

# Braveheart

The same playful, creative approaches to education that work brilliantly in primary settings can translate beautifully into KS3 and beyond – it just takes a little courage, says **Hywel Roberts...**

**I**n secondary, it might come as a surprise that we don't have to look too far away for that bit of inspiration that will help us be the best teacher we can be. For me, it was going into a Key Stage One classroom and watching the teacher talk to the children shortly before I was going to take over delivering a Mantle of the Expert session. As hardened teachers at (what we believe is) the sharper end of education I think we're sometimes guilty of believing that those who teach our much younger 'clients' have an easier time of it. If you still reckon that's the case, get yourself down to your local primary school and offer to teach Year One for a day. I did, and it was like being hit in the face with a comedy saucepan. Repeatedly. Talk about having your face pressed against the edge of your comfort zone. At the start of that session I really liked the way the teacher spoke to her class:

*Oh Thomas, that is lovely sitting.*

*Ravi, you are listening well. Everyone look at Ravi's listening.*

*Look at me Sally. Focus now. Good girl. Sally knows how to focus.*

If I talk like that to my Year 10s, I thought, they'll be phoning Childline. But then I realised I just need to think about my teacher language, not change the message I'm trying to put across – in this case, expectations.

*Sit down Tom so we're ready to go.*

*(quiet, thumb up) Thanks*

*Ravi.*

*Sally, I'm here Sally. Look at me. Thank you. and*

*I love it when everyone looks at me\*\**

This subtle translation of teacher-talk can also be applied to our secondary curriculum – particularly in Key Stage 3. I'm not suggesting we copy successful projects from primary, but I think we need to look at what works there and see how we can build on it – the tools, the strategies, the energy, the hooks, the lures, and the learning integrity. Encouraging our colleagues into doing some action research around transition for example, would illuminate very quickly that the action of dragging the Y6s up from the partner primaries to spend a day of being frightened witless by big school is not always the best method of settling new students in. Now your school may have cracked transition, but many have not. Curriculum transition should be as smooth as the best systems our secondaries offer, and that requires us to look at the educational diet offered up to Y6 and then at what we're doing in Y7 and beyond.

I am a secondary teacher through and through, and spending time in primary phase has enabled me to touch

base with elements of my practice that had been eroded over time – experiential learning, for example. I'm now the secondary teacher who wishes for role-play areas in secondary settings – would it be wrong to have a WW2 space in the history department? Or perhaps a plague space set up in the science labs?

I simply don't believe that children switch off from a desire for experiential learning because they move to a new building. Now this may be coming across as a little 'drama-lite' for you – like I'm trying to sneak a whole load of drama pedagogy into the mix. The thing is, when I was a head of drama, I was wholly focused on resources,

\*\*I call this Banter for Learning (c)



“Be **brave** enough to live life **creatively**. The creative **place** where no one else has ever been.” **ALAN ALDA**



## INFO BAR

MANTLE OF THE EXPERT IS AN INDUCTIVE METHOD OF TEACHING THAT USES DRAMATIC ENQUIRY AND STORYTELLING TO GENERATE AND EMBED LEARNING. IT WAS PIONEERED BY THE LATE DOROTHY HEATHCOTE AND IS NOW USED BY TEACHERS ALL OVER THE UK AND BEYOND. MORE INFORMATION ABOUT TRAINING WORKSHOPS CAN BE FOUND AT [MANTLEOFTHEEXPERT.COM](http://MANTLEOFTHEEXPERT.COM) AND [CREATELEARNINSPIRE.CO.UK](http://CREATELEARNINSPIRE.CO.UK) A CONFERENCE FOCUSING ON MANTLE OF THE EXPERT IS HELD EACH YEAR BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE TEACHING OF DRAMA. FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THIS, PLEASE LOOK AT [NATD.EU](http://NATD.EU)

data and arguments over why my spaces were always used for exams; not a right lot of my middle-leader-head was focused on, you know, the *pedagogy*, the teaching and learning, the core business. I was woken up by being introduced to the work of the late Dorothy Heathcote:

*But it is obvious that any drama activity must involve drama laws...because of the audience – not the direct audience in a theatre, but the sense of audience derived from the continual awareness of preparing something for a client...the scrutiny of each other's work is built in as part of the mantle of the expert system.*

(Drama for Learning, Heathcote and Bolton 1995:172)

I used to believe that Heathcote's brilliant Mantle of the Expert system was firmly rooted in primary phase until a) I watched her working with a group of challenging young men via YouTube – search for Three Looms Waiting, an excellent Arena documentary from the 1970s b) she helped my team develop a fresh KS3 curriculum approach c) I participated in a workshop she led for teachers, and d) she told me otherwise. The system that works so convincingly in primary does work in secondary, too, it just takes an element of courage to give it a go. I now use it as a tool of learning across both phases.

The reluctance of some children to participate in anything vaguely drama-orientated has been a consistent challenge for teachers to negotiate. One of the key features of a pupil's reluctance is the fear of the peer audience. It is what breeds embarrassment and a shrivelling of confidence. This fear is universal amongst adults as well

as children. What the Mantle of the Expert system offers is a method that can remove this fear and offer a bridge between the real and the imaginary – stepping stones that protect participants into a learning context. I urge you to seek it out (see the infobar for details).

I recently worked with a group of secondary middle leaders where an element of the programme was to look at how their specialism was delivered in primary. Their findings were very interesting, but not nearly as fascinating as their responses to them. For some, they knew that the link between their subject offer and what was going on in primary was coherent, but for most, they saw that their KS3 offer looked pale and uninviting compared to the action in primary. English teachers discovered that they had lower expectations of their students in Y7 than their colleagues had in Y5. Why not invite your middle leaders to do a similar piece of action research?

I've talked a lot about scrutiny in this piece, so, if you get chance, look at:

- Your primary partner schools – do some learning walks
- Your transition process
- How primary pedagogy can influence how we lead our children – I use Mantle of the Expert as an example here, but there is so much more
- The delivery of your subject in primary
- Your expectations of Y7
- What useful things you do with Y8
- Courage in your curriculum
- The mirror in your bathroom.



“Be brave. Take risks. Nothing can substitute experience.”

PAULO COELHO

# MANTLE PIECES

Some stuff to do with Y7s who are just starting at your school:

1

## LEGACY STATUES

Get in a decent space. Into groups of around 4. "Create the statue that will be erected outside your old primary school that represents your life achievements" – help them by asking them what they'd like to do when they leave school. Get some big paper and fat pens and create the plaques that go with the statues. Admire each set of statues by walking around and noticing things about them. Get photos of the statues, have them playing on a loop during their first secondary school assembly. **Buzzing.**

2

## LIST GRAFITTI

Grab a roll of paper (lining paper). Each child creates his/her own graffiti section. Put his/her name at the top of each section. Get them to make some lists – things like:

- If a film was made of your life, who would play the roles?
- A list of words that describe you
- What's in your bag?
- Five best dinners
- Five best places I've been to
- Five places I want to visit
- Favourite people
- What awards you'd like to be recognised with
- Whom do you need to apologise to, and what for?
- Favourite subjects
- Subject I need to get a grip with
- .....and many more

Review and share it, then roll it up. This can then be shared again later in the year. How have their attitudes changed? (Then try it with your colleagues at the next staff meeting!)

3

## POSTCARD TO THE FUTURE

Each student writes a postcard to him/herself. They need to write down what they hope to achieve by the end of Y7 and do it really succinctly. Collect them all in. Post them all out in May of the following year (i.e. when they're all nearing the end of Y7). How have they worked towards their aspirations?

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*Me: Who would you take with you in your hot air balloon?*  
*Y1 Boy: The donkey from the field near my house.*

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*Me: What can we do about poverty?*  
*Y8 Girl: Nothing. It will always be there.*

## SCREEN TESTS

A LIST OF GREAT FILMS ALL TEACHERS SHOULD REVISIT:  
**KES** (KEN LOACH, 1969)

**THE WIZARD OF OZ** (VICTOR FLEMING, 1939)

**TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD** (ROBERT MULLIGAN, 1962)

**THE FISHER KING** (TERRY GILLIAM, 1991)

**JAWS** (STEVEN SPIELBERG, 1975)

**THE UNTOUCHABLES** (BRIAN DE PALMA, 1987)

FILMS WITH GREAT TEACHERS IN THEM:

**CLOCKWORK MICE** (VADIM JEAN, 1995)

**LEAN ON ME** (JOHN AVILDSSEN, 1989)

**DEAD POETS SOCIETY** (PETER WEIR, 1989)

**TO SIR, WITH LOVE** (JAMES CLAVELL, 1967)

**SAVING PRIVATE RYAN** (STEVEN SPIELBERG, 1998)

**STAND AND DELIVER** (RAMON MENENDEZ, 1989)

ALL THESE FILMS HAVE CHARACTERS THAT SHOW COURAGE. I STUCK AN IMAGE FROM DEAD POETS SOCIETY ONTO MY PGCE JOURNAL BACK IN 1992. THE LECTURER RIPPED OFF THE PICTURE AND BUNGED IT IN THE FILE WITH A NOTE SAYING 'IT'S NOTHING LIKE THIS'. AT THE TIME I WAS HORRIFIED AND EMBARRASSED BY MY NAIVETY. NOW, I'D LIKE TO GO BACK IN MY TIME MACHINE AND TELL HIM TO GET A GRIP. LET ME BE INSPIRED BY THOSE WHOM I CHOOSE TO BE INSPIRED BY.



## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

HYWEL IS A TEACHER, TRAINER AND INDEPENDENT THINKING ASSOCIATE. HIS BOOK 'OOPS! HELPING CHILDREN LEARN ACCIDENTALLY' IS PUBLISHED BY CROWN HOUSE AND IS AVAILABLE ON AMAZON (£16.99). CREATELEARNINSPIRE.CO.UK INDEPENDENTTHINKING.CO.UK @HWEL\_ROBERTS

