

THE APPROACH TO LEARNING: AN OVERVIEW

RATIONALE

At Robin Hood School we are concerned with enabling children to become 'independent learners'. In a fast-changing world it is essential that children 'learn how to learn', and it is our contention that a learner-centred, skills-based approach is the main way for us to achieve this, linked to the maximum use of I.T. (Please refer to the I.T. policy)

Knowledge does not stand still. It must be remembered that not only are the horizons of knowledge being extended at an ever-increasing rate, but that previously held bodies of knowledge are being challenged and changed. This does not mean, however, that we consider knowledge to be a mere subsidiary of learning; it is the medium through which skills are acquired and developed, and provides the foundation and framework for present and future understanding. Nonetheless, we cannot ignore the fact that we are going through a Technological Revolution in which the scale of change is at least equal to that of the Industrial Revolution and the challenge to the imagination is enormous. We are striving to prepare children for a future in which the traditional precepts of learning, employment, economics etc are in the melting pot. "We are moving from an age where we produce things into an age in which we produce information.". (Alvin Toffler: Guardian 13th Jan.1996). The 'Information Revolution' will shape our children's learning needs. Their ability to handle information in a way never required before demands an increasing range of skills, and higher-order skills learned at an earlier age.

There are two main reasons for developing a skills-based approach. One is to do with the integrated nature of children's learning in the primary phase, particularly in the early years. " Children learn from everything that happens and do not separate learning into subjects." (Baroness Faithfull: foreword to guide for parents and governors on Early Years curriculum 1992). The other reason is to do with an increasing body of evidence from employers that in the modern world 'transferable skills' are essential. This is required at all levels from school leavers to university graduates, and the acquisition of those skills must begin early on in a child's education. "Employers will seek to recruit those with the more broad-based skills of analysis, creativity, numeracy and literacy, adaptability..... communication, problem-solving, motivation and leadership". (Institute of Manpower Services Graduate Review 1992)

The importance of social and personal skills cannot be over-emphasised because success or failure in this area can affect children's attitude to learning. It will certainly inhibit or enhance their ability to work in teams, something that is becoming a common requirement throughout industry and business at all levels. As attitudes are acquired earlier rather than

later, we place an emphasis on developing the positive. (See Independent Learning Policy and Social and Personal Education document) We are concerned with the 'process' of education as well as the 'product'. 'How' children learn is as important as 'what' they learn.

At Robin Hood we have tried to develop ways of learning that give children a broad experience of learning styles. Therefore they will experience didactic, whole class teaching, they will experience individual learning and being taught in a small group. They will experience collaborative learning in pairs and they will experience learning in a group which operates as a team. At the end of key Stage Two children are likely to be in sets for some lessons in Maths, English and Science and I.T. This enables brighter children to receive specialist teaching. The philosophy of 'learner-centred- learning' is not one that dis-bars methods, but in our case, one that seeks to investigate all appropriate methods that improve attainment, and enable us to achieve the goal of developing 'independent learners'.

ORGANISATION OF LEARNING

A topic approach is used throughout the school. The original topics were developed collaboratively under the pre-Dearing National Curriculum and most of these have been carried forward. However some have been replaced and two have been swapped over. All are being reviewed rigorously and re-written to accommodate the post-Dearing changes and to take into account our own reflections about the suitability of content, activities etc. By the end of Key Stage two children need to have a grasp of the 'integrated coherent wholeness' of areas of learning, and the component parts or subjects which make up that wholeness. Therefore we are striving to achieve a balance between cross-curricular and discrete subject based learning which will be kept under review.

CONCEPTS

Topics are organised under a coherent umbrella of Global/Key concepts:

Causes and Consequences
Conflict and Conciliation
Power
Justice
Values and Beliefs
Change and Continuity
Similarities and Differences
Interdependence

These will be re-visited many times as children move through the school and it is intended that these concepts should provide a common core with the exposition delivered over different subject areas and interpreted in different ways from micro to macro. They will of course be supplemented by concepts particular to subjects and areas of learning.

SKILLS

Skills are drawn from a skills bank drawn up by staff over a long period of time, based on the pre-Dearing Curriculum. This provided us with an integrated system with continuity and progression built in. Currently the skills bank is providing us with a common core of skills and learning objectives. There are seven categories of skills:

Communication
Social
Observation
Study
Problem-solving
Measurement/shape/space
Motor

(Please see Appendix for detailed skills list)

The original National Curriculum Statements of attainment were tagged in to the appropriate skills. Obviously this is no longer applicable but the skills are still valid per se.

KNOWLEDGE

The national curriculum sets out the bodies of knowledge appropriate to children of different ages. We have organised our curriculum in such a way as to give different subjects a leading emphasis in different terms and years. Thus for example, humanities may lead one term, science/technology the next, and creative arts the third term. We have sought to achieve a balance over each Key Stage. (Please refer to Grid Summaries)

ATTITUDES

We are concerned with developing in children their own personal attitudes towards their own learning and raising aspirations.

We are also concerned with developing a corporate attitude to do with values, which affects relationships and our views about the world in which we live. This means for example that Development Education influences our approach to learning in encouraging learners to question, challenge, reflect and reason, to be actively involved.

Please refer to comments already made and other policy documents.

SUMMARY

Learning is complex. One approach, one method will never suit every child. Therefore we aim by encouraging reflective practitioners, by formal review of methods and subjects, to have an evolving curriculum which is being systematically refined and improved. As a staff we see ourselves as learners also, an integral part of a learning school. There is no value in hanging on to methods we believe in if they are ineffective. There is no value in pursuing methods that are 'fashionable' if they do not work for us. However it is vitally important that we uphold and maintain our core values. This highlights the need for monitoring and evaluation. This responsibility rests with all staff although it will be co-ordinated by post-holders and directed by senior management.

Curriculum Co-ordinator 1996