ROLLING ROLE

Take a typical teaching timetable, insist that all lessons are taught within the same context, irrespective of content. Add to this to provision that no class must complete their particular piece of work but must leave suitable evidence of their labour for further classes to use. Mix these together with three tension points within the context and a point of shift/change which will affect everything connected with that context. Site the preparations in a single room or space. Finally, introduce many classes, extra adults then leave for however long you want. The result - a "rolling role" approach to curriculum learning.

The key to the whole affair lies in the understanding of the context since this is central to each lesson. A sufficiently complicated set-up has to be developed that has at least three major strands that can be in productive tension with each other. These must submit to reason and be placed within the chosen context so that there is no sense of artificiality or uncomfortable manoeuvring of the tensions; they must exist naturally in the context.

Secondly, yet equally important, is the point of change. This too must be carefully integrated into the context so that it fits without any sense of manipulation. It is through this point of change that the productive tensions mentioned earlier become apparent therefore it must be such that it will have a major structural effect on each of the tensions, causing all previous stability of the context to alter (see Diagram 3: The Structure of a Rolling Role Project).

When a context which contains both the three-way tensions and the point of change has been developed there are other factors to be considered. Ideally the Rolling Role involves an entire timetable, but in this particular project it involved a composit from three teachers. Thus the vagaries of curriculum must raise their heads - no teacher can ignore that which must be included in their teaching if they are to satisfy the demands placed on them by curriculum and examination systems. The context chosen must have sufficient elasticity and breadth to cover the requirements of all the classes on the rolling role timetable.
These should emerge naturally from the context - again, evidence of manipulation is too artificial to be accepted by children.

In our case a single teaching base became another requirement for a rolling role. This is largely because of the reliance the teachers place on the context material. Context is introduced visually through pre-prepared background and source materials (in the form of pictures, maps, histories, archives etc) which the classes use to orientate and place themselves within the overall pattern. This wealth of source material, though added to by each class which passes through, must be firmly and immutably presented creating the security of the whole project.

If the rolling role project was to be carried out across a timetable of highly varied subjects: sciences, arts, technical subjects or games; obviously this idea of a single teaching base would be totally impractical. Many subjects need certain physical requirements in order to fulfil their aims - science laboratories complete with the necessary equipment, gymnasium with crash mats and suitable flooring - and it would be wrong to take these specialist subjects away from these requisites. In such cases the essential context material should either be on general display in an easily accessible area; be duplicated though there then needs to be a master version of the material which can permanently record any changes; or the "core" of the material should be so packaged that it is transportable between rooms. An ideal situation would be that of several rooms of different types: a science laboratory, a home economics area, gymnasium and a workshop set around a central area where the context material would be displayed. However, this is merely a dream with the present climate of faculty teaching.

Rolling role develops in that what ever any one class does is left for use, rejection or development by further classes. This means that work cannot be done in exercise books and marked in the traditional way since the publication of the work is important. Though the product each class leaves is based on
the curriculum requirements of that particular class, there is no individual
record for a specific child to refer back to though the work is displayed for all
to see. This means that both children and teachers have to readjust their
expectations of "work". To be fair, this seems more like the real world where
few keep a permanent record of their own day-to-day working out of the
problems they meet which is what we expect children to do in schools.

The continuous progression of work from class to class, albeit with some
alterations, is essential to the "rolling" nature of the drama. Classes must feel
that they are part of an on-going experience and that whatever they leave is
of importance to other people engaged in that same experience. When they
return to the rolling role classroom they see the fruits of their labour, the
developments other classes have added and will then often start their own
development of others’ materials.

The potential teacher of rolling role must be prepared to give much time
and thought to the original context, to integrating into it the curriculum
requirements, to building in the multi-faceted tensions, to forging a point of
change, to the production of the essential background material and to the
abolition of the notion that what one child starts he must finish. Once these
elements are fulfilled, then can a rolling role commence.

Malcolm Davison
Ida Cochrane
Norman Berwick
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