

A thematic approach to teaching education essay



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For this topic I am going to explore the history of the National Curriculum and the thematic approach to teaching. Looking at these areas I am going to create themes within the Foundation Phase and Key Stage 2 to use as an example of a thematic approach to teaching.

National Curriculum

The National Curriculum has been policy in Schools for many years, it originates back to 1970 when the government focused on education with a desire to educate children to create a better work force. Teaching consisted of no supervision within the classroom and the teachers could teach whatever they wanted as a result of there not being a specific curriculum to follow, or at least relate back to.

In 1976 James Callaghan changed the teaching profession. His idea was everyone should be taught the same topics, this led to an introduction of more core subjects. Within a few years, Margaret Thatcher became Prime Minister and decided she didn't like the scheme of teaching within the National Curriculum, so, in 1979 she decided that every Council would write their own policies. These policies had to include maths, English and science which were deemed to be core subjects. The Prime Minister wanted to see a lot more testing of the teaching process so that teaching was far more measurable and what progress and standard the children were achieving.

In the 1987, Kenneth Baker, the Education Minister took the concept a stage further. He divided the curriculum into 3 core subjects - maths, English and science, and 7 foundation subjects including the subjects of history, geography, foreign language, art, music, P. E and design and technology. He

had a syllabus for each subject composed so that all teachers knew what content to cover when teaching each subject. In 1988 the Educational Reform Act became legislation. It was widely regarded as the most important single piece of education legislation in England and Wales in modern times.

The Educational Reform Act changed education. After its introduction in 1988, the National Primary School Curriculum had to be presented to the government to ensure standards of teaching were the same for every child. Key Stages were introduced in schools that benched marked milestones in a child's education. At each key stage a number of educational objectives had to be achieved, the impact of this was the curriculum evolved into educational overload. Each teacher had 345 targets to meet! The Key Stages introduced were Key Stage 1 (5 – 7 year old children), Key Stage 2 (7 – 11 year old children), Key Stage 3 (11 – 14 year old pupils) and Key Stage 4 (15 – 16 year old pupils). Statutory tests were progressively introduced for each Key Stage. The Key Stage 1 statutory tests were introduced in 1991, Key Stage 2 in 1995 and Key Stage 3 in 1993.

Sir Ron Dearing reviewed education in 1995, he removed some topics out and reduced the burden of 345 targets to 14 targets that teachers needed to meet. Margaret Thatcher still wanted to change elements of the curriculum whilst Sir Ron Dearing was doing his review. She wanted to name and shame every school that wasn't performing and to rank all schools, hence the birth of school tables to publicly inform parents how individual schools were performing. Sir Ron Dearing wanted a structured numeracy and literacy hour which was structured and dictated what had to be done and was applied by

all schools across the Country. This enabled visibility to monitor and evaluate what was being done at any one time.

Another huge change arrived 30 years later when Sir Jim Rose looked at the National Curriculum. He led an independent review in 2008-2009 and came to the conclusion that there was still too much going on in the curriculum. He wanted focus on essential life and learning skills and on literacy, numeracy, I. C. T, learning and thinking skills and social and emotional well being. Sir Jim Rose wanted to establish a curriculum for the 21st century that met the needs of individual learners whilst taking account for the broader needs of Wales. The national curriculum changed once again in 2008. The stages of the curriculum Key Stages were and remain divided into sections, Year 3- Year 6 Key Stage 2 (7 – 11 year olds) and early years which became the Foundation Phase Year 1 – Year 2 (3 – 7 year olds).

The curriculum content consists of core subjects (Mathematics, English and Science) and Welsh Language, broader curriculum subjects (I. C. T, History, Geography, Music, Art and Design, Physical recreation, Design and Technology, Welsh second Language) and basic curriculum (R. E and P. S. E). This ensures subjects are taught via a cross curriculum approach and introduce key skills that includes thinking, number, I. C. T and communication. Assessments have been introduced to enable teachers to monitor children's learning and baseline assess attainment at the end of the Foundation Phase. At Key Stage 2, pupils are tested on their English and Mathematics and core subjects. then in Year 6 they are assessed in preparation for transition to year 7 in Secondary education.

The introduction to the Foundation Phase was set out in Wales and further amplified and explained in the Foundation Phase consultation paper published in 2003. The proposals contained in this paper was supported by 96 per cent of respondents. The Welsh Assembly Government then piloted the Foundation Phase from September 2004. The Foundation Phase provides young children with a curriculum that is more appropriate to their stage of development and that caters for their individual needs.

From reading ' Welsh Assembly Government, March 2009, Foundation Phase Child Development Profile Guidance, Welsh Assembly Government' I have discovered the seven areas of learning within the Foundation Phase (3 - 7 year olds). The seven areas of learning are:-

Personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity

Language, literacy and communication skills

Mathematical development

Welsh language development

Knowledge and understanding of the world

Physical development

Creative development

This approach allows teachers to monitor the knowledge of individual children's development in the key areas of a child's learning and to follow

onto the areas of learning to observe and evaluate children's progress throughout their learning.

In the National Curriculum for Key Stage 2, each subject has two sections (skills and range) for a child's programme of study in each different national curriculum subject. This includes levels of understanding, investigating and making. There are also national curriculum skills that are the same for all non-core and core subjects within the National Curriculum. Children develop thinking skills by planning, developing and reflecting on their work in all subjects. Another requirement within the National Curriculum is to develop communication skills. The children learn to communicate across the curriculum by using skills such as oracy, reading, writing and wider communicating in all subjects across the National Curriculum. A further requirement is to develop ICT skills. The children must develop their ICT skills across the curriculum by finding, developing, creating and presenting information and ideas using a wide range of software and equipment. Finally children must develop their number skills across the curriculum by using mathematical information, calculating, interpreting and presenting their findings across the whole range of national curriculum subjects.

Thematic Approach

The cross-curricular thematic approach has been part of education in schools for many years and slowly began to gain popularity in primary schools during the '60's. This was due to recommendations from the Plowden Report (1967) emphasising that children learn better finding out information for themselves rather than being taught directly and supplied with information direct from a teacher. A thematic approach to teaching involves integrating all subject

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areas together under one theme. The cross curriculum approach helps children relate basic academic skills to the real world. Thematic units are common in the Foundation Phase where children learn through interactive, integrated activities. These themed units incorporate reading, mathematics, science and social studies. To create thematic approaches in teaching a theme is selected for a particular topic which would be applied for a period of a week or a month. The time line would depend on the broadness of the theme and how many subjects are going to be included in the cross curriculum approach. From knowing the themes the teacher develops schemes of work, activities and writing lesson plans. The children are then given aims and objectives within the thematic approach lessons. The activities may consist of being hands-on or physical learning, games on the internet and reading certain books for the skill level the children are reading at. For example, art skills can be developed by drawing exercises related to the theme. There is no end to what national curriculum subjects can be developed within the thematic approach.

The benefits of a thematic approach have been examined. Teaching thematically helps children build self esteem and allows the children to understand what they are being taught. Content and subject areas are integrated and not made obvious to the children what subjects they are being taught. The pupils are able to learn and retain more information through a thematic approach, it encourages the involvement of all abilities of children through topics relevant to them and their learning needs, from the learning aspect the children are able to relate to real-world experiences and build upon their prior knowledge learned from previous lessons taught at

that particular moment in time. The thematic approach also helps teachers teach to the different learning capabilities of their children. Overall the thematic approach keeps children engaged by making learning activities fun by creating a variety of different experiences within different thematic approaches. The teacher and children are able to be creative, authentic and original, it also allows the teacher to integrate all subjects and use literacy within those subjects. The children can share the same learning goals, is children centred and utilises collaborative and cooperative learning. The curriculum is also compact and saves time teaching multiple subjects at once.

The negatives of a thematic approach need to be considered. Some children may lose interest in the theme/subject being addressed. Using one theme for a month may become boring, repetitive and the children's motivation to learn will decrease and become uninterested and distracted. The children may also not like the choice of the theme chosen by the teacher and may cause arguments between children making them unwilling to participate in the activities created by the teacher. It can be hard for the teacher to find enough resources/information to cover every aspect of the topic and intertwining the benchmarks within that one topic may be difficult, it can also be easy to miss out on some content that could be covered in the theme. Within the thematic approach it may be hard for the lower level children to engage and consequently have a hard time with concepts within that theme, they will then struggle with the work. This child is still expected to connect within the focused tasks causing possible stress for the child knowing their level of capabilities are lower than someone else in the class,

so it is difficult for the teacher to provide tasks that suits everyone's needs and learning styles.

From reading a document ' Using thematic approach, Bristol, Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun' (Page 2) express a mixed view of the thematic approach. They quote ' Thematic analysis is a poorly demarcated, rarely-acknowledged, yet widely-used qualitative analytic method.' They believe that the thematic approach is rarely acknowledged but is used widely across teaching.

Theorists have a mixed view about the statement because they feel that the thematic approach can prove to be successful as long as the theme and subjects used are taught at a level that suits all the children's needs using an integrated and balanced scheme of work for all abilities . Others also think that the quote is wrong in saying the thematic approach is rarely acknowledged. It is clear from experiences within the classroom that teachers successfully use the thematic approach a lot.

My view on the foundation phase and what it has to offer.

Within the Foundation Phase, children as individuals are given opportunities to learn about themselves, improve their own knowledge and understanding of the real world and gain better knowledge of personal hygiene and safety. The children become independent and achieve goals that teachers cannot pass on to the children through use of just the direct teaching method. This is why the Foundation Phase is so unique, it allows the children to learn from their own personal experiences and take their learning into their own hands. The children become more confident and assertive and learn values for themselves and from their peers. With all of the above focusing on skills, children can develop in the Foundation Phase. The main thrust of developing <https://assignbuster.com/a-thematic-approach-to-teaching-education-essay/>

skills is by letting children play, it is an essential feature within the curriculum which must be fun and stimulating for the children to enjoy learning. This approach helps children to be pro active and physically interact with objects they wouldn't necessarily encounter day to day.

From reading the Rumbold Report (1990) on play, there is a very strong view about using play within the Foundation Phase, it is believed that ' active educational play supports children's learning across all areas of learning.' I totally agree with this statement as it does create activity for the development of a wide range of skills and also allows the children to develop their own personal skills. Overall I think the Foundation Phase is an all round positive curriculum that appears to work very well in developing children from an early age of 3.

My lesson ideas for teaching within the Foundation Phase

The subjects I examine as an example for my teaching in a thematic approach in the Foundation Phase incorporates two non-core subjects - Geography, Art and Design and also look at the basic curriculum area of R. E.

The theme I have chosen is the Amazon rainforest. The class I have chosen to deliver this task to is Year 2.

R. E

In the R. E lesson, I will read the book of Noah's Ark. ' Maisy, 2007, Noah's Ark, Lucy Cousins' I will identify the type of animals and relate them to the Amazon Rainforest. From reading the book I will have a section of play where I will divide the class into groups. The children will have samples of all of the animals referred to in the book along with a boat. They will then have

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to memorise the list of the animals which relate back to the book and fit them into the boat. This will develop their thinking skills and also their communication skills while working in groups to do the activity. This will be a warm up activity for the children so they are getting their brain into working mode. This relates back to the national curriculum skills for R. E in the ‘Guidance for local education authorities and agreed syllabus conferences, January 2008, National exemplar framework for religious education for 3 to 19-year-olds in Wales, Welsh Assembly Government’ by using the section listed as developing thinking.

For the main activity the children have to create their own story where they save a number of animals onto a certain object, the object can be specific to our day and age so it could range from a boat or train to an aeroplane. To get the children started in their story one can brain storm and list their examples of some animals and objects on a board / interactive whiteboard and show what mode of transport animals can be rescued onto. From the main activity they are developing their communication skills, they’re using their writing skills and oracy by discussing what they are going to include in their story.

From the content of the activities created one can monitor the calibre and style of children’s writing. I will select three or four pieces of work to be read out by the children and evaluate everyone’s work by having everyone on each table to swap and evaluate each others work.

Geography (Knowledge and understanding of the world)

To teach knowledge and understanding of the world I will focus on the wider world section of the curriculum, illustrating to the children what lives in the Amazon Rainforest, and type of habitats they live in. I would create discussions around particular questions I would continually ask. Questions would raise awareness and explore what is the rainforest. Childrens knowledge and understanding of the Amazon Rainforest will be developed through the handing out of a quiz that can be completed in groups. A class competition can be created to see who has the most questions correct about the Amazon Rainforest. After the quiz, to develop continuity through this subject of geography the children can create pieces of work to put up on the Amazon Rainforest board on the classroom walls. The children can bring their knowledge from R. E and use their drawings they developed in art to put onto the classroom board, this will create a sense of achievement and ownership as the children would be able to look at their own work when in their own classroom and is a clear display of their own work for others to see what they have done.

A number of skills will have been developed from using this approach that are taken from the national curriculum book of knowledge and understanding of the world for Foundation Phase. The skills developed consist of enquiring, exploring, describing, asking/ answering questions, investigating, thinking, solving problems and recording their research. All of these are required and used within the theme and tasks set during lessons.

Art

From reading the book Noah's Ark, children can draw an animal of their choice that relates to the story, a list and a picture of each animal mentioned in the story would be given as a resource for the children to relate back to. A directed task would then be set to use different materials to create a 2D image of the animal from the Noah's Ark story. Materials to be used would include:

Coloured pencils

Paint

Coloured pens

Crayons

Craft materials to create different textures etc.

From creating their animal drawing, the children can try and link them to a habitat within the rainforest. To research the animals habitat the children can use the internet to find an image of the habitat for their animal to be stuck onto. The final outcome will then consist of a hand made piece of artwork of an animal from the rainforest made by every individual child and placed on a background of the habitat the animal would live in within the rainforest.

Overall the children would have explored colour using different materials and creatively making an animal by exploring and forming different textures. This relates back to the national curriculum within the foundation phase due to

reading the creative development Welsh Assembly Government book. ' Welsh Assembly Government, June 2008, Creative Development, Welsh Assembly Government' The children will have used ICT skills to research on the internet for a habitat picture of the rainforest.

From creating the animal design that relates back to the Amazon rainforest, focus can be made upon literacy skills by asking each child to describe what animal they have created and what their habitat looks like. Overall, the children would have used planning and thinking skills by developing and creating the art work. The children can reflect on their work and see if their animal relates to the rainforest to give it a real life effect. Oracy and writing skills are also developed by describing their animal and habitat, so they are expressing their ideas and emotions about their work.

The structure of the child's learning will be as it is presented in the essay, I will start off with R. E, and then include Geography and follow integrate Art and Design. When the children take part in these activities the children themselves do not realise they are learning these skills. This is an excellent outcome, as, when they grow up, the children will reflect and hopefully remember what they have done and recognise the skills they had used.

My lesson ideas for teaching within Key Stage 2

The subjects I examine for teaching a thematic approach in Key Stage 2 will consist of two non-core subjects of Geography, Art and Design and also look at the basic curriculum which is R. E.

The theme chosen is Judaism. The year group chosen for this is Year 5.

R. E

The children will be made aware what Judaism, different clothing and their names worn at this time would be examined. A group activity for children would be used after explaining the variety of clothes using dolls clothing, some relevant to Judaism and some not relevant. A women and man doll would be introduced for the children to dress and they learn to relate the same back to Judaism culture. From dressing the dolls the children move on to examine a house of a Jewish person. The children will look at dietary make up of Jews and what type of ornaments they have in their houses that are an integrated part of their culture. A group session can be delivered where children can trial some Jewish food and if possible have a Jewish person to come in and talk to the children about their lifestyle. A useful website for a teacher resource would be:- ' <http://www.waupun.k12.wi.us/Policy/other/dickhut/religions/14%20Jewish%20Symbols.html>'

This website describes the clothing and certain items that are found in a Jewish home. This theme will have continuity and appear through other lessons. In other lessons different festivals within the Jewish community would be explored and have a look at videos to demonstrate how they celebrate their festivals.

The skills developed throughout these lessons would be communication through talking in groups to discuss issues about the culture and ornaments the children have discovered. The children are also developing thinking skills to execute dressing the men and women dolls into suitable clothing for a Jewish person.

Art

From the previous lesson on R. E about Judaism children are given a directed task using a hand out sheet with four boxes to draw in. The children are asked to use each box to draw from real life, objects such as Shofar or a type of clothing like a Kippah and use a range of art materials to colour in their drawings. The materials used could include :-

Coloured pencils

Paint

Coloured pens

Crayons

Charcoal

Water paint

Mark making

Tone

Craft materials

Each box I will ask The children will be told to use each box to illustrate a different art material so they are experimenting and testing different materials and are using a range of art media. After finishing the drawings the following activity would develop literacy where children have to describe the content and process used in creating each box, stating what material they have used, what the object is and how it is used within the religion of

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Judaism. Overall children have explored different art materials and creatively making examples relating to Judaism using the clothes they wear or the different items used within the culture. This links to the national curriculum within the Key Stage 2 Art and Design as found through reading the Art and Design national curriculum for Wales book. ' Welsh Assembly Government, January 2008, Art and Design in the National Curriculum for Wales, Welsh Assembly Government'

From reading the book listed above I am able to see what parts of the curriculum I have taught. The activities demonstrate that the children have planned, developed and reflected on their work which uses the developing thinking skill and that all of the children have developed their oracy and writing skills that links to the developing communication aspect.

Geography

In geography focus is on where the Jewish community was founded and where Judaism is sited in different countries. A presentation using PowerPoint for both tasks and the children can do small tasks from worksheets. We will then look at the Star of David flag and what the meaning is behind it. Two follow on from this children will be asked to develop a double page in their book about Judaism. This double page will involve information about the Jewish community, where Jewish people are distributed around the world, some ornaments, clothes and the Star of David flag.

The children are being tested on a number of skills across the curriculum in geography. The children are developing thinking skills, they have to plan the double page on Judaism and develop the work on Jews and also to ensure

they include Judaism. The children's communication skills are being developed through them writing about what they have learned about the Jewish community and Judaism. The children are using selected language to describe where the Jewish people live within different countries, and so are discussing geographical issues. The children are conducting their own personal investigation into Judaism and Jewish religion. From developing the double page they are developing creative and presentation of information and ideas from their investigation.

Observing children

To see the children's improvement throughout their learning teachers need to pay attention to observing the children in their care. In the observing children book ' Welsh Assembly Government, January 2008, Observing children, Welsh Assembly Government' it is quoted ' It is important that practitioners listen to children as well as watch them when observing, as they can learn a great deal about children's learning and understanding through listening to their speech' I believe this is a vital quote for teachers observing children because you can definately gain more understanding of the children's learning by talking to children as well as observing how they play and the standard of their work. The observation of children should be taken into consideration through using the seven areas of learning, this will provide evidence of their development and achievements across the national curriculum. Teachers can also observe different situations children are exposed to through playing on their own or as part of agroup. The main headings mentioned in the ' Welsh Assembly Government, January 2008,

Observing children, Welsh Assembly Government' state that teachers need to observe:-

Personal development

Social development

Well-being/emotional development

Cognitive development

Language development and communication skills

Physical development

Gross motor skills

Fine motor skills

There much observation of children's development of the child as a whole that has to be considered as an essential part of the role of a teacher.

From observing the children one can monitor their progress and continuity during lessons to ensure improvement and that children are gaining and benefiting from new learning experiences throughout their years in primary school. This can be achieved by both looking at the development of their work and also how they play alone and within groups.

Conclusion

To conclude, the National Curriculum has gone through many changes in the past few years and evolved into what is delivered in primary schools today.

From the many theorists I have researched and read about, there is a belief that where we are placed today is the better stage of the developed National Curriculum. The Foundation Phase is proving to be a success. The children are able to improve their personal learning without having a teacher to spoon feed them to gain experiences and skills. Key Stage 2 needs improving and attention due to the drop in standards and attainment in literacy and numeracy, this drop in standards has resulted in improvements being demanded by the Welsh Government all across Wales. Welsh Government are implementing literacy and numeracy strategies in every subject across the national curriculum. The thematic approach has been evaluated and is declared a success by many theorists, it allows teachers to choose a theme and teach joint subjects in one integrated scheme of work/ lessons, this is a definite advantage because the children do not specifically realise how they are being taught. This method of educating primary aged children develops what they know from personal experiences and their involvement develops them through the teachers integrated lessons.