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History, values education & PSHE

— Hilary Cooper

Introduction

The core values which are supposed to underpin the curriculum are generally taught through discrete personal, social and health education lessons and developed through classroom ethos. Yet history has at its heart the ways in which people may have felt, thought and behaved, the decisions, both personal and social, that they made about how to live, within the constraints of past times, from which current values and attitudes emerged. Surely this must be a key reason for learning history. However, exploring value laden issues integral to a topic is rarely the starting point for planning. Recently colleagues at the University of Cumbria have been investigating ways in which the humanities can be the starting point for curriculum planning with values education embedded within history and/or geography as central (Rowley and Cooper 2009). We have also been exploring ways in which the perennial values at the heart of folk tales, oral sources from different cultures, can be translated by children into contemporary contexts meaningful to them (Cooper 2008 a, b).

Oral history: Values transmitted through folk tales

Folk Tales describe all sorts of people: clever and stupid, good and bad, rich and poor and the dilemmas with which they have to deal. In doing so they convey the values a society wants to transmit. Simple folk tales, which tell about how people lived in other times and places have a traditional role in the Early Years curriculum. They involve questions which lie at the heart of historical enquiry. Teachers discuss motives. (Why did s/he do it? Was it wise?) They discuss sequences of events and causes and effects. (So what happened next? Why?) And they compare interpretations and reasons for them (Different versions of stories and different styles of illustration).

At Key Stage 2 Elizabeth Ditchburn, at St. Joseph's RC Primary School, Cockermouth, told her Year 4,5, 6 class two folk tales as part of a cross curricular project. The first was a Turkish Story, The Authority of the Host (Walker 1990). The morals were the importance of offering hospitality and the need to respect other people's house rules. After discussion and role play children wrote modern interpretations. The contexts for younger children involved, for example, being invited to a house where the family were vegetarians, or a footballer who misused the hospitality a local farmer offered after he crashed his car. Some of the Year 6 children interpreted host as hosts and guests on a television cookery programme; appalling behaviour of the guest was met with great generosity by the host! In another lesson the children were told Russian stories, one about material greed and another about a stepmother. The contemporary interpretations of these stories, which the children retold, revealed that their greatest fear of loss was not material but of family. The insights and understanding of the stepmother/child relationship were amazingly mature and also positive, drawing on their own experiences or, often, on soap opera themes.

At Key stage 1 children have the opportunity to discuss the motives of a real person. Those of Florence Nightingale may

appear obvious, but some teachers are brave enough to explore the motives, conflicts and decisions of, for example, Harriet Tubman, Rosa Parks or Jesse Owens or with their children (Claire 2002).

History Study Units

Since there is no space here to identify key value-laden dimensions of each Key Stage 2 National Curriculum study unit we shall focus on Janet Ager's work on Tudor Explorers and Settlers with her Year 5 class at High Heskett school in Cumbria (Teachers' TV). In making a map and time line and hearing accounts of Francis Drake's explorations children discussed the values that motivated Tudor Explorers: national wealth, international competition, personal wealth from piracy, new trade routes, scientific discoveries and compared these with contemporary motivations. They were read a poem about life on board ship, which led them to hot-seat first Sir Francis, then 'an ordinary sailor' to consider their different attitudes and motivations. Then they researched the Roanoke Settlement. They discussed reasons for emigrating (concerns about over population, religious intolerance, political freedom). When they landed on the wet and windy coast of America, (convincingly replicated in the unpopulated land behind the school), they discussed their feelings, what things are essential in life (shelter, food and warmth) and how to provide them. They wrote letters home saying who and what they missed. They listened to accounts written by the settlers of how they were helped at first by the Amerindians, but later, after the poor harvest, abuse their hospitality. They discussed how the indigenous people may have felt towards them and why their feelings apparently changed.

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