

Relatability

What's the point?

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Teachers spend an umpteen amount of time planning a progression of lessons for the children in their care to ensure they reach their full potential. What they teach is potentially pre-determined by the National Curriculum to check they are aligned to expectations. How they teach is a carefully considered practice to facilitate differentiation and ensure all children are challenged and supported appropriately, usually in a creative and engaging way. Teachers are skilled practitioners in both of the above, however, due to a number of factors there is something that we don't potentially take as much time and consideration as we should.

Consider the question why? Why are we teaching the children what we are teaching them? Also, somewhat more importantly, why are the children learning what they are learning? How is the Curriculum we plan relevant to their daily lives and the bigger picture? This, I pen, as relatability.

My passion for ensuring that learning is purposeful and meaningful stemmed from my early career working in the Foundation Stage. Having the freedom to plan from children's interests resulted in a flexible and engaging curriculum, which inspired the children on a daily basis. I could ensure it was purposeful and also tackled current day interests and trends. We would jump from a week focused on Doctor Who to hatching butterflies and chicks.

Following that, I spent two years working in an International School in Bangkok teaching Year 2, a class which was predominately made up of Thai children. Back then, schools were heavily reliant on the

traditional QCA documents and I was faced with planning a unit on the Great Fire of London, which is a very popular topic with children of that age. Whilst I fully appreciate the importance of learning about significant historical events, for the children I was teaching at the time I struggled to see the relevance to their lives in the present day. They had a developing use of language and had mostly travelled locally in Asia. Furthermore, Thailand at the time was suffering from a period of severe localised flooding. Therefore, in studying the Great Fire of London we instead looked at the impact it had on people's lives and then spent time producing a comparison with similar events in Thailand.

The change in the National Curriculum in 2014, to a more skills-based approach, gave teachers back freedom to have more flexibility when planning. For some, this was a challenge, as they had become used to the constraints provided by the rigidity of schemes of work. I was leading a Year 1 team at the time, having recently moved to an International School in Dubai. The focus here was on a concept-based curriculum, planned under an overarching creative topic-

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based umbrella. By focusing on a concept, the learning automatically became more relevant to children's daily lives. For example, when studying Jack and the Beanstalk, children can rarely relate to magic beans or giants in castles in the sky. When you think of it through a contextual lens though, or provide a guiding question, the learning has reliability. In this case, whilst looking through the lenses of wealth and ambition, the question 'is it ever right to steal?' could be posed. Children's responses are usually resoundingly no and then they are encouraged to discuss Jack's behaviour at the castle and they start to consider a different viewpoint. They can then make the links to similar behaviour patterns in the real world.

Another planning approach in which reliability can be promoted in through cross-curricular planning with a real-life purpose. Recently, our Year 1 children were very keen to develop our outdoor space. The teacher responded positively to this and helped facilitate learning for the children with a real-life purpose. They did research in Science, wrote letters to ask permission, grew a pound at home for fundraising, visited the local garden centre to purchase their equipment, built planters in Design Technology and then planted their crops. They plan to set up their own Farmers' Market at school this academic year. The children's enthusiasm and engagement in

their learning was second to none. They knew what and why they were learning and could also relate it to real life skills in the wider world. It can be argued that planning for reliability is easier with younger children, due to the increasing constraints and content of the Curriculum as children get older. In this case, it could be that tweaks to planning, focused on looking at a global perspective or a real-world current issue, could hold the answer, therefore teachers don't necessarily need to reinvent the wheel. An example could be a World War Two topic. Instead the context could be changed to Conflict in Europe. Instead of focusing solely on historical events, this could focus on modern day conflict, such as Brexit and immigration and what may happen in the future. We, as educators, have a responsibility to facilitate learning around modern day issues and tackle them with children. We need to encourage students to be inquisitive, challenge respectfully and have the freedom to ask questions and debate. Another example is the KS2 local geography study. We have traditionally studied a local market town and written to the local MP to provide feedback. To gain even more depth from this topic, children could also discuss the recent press centred on the supposed decline of the High Street and market towns in the UK. Furthermore, they could debate whether we should be trying to save them at all?

To conclude, reliability ensures that children's learning can be placed within in a real-life context. They understand what they are learning, but also why they are learning and how this is relevant. This can be achieved by encouraging children to think about things from a different perspective, providing a purpose

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for learning with a tangible outcome or tackling current global issues in an age appropriate way. From experience, when teachers have the flexibility and freedom to plan like this, not only are they much more enthused, classrooms are more engaged and learners are more enthusiastic.