



Our teachers as narrators – successful curriculum implementation in a small school

Successful curriculum implementation has been compared to enjoying a particular kind of box set, such as Game of Thrones. In contrast to something like The Simpsons:

there is an overarching plot to the whole series; there is purpose and there is a clear thread that binds the seasons together. Not only this, but within the individual seasons, there are sub-plots which tie the episodes of that season together. Within each episode (or two, if the deliberate stylistic choice of a cliffhanger has been made), there is a plot that is resolved which means the episode has its own merit; a short-term purpose of being there. Each episode deepens our understanding until the plot of the season is resolved. This is why one cannot simply watch and understand any single episode from such a series as we lack the necessary prior learning from previous episodes to make any meaning from the random episode. The plots within each episode are a vital part of understanding the plot of the season, which in turn is crucial to solving the overarching plot of the series. Although a quick, initial summary – what is known in the TV trade as ‘the previously’ – may put us on the correct path and give us a bare minimum of understanding, viewers that have attended and thought deeply about each episode, the actions of the characters and events, will get a much deeper understanding of character motivation and plot choice. It is a delicate, intricate and purposeful web of knowledge that gradually deepens and all links up together to create a cohesive journey.¹

Now, let us imagine this box set as a curriculum subject, each season as a school year and the episodes as lessons:

Within each individual season lies its own narrative plot, which is worthy in its own right and is resolved by the end of the season – but can also set the scene for what is to come or play a part in the resolution of the overarching story arch. In an educational context, each season provides the core knowledge and understanding required in each year group in order to successfully progress and understand the subsequent seasons that will follow. In other words, it takes new ideas and learning and gradually increases the complexity of those ideas so that a child’s knowledge goes from shallower to deeper over the course of their schooling.²

This persuasive analogy clearly runs into difficulties when applied to a small school with mixed-age classes where children in one year group are experiencing the same lessons as pupils in another; however, we believe successful curriculum implementation remains achievable and is explained using a different analogy.

Instead of a box set, we compare successful curriculum implementation to a film franchise. For example, Marvel have created a cinematic universe centred on recurring characters. While each film can stand alone and has a complete story, the movies are connected, and the links become indelibly clearer with every new one enjoyed, especially when the viewing

¹ Sealy, Clare. The researchED Guide to The Curriculum: An evidence-informed guide for teachers (pp. 84-85). Hodder Education. Kindle Edition.

² Sealy, Clare. The researchED Guide to The Curriculum: An evidence-informed guide for teachers (pp. 86-87). Hodder Education. Kindle Edition.

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experience is shared with a superfan, who knows everything about the characters and the world they inhabit, and can patiently explain the twists and turns, even pausing a film for this purpose, meaning nothing is missed.³

We see our teachers in this role, as narrators. They know what point each year group has reached in their learning journey, and the links both within and between subjects, and can teach mixed-age classes the same lesson while carefully adapting the accompanying dialogue for different sets of pupils, supporting and challenging, providing access for all, achieving progress for all. Our teachers are, of course, particularly attuned to the needs of their children given they stay together for two years.

³ https://my.chartered.college/impact_article/small-schools-with-big-ideas-a-connected-curriculum-model/