idea of seeing the tomb that they had only individually imagined. However, as the children stood outside the hall waiting to enter the 'tomb', there were lots of giggles but little evidence that they were thinking of themselves as archaeologists preparing for an important dig.

At this point my questioning and responses helped edge the children into imagining themselves as archaeologists with their equipment.

- *Have we all got our equipment ready? What are you holding there? A camera.*
- *Good. Has anyone else got a camera?*
- *Good.*
- *As you know, we must record everything before we start moving things.*
- *Has anyone brought a video camera? Excellent.*
- *I think the press are going to be very interested in this find.*

I knew that the children had begun to imagine that they were carrying the archaeological equipment they needed because they held up imaginary equipment for me and their 'colleagues' to see. This simple but powerfully-engaging activity reactivated the expert *frame* that we had begun to build the previous day through the drawings.

One at a time, I let the children enter the tomb where Maddi was waiting to meet them. She and I continued to speak to them using appropriate specialist language and were sure to treat them with the adult seriousness that archaeologists would use toward one another. As more people entered the tomb with their imagined objects in their hands, I could sense the levels of commitment rising.

On tables around the room we had laid out the type of equipment used by archaeologists: small brushes, sealable bags and labels. As the 'archaeologists' began to explore the tomb they began to use the equipment: sweeping away the dust and dirt, labelling and recording the different objects. They took photographs.

All of the children were engaged with the sort of serious attention to detail and care that you would expect of archaeologists. As they worked we started to discuss the find. We speculated over whether or not the skeletons might be the remains of Boudicca and her daughters. Different children tried to work out how these people might have died and how long they might have been in the ground.



I found it very interesting that the children did not sustain their serious tone later in the classroom. Having returned from the hall to record the evidence that we had discovered in the tomb by drawing artist's impressions from photographs and labelling the artefacts, the children were chatting, giggling, telling each other jokes, and talking about football. Though at first I wanted them to behave with an adult seriousness, in retrospect I realised that, because these activities were much closer to everyday classroom tasks, children had *framed* themselves as pupils rather than archaeologists.

Yet the archaeological frame persisted to give the work an authentic sense of purpose. In talking with the children and overhearing their conversations it was clear that they

understood why and for whom they were doing their tasks. Though to a casual observer it might have looked as if the children were doing a pleasant task set by the teacher but largely meaningless beyond the classroom, the children regarded their work as a job that had to be done on time and to a high standard.

Setting high standards

Once an enterprise is up and running, it is the commission from the client that drives the need to know and the need to do. As in the everyday world, fictional clients can have tough demands and deadlines that won't go away. These fictional demands, rather than those of the teacher or of the amorphous National Curriculum, act as a focus, a reason and a standard for the children's work.

Two years ago in the classroom, the children and I ran an enterprise that the children named *The Star Company*. They invented a history for the company that included various 'Great Films.' The commission which drove most of our curriculum work was from a fictional company called *DreamWorks* to make an action film about the Egyptian myth of Seth and Osiris.



After receiving the commission, the children, working as expert filmmakers, began the many tasks involved in making a film. They researched the story and the lives of the ancient Egyptians; they started writing the script and making costumes; they designed the sets and made masks. Everything was going well when, quite unexpectedly, they received an email from *DreamWorks* threatening to stop production of the film and withholding the extra \$5 million needed to complete the project. *DreamWorks* said they were unhappy about the film going over budget and in two weeks they were going to send over Mr Lance, one of their top executives, to see whether the film was worth their continued investment.

This created a new sense of urgency inside *The Star Company* for film makers to complete their work and justify their expenditures. They had two weeks to finish the scripts, make rushes of the film, and prepare PowerPoint presentations to demonstrate the progress they were making.

I asked my dad (who is a retired head teacher) to come into class to play the role of Mr Lance, the executive. On the day of his visit, the filmmakers gave Mr Lance a tour of their place of work. They showed him the sets and the props, the costumes, rushes of the film, presentations about their work and previous projects. They answered his questions and spoke with confidence and understanding about their belief that the film would be worth *DreamWorks'* continued investment. They knew what they were doing and why they were doing it. Mr Lance left impressed. After the weekend *The Star Company* received an email from *DreamWorks* instructing them to restart production and to complete the film within six weeks – which they did.

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Evaluations of Mantle of the Expert

I think it's important to regularly assess the children's feelings and thoughts about our work. I need to know whether or not they are still enjoying the work because if the children become bored or disengaged then it is time either to change activities or to shift our focus entirely. I talk to them daily about our work and make sure that I gather more formal evaluations each half-term. Here are some quotes from our last evaluation in February 2005:

- *'It's fun because you never really get to do stuff when you're little ... when you're doing archaeology you feel like you're an adult because when I do it I feel like I'm a grown up actually doing it. So I use my imagination and actually do it and it helps you because you feel what you'd like to do when you're an adult.'* Sasha (7)

- *'Everything we've learnt, everything you've taught us, we have to put to the test, 'cause I remember when we were trying to save that man from the space rocket we had to use everything we had learnt to save him.'* Bobby (8)
- *'Making it more exciting helps you learn better ... because we're doing it ourselves. If we read it out of a book we would learn stuff, but we wouldn't learn how we would do it ... when you act it out it's like your own story you're doing ... It's fun because you all get to do stuff, it's not like a boring teacher saying do work, do this work, all boring work. This is work, but it's like fun work, it's creative stuff.'* Sasha
- *'But if you're like us, children, then you won't know that already until you've have actually tried what it is about ... it gives you experience to learn about things ... it makes it fun for us and helps the teachers. Also it helps us learn because if you act it out it gives you experience of what you are actually doing.'* Sian (8)
- *'You want to make it more exciting because we won't learn something if we think its boring ... We wouldn't want to learn if it wasn't fun ... that's what all this Roman stuff is about, we're actually wanting to learn. That's the thing that we like.'* Bobby (8)

OFSTED also approves. During the four days of our last inspection in February 2004, teachers continued working as usual with the children using the *Mantle of the Expert* approach. These are some highlights from the report:



- Throughout the school, much work is very successfully undertaken through *Mantle of the Expert* enterprises, a way of working that makes learning very real, uses drama to work through problems and cuts across curriculum subjects as the children lead the direction of their learning, becoming 'experts' in the enterprises they invent. When the tasks omit planned aspects of individual subjects, these are taught separately.
- The use of investigations through drama (*Mantle of the Expert*) has extended imaginative thinking and children make rapid progress in their speaking and listening skills.

Looking forward

I hope I have given you an insight into why I have become committed to using the *Mantle of the Expert* approach to education. I have outlined how it promotes pupil engagement through creating meaningful contexts for learning and authentic purposes for activities. *MoE* makes cross-curricular planning easier and allows me to set high standards for work in a way that children respond to very enthusiastically.

Using the *Mantle of the Expert* approach has led me to seriously re-examine my relationship with pupils and with the curriculum. I could no longer teach without drawing on the imaginative potential of classroom life. I see the value of interacting with pupils as colleagues running an enterprise and now, when I read the National Curriculum, I keep imagining possible enterprises that I might run in the future.

I have found using the *Mantle of the Expert* approach an extremely challenging way to work. I know that it is neither a 'quick fix' for everyday classroom challenges nor a universal remedy for the problems facing our education system. However, it is a pedagogical method that puts learners at the centre of their own education. The *Mantle of the Expert* approach stimulates teachers and pupils to be resourceful, co-operative and creative.

Tim Taylor is an AST teacher at Tuckswood Community First School. This year he has been working with a class of years 2 and 3.

He is running an introductory day with Luke Abbott on the *Mantle of the Expert* approach to education in London on 24 June 2005. Details from DialogueWorks: www.dialogueworks.co.uk



References

- Bolton, Gavin. *Dorothy Heathcote's Story: The Biography of a Remarkable Drama Teacher* (Trentham Books, 2003)
- Heathcote, Dorothy. *Collected writings on Education and Drama* (Northwestern University Press, 1991)
- Heathcote, Dorothy & Gavin Bolton. *Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education* (Greenwood Press, 1996)
- Dewey, John. *My Pedagogic Creed*, *The School Journal*, Volume LIV, Number 3 (January 16, 1897), pages 77-80. (Available online at: <http://www.infed.org/archives/e-texts/e-dew-pc.htm>)

Relevant websites

- Tuckswood school website: www.Tuckswood.co.uk
- Tuckswood OFSTED report: www.creativecorner.co.uk/schools/tuckswood/Information/Ofsted.html
- The Star Company website (2004 mantle of the expert enterprise in my classroom): www.creative-corner.co.uk/schools/tuckswood/star_company/
- For resources on *MoE*, photographs of children engaged in the work and a forum for interested teachers please visit our research group website: www.imaginative-enquiry.co.uk



Commentary on the Mantle of the Expert approach to education

When teachers use the *Mantle of the Expert* (MoE) approach, they create conditions in their classrooms for children to learn as people do in their everyday lives – from and with others in tasks, activities, and practices that draw on, and extend, their existing expertise.

Children gradually take on a ‘mantle’ of expertise as they adopt the viewpoints and responsibilities of experienced, professional adults who collaborate to run a fictional enterprise. When children collectively take on a mantle of expertise, they frame their relationships with other people and with any area of study quite differently than they tend to do when they see themselves as ‘pupils’. In MoE, children have a stance of competence yet are open to new learning.

MoE breeds *engagement* because it harnesses children’s enthusiasms and abilities for imagining that they are *capable* people in a community (like a group of archaeologists) doing the sort of interesting things that those people would do (like uncovering and entering an ancient tomb as well as imagining the life of ancient Roman and Iceni peoples).

MoE can transform classroom relationships and build community. Over time, as children engage in self-motivated and collaborative activities, they build identification with a classroom learning community that is focused on authentic tasks, activities, and practices.

The enterprise can form a locus for any classroom activity and any part of the curriculum. Whatever might reasonably be needed by the enterprise becomes a possible short-term task or longer-term activity. For example, Tim’s team of archaeologists had to create an annotated map of the site they were investigating and write letters to ask for permission to dig in a farmer’s field. Thus, by planning MoE scenarios that require children to use or learn knowledge and skills that are part of the school curriculum, teachers are harnessing children’s enthusiasms for ‘playing the experts’ to support agreed curricular objectives.

Learning and teaching through MoE is always *socially supported*. Children can always work with or seek help from other people who, in the fictional context, have relevant expertise. In this way, the teacher and other adults can support learning and teaching. Pupils are also encouraged to share their knowledge and skills as they collaborate on on-going activities.

MoE creates *contexts* for learning and teaching where pupils are keenly aware of authentic purposes for all activities. Those contexts do not *give* children any more expert knowledge or skill but rather create fictional opportunities that *activate* the knowledge, skills, and understanding that they already have and that *motivates* them to develop new facets of their expertise and thus new knowledge, skills, and understanding.

Whereas children frequently feel that they are only doing work for their teacher with no relation to everyday life, in MoE they are engaged in work that has been commissioned by a *client* that has very real connections to life outside the classroom. Further, it is the needs of clients, rather than the teacher or the curriculum, that create the felt purpose for all pupils’ activities

Taking on a mantle of expertise is about more than adopting a professional attitude to work. For Dorothy Heathcote, MoE always means that we should be responsible for our actions and thus learn about what it means to be ethical in how we use our expertise. With MoE we can ensure that children are part of a community that is committed to the highest ethical standards. Equally, just as in everyday life, children can deepen their understanding of the moral dimension to learning when they explore, from the inside, situations that contain moral dilemmas.

The *Mantle of the Expert* approach is much more than a collection of ideas or activities. It is a pedagogical system that could revolutionise education. Perhaps it is most innovative because there is a ‘continuous goal of raising the students’ awareness of how responsibility arising from the particular expertise is part of a value system’ (Heathcote & Bolton, 1996, p. 24).

Brian Edmiston, a former primary and secondary teacher, is a professor of education at Ohio State University where he directs the *Teaching and Learning with Drama* programme.

References

Heathcote, Dorothy & Gavin Bolton. *Drama for Learning: Dorothy Heathcote’s Mantle of the Expert Approach to Education* (Greenwood Press, 1996)

The Norfolk Archaeological Services
Norwich Museum
Castle Meadow
Norwich
NR1 3RP
12 November 2004

Dear Archaeology Team

I am contacting you about the exciting work you have been doing on the excavation site in Caister St Edmunds.

We are still recording all the wonderful finds, both Roman and Iceni, that you have uncovered in the tomb and under Mr Brown's fields.

Although there is no conclusive proof that the tomb is definitely that of Queen Boudicca and her daughters, it is nevertheless a very important find and we are all very excited at the museum. We believe people from all over the country will be interested in this historical find and so the directors of the Norfolk Archaeological Services are proposing to build a visitors' centre on the site.

We want the centre to be an interesting, interactive and educational experience for the people visiting it, with artefacts on display from the site along with background information about the Roman and Iceni people who lived in the area.

We think it would be an exciting idea to have interactive computer programmes for children to use, detailing the way people lived two thousand years ago. Around the centre we would like people to see bright and colourful displays and maps to illustrate the history of the site and the way the landscape has changed over time from the original Iceni settlement, to the Roman town, then to the present day.

There will also be a free magazine that children can take away with them, with games, activities and facts about the Romans and Iceni. Of course, in order to attract people to the centre it will need to be a fun and colourful space with lots to see and do.

As the team that excavated the site and discovered the 'Queen's Tomb' we think it is very important that you are involved in this project. I know that you are always very busy, but we would very much appreciate your input into the planning and designing of the centre.

If you think you would like to take part in this exciting project then please let me know and I will be back in touch with more details soon.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration in this matter.

Yours sincerely
Mrs Alex Campbell