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A critical appraisal of the defining features of Heathcote's methodology and their impact on the delivery of *Mantle of the Expert* in classrooms.

Introduction

This paper considers the breadth of Heathcote's educational drama methodologies and proposes that *Mantle of the Expert*, a situated drama practice which she developed in the latter half of her career, cannot be viewed in isolation and it is very difficult to teach effectively without an understanding of the subtleties of her earlier work.

As a relatively inexperienced classroom teacher, I found Heathcote's work transformational when I encountered it. My allegiance to the pedagogy which she promoted meant that when it appeared to fall from favour as a relevant strategy, during the late 1980s, I was personally and professionally affected. Running through this paper is a somewhat artificial divide between Heathcote's earlier and later work, necessitated by a desire on my part to indicate that *Mantle of the Expert* is not an accessible methodology for teachers who do not understand Heathcote's earlier work, often called *Man in a Mess*. The divide between early and later work is concerned with teaching methodology rather than content, yet many of the pedagogical features are consistent. My paper firstly places Heathcote's work within an historical framework and then selects features from her earlier work to see if they are essential in *Mantle of the Expert*.

Many writers and practitioners saw Heathcote's work as mainstream educational drama practice, even 'drama orthodoxy' in the mid-1980s (Byron 1986). My inclination to use Heathcote's methods was supported locally by a countywide support network which encouraged innovative practice. I worked in what Reva Klein coined in the TES an 'arts utopia' (Klein 1991a:144) which allowed Heathcote's work to flourish. Yet by the end of the decade, her work appeared to be more difficult to promote and practice. By the early 1990s Klein pondered 'is the work of drama-in-education pioneers Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton still useful or merely a historical footnote?' (Klein 1991b: 27).

If Klein is right and Heathcote's *Man in a Mess* methodology was losing favour in the late 1980s, the reasons might be found within the prevailing educational culture of the time,

following the Education Reform Act of 1988. Policial changes to education might have led practitioners to turn towards *Mantle of the Expert*. I was also aware of and involved in a long running binary debate about the nature of educational drama at this time, which ran throughout most of the twentieth century. The debate arose between, on the one hand, practitioners who proposed that drama was taught as a theatre art form in its own right with relevant skills and content and, on the other, progressivists who saw drama as a means of personal and group expression and development. These polarised views became critical when learning in drama had to be defined for the emerging national curriculum (Department for Education and Science 1989). The Arts Council England was invited to establish two task groups to report on the drama curriculum, initially in 1989. The composition, remit and conclusions of the task group affected the way that drama was delivered in many schools, as they were disseminated by the Arts Council.

Progressivism

Heathcote is often viewed as belonging to the 'camp' of those who saw drama as a tool for personal development, rather than a theatre art. However, Pam Bowell, speaking at Heathcote's Life Celebration in December 2011, stressed that Heathcote had not abandoned theatre forms, since to get to the essence of the drama she sought to

strip it back to its essentials rather than bury it under layers of what she saw as unnecessary theatrics. This was not a betrayal of her theatre roots but rather, I think, a profound understanding of them (Bowell 2012: 4).

John Dewey, a proponent of progressive education, described the importance of testing ideas in the 'crucible of real life experience' (Ozman and Craver 2007: 93) and Heathcote adopted this metaphor as she described a paradigm of learning with children and teacher stirred up together in a 'crucible'. Heston's PhD thesis, (1993), reflects on this paradigm and she takes it further, describing the span of Heathcote's career as a shift from the paradigm of crucible in her earlier work to the paradigm of stewardship with the development of MOE.

One of Dewey's central proposals was that students should be able to work on a project related to their own interests (McDermott 1981) which led to topic-based approaches to

learning in Britain in the 1960s and also, perhaps, to Heathcote's MOE approach. Problem-solving is central to all Heathcote's work and was also found in Dewey's pedagogy, which 'cuts across traditional divisions between subjects and involves pupils actively in solving problems' (Bullock and Stallybrass 1999: 500). There is evidence to show that in 1970s this topic based, exploratory approach was in tune with government thinking. Here is an extract from the Warnock Report of 1978:

For the imagination is the power to see possibilities beyond the immediate; to perceive and feel the boundlessness of what is before one, the intricacies of a problem, the complications or subtleties of something previously scarcely noticed. To work at something, to begin to find it interesting, this is to let the imagination play on it. To begin to explore something imaginatively is to begin to see it stretching out into unexplored paths, whose ends are not in sight (Warnock 1978: 155).

Progressive education was unpopular with the Thatcher government after 1979 and her ministers' educational reforms made them harder to embrace in teaching. By 1996 it became an explicit intention to outlaw them, as noted by Davis: 'The chief inspector of schools said three weeks ago that we needed to bury progressive education' (Davis 1996). This reversal in attitude and the cessation of topic work across subject boundaries might have affected the popularity of Heathcote's practice and methods.

The pressure to abandon progressive methods was reinforced by Michael Gove, when he was shadow Conservative Secretary of State for Education:

This misplaced ideology has let down generations of children. It is an approach to education that has been called progressive, but in fact is anything but ... We need to tackle this misplaced ideology wherever it occurs (Curtis 2008).

Heathcote's work changed from being very experimental and improvised, to being much more structured. She called the earlier work *Man in a Mess* because it was about trying to sort out problems that people found themselves in.

I have become increasingly interested in the notion that without an understanding of both *Man in a Mess* and theatre form, from which Heathcote drew consistently, *Mantle of the Expert* might be very difficult to teach effectively. The constituent parts of the early model contain numerous values and features which were to be incorporated into the MOE model. I

will outline some of the features of *Man in a Mess* drama, to illustrate my concern that MOE has often been introduced to teachers who do not have prior experience of experiential methods and when this occurs the version of Heathcote's work that is introduced to young people is potentially quite different from the work practiced by those with knowledge of her earlier work.

Frame

One of the enduring features of Heathcote's work involved engaging all participants in a common 'frame' or role, facing a significant dilemma. A trademark of Heathcote's work and departure from the drama practice of earlier practitioners and from traditional theatre is the emphasis on the group, rather than a set of characters. *Man in a Mess* is described by O'Neill (1995: XV1) as a series of episodes or scenic units, quite unlike improvisation. She refers to the temporary acceptance of 'an imaginary world' (1995: 45).

Heathcote was motivated by the desire to engage both affective and cognitive responses from learners (St. Clair 1991, Bolton 1984) as she was interested in what happens when people experience and reflect at virtually the same time (Johnson and O'Neill 1984). She introduced a unique element into drama activity when she made the decision to give all learners the same viewpoint. O'Neill (1995) recognises group orientation as a significant aspect of her methodology, along with the decision to place the teacher within the artistic process alongside the learner.

Questioning

Questioning techniques, within the fiction, also endured through early and later work. Wagner points out 'I have never heard Heathcote ask a characteristic teacher question' (1999: 55) meaning one loaded with the heavy implications of the 'correct' response. It is very empowering for a class to be asked a question which the teacher actually wants to know the answer to. This aspect of Heathcote's methodology is explored by Warren (1999), who points out that, rather than congratulate a child for a good idea, the teacher should adopt an appropriate tone (worried/surprised) and ask a further question, engaging with the fiction. Heathcote worked and questioned from *within* the fiction, as a fellow artist and not as a teacher, altering the dynamic of the classroom interaction from one of teacher as

instructor to one of teacher as negotiator. This might not be understood by teachers using *Mantle of the Expert* (MOE).

Time

The manipulation of time is the next feature that I want to focus on. Heathcote worked in imminent time alongside learners, as if the experiences are happening here and now. It was this immediacy or 'real depicted time' (Heston 1993: 79) that acted as a lever to create productive tension.

I am constantly amazed by the miracle of how thinking about a dramatic idea, can in an instant become that of carrying it into action. There is a world of difference between someone in a class saying "Well, they would take all their belongings with them" and saying "Let's pack up and leave" (Heathcote 1982: 20).

Heathcote was extremely aware of the potency of imminent time as opposed to reported time. She claimed that the factor which singled out dramatic work from other kinds of learning was that time changed from reported to present or imminent.

Heathcote's work involved participants being forced to make difficult group decisions at moments of high tension under pressure of time, then being immediately thrown into concentrated reflection in which they must evaluate their actions. Heathcote described this as 'forcing them to confront their own actions and decisions and go forward to a believable outcome' (Johnson and O'Neill 1984: 99). She also suggested that such work might lead classes into sensitive emotional areas that are usually avoided in school but can be productively introduced within a depicted world. An understanding of the subtle use of time and tension is essential to successful utilization of her strategies. Bowell and Heap explain the importance of tension by referring to dramatic tension within the theatre, as an ingredient of all well-crafted plays. Implicit in this quotation is the requirement for drama teachers to understand the power of theatre form.

It is the fuel which fires the imperative for action in a play. It is created by the friction which exists at the interface between the differing, and sometimes rival, values, beliefs and aspirations of characters (2001: 58).

Role

Heathcote was immersed in the concept of bringing a presence into the room for the children to meet and interact with. She entered the fiction as a character, or role, in order to offer something meaningful to the class. The role would use controlled language, often slightly mysterious, withholding rather than offering too much information. She described it as a sense of care and selectivity in the language. 'You can see how, when you do something like this, you are indeed extremely close to theatre' (Heathcote 1978). The closeness to theatre is an opaque feature of Heathcote's work which, if not recognised, might make her methods harder to use because the forms she used can appear to be straightforward when they actually have many layers. It could be argued that *Mantle of the Expert* is a method of teaching which appears to be quite straightforward but could lack sophistication if the teacher does not have an understanding of theatre form and educational drama.

The use of 'teacher-in-role' is arguably Heathcote's single most distinctive contribution to educational drama. It is essential to *Man in a Mess* drama and is also used, slightly differently, in MOE. Heathcote described both teacher in role and person in role as strategies for the classroom, the latter being the easier to define. 'Person in role' is deployed when two adults work together and one facilitates the lesson while the other pretends to be someone else, or 'takes on' a role over a long period of time and acts as a focus for the participants' attention. Wagner gives advice about the rules that Heathcote developed for the use of person in role; this should not be fully formed or rehearsed and may have little initial idea of the direction of the drama, yet be aware of the limits and restrictions of the form (Wagner 1999).

Laboratory

The analogy of the laboratory is, for me, the tipping point from *Man in a Mess* into MOE, in which enquiry-based approaches and enterprise really take hold. In his biography of Heathcote, Bolton suggests that the metaphor of activity in a laboratory comes closest to Heathcote's vision of education (Bolton 2003), with students setting up experiments, clustering around benches, making observations and communicating findings. This is how he sees Heathcote's teaching and learning style, set within the laboratory of learning and with the emphasis increasingly on the learners as people who own their knowledge.

Heathcote applied Erving Goffman's work on frame analysis (1974) to process drama (Heathcote 1978, Howell and Heap 2001). Although she changed the style, pace and atmosphere of her work over time, she maintained the importance of a context or domain, inhabited by all the learners with a common concern. The frame, or viewpoint, is the window through which the participants engage with the action, defining their attitude towards events.

Brotherhoods

An essential ingredient in Heathcote's methodology was the possibility that those involved in the process should be enabled to make connections across time and space, to understand the motivation and share the dilemmas of human beings with whom they had very little in common (Johnson and O'Neill 1984). The frames that she chose allowed her to cut a slice through social strata, time and age, yet holding firmly onto one issue or idea (Wagner 1999). The issue acted as a thread, woven through the situation and became a universal element which could give access to the feelings of people from other places and times, binding them together in a brotherhood. It represents all those who behave in a certain way, or hold a particular belief and was intended to help participants understand more about what motivates human behaviour. Collective concern became important in Heathcote's work because participants within each frame were forced to confront each other's attitudes. Wagner describes participants being 'trapped in the experience', and having to 'pull out new information' and she suggests 'this is when they plumb to what they didn't know they knew' (Wagner 1981: 45). MOE work which does not actively seek meaning from within the group experience might be impoverished as a result.

Ethical Stance

Edmiston (1998) speaks of an ethical vision in Heathcote's work which affirms students' relationships with others arguing that caring is our basic reality and that the formation of an 'ethical self' is essential in recognising the interdependence of human beings. Group decision-making is central to ethical group relationships.

Montgomerie describes Heathcote's work as a kind of 'dialogism' which can be likened to Bakhtin's worldview, including elements such as 'outsideness' involving new learning which

comes from a detachment and ethical understanding, tied to the empathy which can come from seeing the world from another's point of view (Montgomerie 2008: 1). Process drama theory, according to Montgomerie, also draws on the idea of a 'moral conscience' which links with Heathcote and Bolton's belief that drama participants must be held responsible for action taken in drama (Heathcote and Bolton 1995).

Sign

One of Heathcote's early essays explores how signs are used in the classroom.

Actual living and theatre ... both use the same network of signs as their medium of communication; namely the human being signalling across space, in immediate time, to and with others, each reading and signaling simultaneously within the action of each passing moment (Heathcote 1982: 20).

Social encounters, she maintained, need 'the sign of the person, in action, using all objects, significant space, pause, silences, and vocal power to make the meaning available to others in the encounter' (1982: 27). Almost twenty years later, she and Bolton described signs as 'those aspects of the total environment from which a "reader" seeks to make coherent meaning of the situation and circumstance' (Bolton and Heathcote 1999: 89). It is therefore important in the classroom that the only signs offered are those which the class is likely to be interested in reading. Three functions for signing are offered; representations, indicators and lures' (*ibid*: 91). Such a highly-developed sign system might elevate all her drama teaching, including MOE, from a potentially mundane exercise to a complex and rich experience.

The significance of Heathcote's use of semiotics and signing is that it is not likely to be grasped readily by someone without prior understanding of drama and theatre, and might make the adoption of any part of Heathcote's pedagogy difficult for the 'non specialist' .

Theatre Form

A final feature of her work is again linked with the theatre. She did not distance herself from theatre, maintaining that she taught *through* the aesthetic rather than *for* the aesthetic (Morgan and Saxton 1987). She uses Brecht's alienation techniques in her drama practice because her approach required both emotion and analysis (Wooster 2004). Her classroom

strategies involved constant interruption, to remind participants that they were involved in a drama process and allow them to reflect upon it, which is another aspect of alienation. Heathcote's use of 'frame distance' has been likened to Grotowski (Ackroyd 2004) and O'Neill draws comparisons with Grotowski when she investigates the transformation of actor into character in full view of the audience as a deliberate strategy (1995).

In an apparent contradiction, Heathcote tried to bring participants in drama close to the subject, engaging them at an emotional level, yet always distancing them again, through intervention, to demand objective reflection. The word 'metaxis' is used by both Heathcote and her colleague Gavin Bolton to describe moments when reality and fiction fuse for participants. From her earliest work, Heathcote stressed that learning happens during reflection on action rather than the action itself. This reflection is a Brechtian tendency, demanding objective rather than emotional responses.

Bolton describes this detachment slightly differently. He outlines similarities in the way that participants submit to an event, signal their acceptance of the rules and observe the time and other restraints of the encounter. Bolton asserts 'only when you "give yourself" to an event can you be said to be experiencing it. You "let it happen" to you so that you can then continue to "make it happen"'. He describes it as 'an act both active and passive' (Bolton 1992: 4). He suggests that there is an *existential* quality to the experiencing because the engagement is internal to the event. This active, reflective dualism is a very good explanation of Heathcote's work.

Theatre Arts

The features I have described, above, were the ingredients of Heathcote's classroom drama practice, which she called *Man in a Mess*. In the mid 1980s this practice was described as Drama orthodoxy, yet by 1990 commentators were describing the methods as history. There may have been powerful incentives to adopt theatre arts or combined arts approaches in the late 1980s. These approaches were favoured by the Arts Council. David Hornbrook, a strong advocate of theatre arts curriculum, produced a tailored set of attainment targets and assessment criteria, linked with foundation subjects in the National Curriculum (1989, 1991). He also provided a defined curriculum which could be easily

articulated to colleagues and the wider world. I believe this was attractive to many teachers and that Heathcote's *Man in a Mess* drama model probably became less influential than it had been in the first half of the decade. The political shift from progressive education to a subject-based climate of testing had an impact on all areas of the curriculum, including drama.

My original idea for researching Heathcote's practice was to seek reasons for the apparent decline in its popularity. But I then discovered that during the mid 2000s, there was a growing interest in MOE, a later teaching methodology. It is appropriate to initially outline this practice.

Definition of MOE

MOE is a cross-curricular system of learning, run as an enterprise, normally over a lengthy time period such as a few weeks or a term and most often in the primary school. It begins with an agreement between teacher and students to take on *functional* (Heathcote and Bolton 1995: 23) roles as a group of people who are experts in running something, such as a manufacturing or retail enterprise. It is designed to set up a 'supportive, interpretative, and reflective community' through introducing tasks (O'Neill in Heathcote and Bolton 1995: viii). It is an enterprise model of learning, with emphasis on tasks that need to be completed for a fictional client. Participants should be motivated by problems and challenges that arise, creating a social dimension to the work as short term tasks are completed collaboratively. There is an emphasis on making participants aware that they are learners.

The teacher, operating within the fiction, is dependent on the students' advice and guidance, enhancing their ownership of the enterprise, which should be developed over time to ensure that it has cultural and social traditions. These features, including its history, will be invented as part of the enterprise. In traditional theatre, the narrative usually relies on human traits and differences, but in Heathcote's work the narrative emerges from the collaborative tasks that need to be completed. Characterisation is therefore less significant and acting skills on the part of the teacher irrelevant because meaning emerges from the context and not the characters (Bolton and Heathcote 1999).

A fictional group is created whose power increases through group action and the strength they draw from working towards a common goal. Their only claim to identity is that they are a group who could legitimately exist in the real world. This means that the fictional situation must feel authentic to the participants and they must be able to imagine real people doing something like this. The group becomes an audience to themselves, with the teacher also adopting a role within the fiction so that there is no actual audience. During MOE lessons, students are required to 'question, negotiate, compromise, take responsibility, cooperate, and collaborate, all in the service of something beyond themselves' according to O'Neill (in Heathcote and Bolton 1995: viii).

The cross-curricular application of MOE presents opportunities for talking and writing-in-role, as adults, through formal meetings. Telephone calls, business discussions, film and media work, report writing and developing marketing materials can also be imagined within this frame. These activities are not isolated, but are developed within the context of an enterprise which is delivered with 'real' time pressures and as a collaborative activity.

Taylor (2006) identifies the key defining concepts of MOE as the development of a community of inquiry, the acquisition and application of new skills, the frame of role-play, cross-curricular experiences and activities based on relevant problems, which are perceived as 'real' by the community. The principles within which MOE operates, for Taylor, are an ethos of risk-taking, socially-constructed knowledge in a collaborative framework and the involvement of the teacher as facilitator and co-creator of knowledge. This ethos of risk-taking may be perceived as greater by those with less drama experience, encountering MOE for the first time. The risks are probably different than those for participants in Heathcote's earlier *Man in a Mess* drama model, and teachers using this earlier model may find MOE less exciting and with fewer moments of tension.

Heathcote designed a model for teachers to use in order to help participants gradually build belief in their engagement in the process. This consisted of five levels:

- *I do this*
- *My motive is*
- *I invest in*

- *My models are*
 - *This is how life should be.*
- (Heathcote and Bolton 1995: 20).

This model should enable participants to work from the particular action to a universal understanding of how that action ties them to the company and their colleagues, to those who have done these tasks before and how the tasks might contribute to some sort of world view. It involves slowing down the action to reflect in the same way that her earlier work did.

Herbert feels that the significance of MOE is that the group is empowered to change the context from the inside because they have a firm control over its development. This might be described as a situation in which the teacher cannot give direct information to ‘an expert’ but instead must set up ways in which this expert will discover what he/she knows whilst at the same time ‘protecting him from the real awareness of the fact that he does not as yet have this expertise’ (Herbert 1982: 10). Heathcote, like Freire, (Baldwin 1987) believed that learners are empowered by the knowledge that they are learners (Heathcote and Bolton 1995: viii).

Change of Practice

One of the reasons that Heathcote’s practice moved towards MOE was because she was increasingly concerned for authenticity and wanted participants to have time to slowly engage with the roles they were to adopt through the five-stage process described above. She wanted them to have the confidence to adopt the appropriate attitude and behaviour. Earlier practice allowed participants to jump quickly into a given role and often switch roles swiftly and frequently, but MOE required them to stay in the same role, for several hours and even days, though without the intensity that was associated with her earlier work. Heathcote hoped that participants would assume more ownership over the tasks through preparing the role more fully. Another, equally important reason for change, was the greater attention given to accurate information and historical truth through a form which ‘dignifies respect for knowledge as paramount’ (Bolton and Heathcote 1999: 123). Placing accurate knowledge at the centre of the work should, perhaps, have given it greater

acceptability within an educational system in the 1990s that placed more emphasis than before on the content and testing of children's knowledge.

Changes in Heathcote's attitude towards integrity and accuracy of information within a drama may have come about partly because she was aware of charges that her work was process-rich but content-poor (Clegg 1973, Beecham 1986). She increasingly used the analogy of a laboratory to describe the context for drama and adopted a more scientific mode of discussion with participants. Research and discovery became more important than imagining.

The key shift from *Man in a Mess* to MOE has been described by Allen (2012: 10) as a change in emphasis, from focusing on the tension inherent in the dilemma to a focus on the expertise and professionalism with which tasks are undertaken. The tension is still there, but the atmosphere has changed from panic to capability.

Bolton was very aware of Heathcote's changing methodology. He described a drama lesson in 1971 in which she began by rocking a baby's cradle with her foot. She chose this symbolic action as a starting point for a drama to help children learn about meat coming from animals. She was costumed and used a sound loop of a crying baby. He described this moment as the switch from doing to watching (Bolton 1984: 93). Bolton was aware that Heathcote's work was becoming more reflective and was less concerned with participants being 'in' the action than with commenting upon it.

Striving for a carefully structured projection into emotion so that participants are engaged but not threatened, Bolton describes the 'paradox in the art form that distance can bring closer, for the distancing gives us permission to move closer as and when we are ready, whereas facing the painful issue directly may cause us to back away' (Bolton 1987: 22). Indirect handling of a topic, according to Bolton, is a way of offering protection to students, especially when dealing with particularly sensitive topics. He describes how MOE can protect through an oblique or indirect approach. He suggests that a lesson about an adolescent suicide might be approached through the role of reporters or neighbours, or a

lesson about prostitution through social workers or students on a counselling course (Bolton 1984: 130):

If you are the kind of teacher who assumes that whatever the topic, it should be entered through 'characterisation', then you take the risk that your students, in their attempts to express the pain felt by those fictional characters, will retreat into glibness or expose themselves to distress (Heathcote and Bolton 1995: 84).

MOE changed the relationship between the group and the material or event that they were to engage with, as suggested in the following quotation. This reveals a growing desire to distance the participants from the fictitious event and introduce a cool strip to prevent an emotional engagement with the action.

How near are they to be to whatever the event is – are they to be framed as participants (I am in the event), commentators (I am telling you what is happening), guides (I was there and I am recalling it for you), investigators, (I have the official authority to find out what happened) recorders (I am recording the event for all times), critics (I critique or interpret the event as an event) or as artists (I change the form of the event and remake it)? (Bolton and Heathcote 1999: 64).

MOE, with its collective frame, imminent time and negotiated learning, is a community of practice, (Lave and Wenger 1991) though it was not described as such by Heathcote. It is different from the *Man in a Mess* drama model, yet it contains many of the same assumptions, principles and features. It is simple to set up in the classroom but complex to prepare. My concern is that any teacher who wants to make MOE vital and meaningful for children and young people, probably needs a broad personalized understanding of Dorothy Heathcote's earlier models of drama teaching. This might be challenging for many generalist primary teachers and this phase appears to be where most MOE is happening. Without an understanding of the wide range of features described earlier, which are at the heart of all her work, it could be argued that MOE is unlikely to be delivered to its fullest potential.

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