

Spotlight on ... *'Mantle of the Expert'*



This term we have started to teach our topics through an approach called Mantle of the Expert. This approach is an inspirational way of engaging children in their learning by providing tasks and activities that replicate real life.



What is 'Mantle of the Expert'?

The Mantle of the Expert is a dramatic inquiry based approach to teaching and learning invented and developed by the internationally renowned Educator, Dorothy Heathcote. The big idea is that the class do all their curriculum work as if they are an imagined group of experts.



So, they might be chefs in a world renowned restaurant or a team of people running an animal sanctuary. They may be scientists working in a laboratory or palaeontologists working on their latest excavation. Or perhaps they are running a removal company, a factory, a shop, or even a space station.



The children behave 'as if they are experts', working from a specific point of view as they explore their learning. This brings special responsibilities, social behaviours and the need for knowledge to complete tasks related to their enterprise.



Whilst they are engaged in their enterprise the children are asked to agree, for a time, to imagine themselves as a group of experts – chefs, vets, scientists, archaeologists or astronauts with jobs and responsibilities. Through activities and tasks, the children gradually take on the same kinds of responsibilities, problems and challenges that real experts might do in the real world.





How does it work?

In the Mantle of the Expert, there is always an “enterprise” to be run. And always a client who needs help with a job needing to be done. The emphasis is on the tasks the children need to do, to make the “enterprise” a success and to serve the needs of the clients. In this approach the teacher and children work together and instead of the children relying on the teacher’s energy to drive the work and evaluate achievement, the teacher and class share the responsibility for the quality of work. Running the enterprise is, like an enterprise in real-life, based on action and processes; it generates a range of different tasks: talking, listening, writing, speaking, making, designing, planning, measuring, weighing, etc. These tasks are channelled by the teacher towards the requirements of the school curriculum.



What are the advantages of working this way?

The “enterprise” provides an exciting context for learning. Teachers can bring together different areas of the curriculum, rather than trying to teach them separately. It is ‘drama’ based, so that classes develop ways to ‘see through other eyes’ helping young people develop ownership over their enterprise. They are motivated by the challenge of making their enterprise a success.



But what about knowledge and skills that can’t be taught through the enterprise?

There are some areas of the curriculum that cannot be taught through Mantle of the Expert for example phonics, handwriting, basic mathematics. These subjects are taught separately outside the ‘story’ of the Mantle. However, the children will be expected to apply these skills when undertaking specific tasks for their enterprise. For example a menu for a restaurant will need to be presented correctly and the animal keeper will need to work out how many carrots to buy for 12 hungry rabbits who want three carrots each. Mantle of the Expert provides the opportunity for purposeful learning and the application of skills in a real life context.





What other people have said ...

"I know it's right because of the engagement I have seen in the eyes of the children, the passion in the voices of the teachers, and the feeling in the air in a classroom when everyone is taking part."

Primary School Head Teacher



"Lessons are far more enjoyable, the children seem to thrive on needing the relevant knowledge to complete the tasks before them. The class are far more engaged in the learning process."

Class Teacher



"It's fantastic. It's really fun. I prefer working in a company because it's much better and it tingles in my tummy."

Pupil, Y1



So if you are passing through the school and find a sign leading you to Beechrout, The Willows Restaurant or Oakwood Animal Sanctuary you now know that inside there are a team of extremely important experts who may have just received an urgent email, phone call, or visitor and are therefore busy working on their next exciting challenge ...

