

Mantle of the Expert – Lessons and uncertainties

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[This article will explore some of the challenges we have met so far with infecting the educational system with an idea that can in the right circumstances give teachers and children the ‘power to influence’. Since MoE’s invention by Dr Heathcote in the 70’s the system went ‘underground’ only to emerge now in the 21st century as a formidable way for many primary schools who are adopting (or re-adapting) the system to engage children in curriculum enquiries in order to raise standards of ACHIEVEMENT for all its students in new and unique ways. In primary schools-the access to the time required is always available given the way most of them are organised-around the 90-95% of time children spend with ONE teacher.

We are also beginning to see secondary schools that are recognising the possibilities of the pedagogic model to transform the offer of some of their KS3 curriculum-and in some quarters-secondary schools are paying great attention to the reconstruction of their curriculum teaching teams including the use of MoE to manage the changes that are prevalent nationally (1). Secondary drama teachers are also beginning to be able to see the potential of mantle of the expert not only in the ‘drama space’ but also as a curriculum binding tool which can affect the practices of many teachers. Their role in school improvement is thus assured if they can and want to take up the challenge-so that dramatic based learning becomes part of the experience of many teaching teams. Whilst this sort of conceptual framework may unfortunately tread on the hallowed ground of drama as specialist ‘subject’ and drama as a ‘tool’-I argue here that the ramifications of using enquiry based drama as curriculum pedagogy cannot be ignored or belittled any longer. There is much to open up and discuss here as the debates that ranged for years have yet to be laid to rest as so many points of view abound and all are of course legitimate!]

The Lineage

Many drama teachers throughout the country (and many would reasonably argue-the world) will be familiar with ‘mantle of the expert’ as a strategy in the toolkits for drama for learning-since the 1970’s when people saw the brilliance of the teaching of Dorothy Heathcote who indeed seemed in those days to use it as a strategy in the use of drama in her teaching. Drama practitioners were left with the impression that that was all it was! However-as time progressed and the implications of the system began to emerge as a new and radical mode of working holistically- the ‘system’ behind the ‘strategy’ began to unfold.

Within two decades we were to be confronted with a whole new and challenging pedagogy for dramatic based learning. Academics won PhD’s (Dr John Carroll) along with many Masters Degrees on the back of the emerging theory-all in the canon and all researchable, but unfortunately, much of it unread by current practitioners. To address this we are working with Manchester Metropolitan University to support the digitalising of a major section of the

amazing archive-film and documentation-that they hold on the work of professor Heathcote over her lifetime.

The work of Dorothy Heathcote, John Fines, Gavin Bolton, Ken Byron, David Davies, Mike Fleming, Brian Edmiston, Jonathan Neelands, Nora Morgan, Cecily O'Neil and others in the field at the time give testament to the rise of drama for learning as the processes became transparent and able to be adopted by new generations of teachers. We must also remember that many children were themselves utterly transformed in this time by their newly constructed experiences of drama (both 'process' and 'product' type) and that without the huge burden carried on the shoulders of the leading practitioners of the time-drama as an educational tool would be long lost.

In secondary schools-the challenges posed by drama practitioners were even more acute as many students became aware that the haven of the 'drama studio' was usually a place of success, achievement and actual attainment against a backdrop of institutionalised compliance and for some-failure. The best drama teachers were then and now, rightfully so-hailed as teachers who could engage and challenge students often 'lost to the system'. Focus for drama people was therefore on 'subject teaching' and the secondary curriculum seen as an 'immoveable object' forever streamlined into subjects as in CS Lewis's metaphor of the Ice Queen's palace full of frozen beauty.

But times are changing.

Primary Practice

The primary sector has been ignored for too long it seems to me. Primary schools work in very different ways and are often misunderstood by secondary folk. It can be of little surprise that primary teachers and educators see the value of enquiry and holistic curriculum experiences as that which is 'worthwhile'. Such people seek pedagogic tools that move students into 'responsibility' and 'self determination' as outcomes-not just as sets of raw figures for a school to be proud of. The tectonic plates of the education system are on the move across the board and we are now witnessing new gateways to learning being encouraged as the movement to a humane curriculum emerges as an essential priority under the banner of the ECM agenda. Some secondary schools are experimenting with primary appointments in KS3 to enable primary models to be adapted and aid transfer and transition. In all my time in schools (since 1971) it is only now that such thinking is seen as at least an option in the mainstream of secondary SLT strategy.

In the most innovative secondary schools in Essex, London and Bolton and elsewhere it seems (1a), SLTs are focussing not only on learning skills in their classes but also at ways to enable learning to be seen as an 'holistic experience'. Such schools are therefore very interested in cross curricular approaches as part of the mix. The short fall currently is in the pedagogic modelling available to facilitate such a programme so attention is now being drawn

to mantle of the expert as a possible model of pedagogy. It is in this domain that secondary and primary schools are as one. What is a new set of pedagogy that has any answers-not WHAT to teach but HOW. Models 'out there' currently are ones such as the International Primary Curriculum, The Learnacy Project, P4C (Philosophy for Children) D4LC (Drama for Learning and Creativity) ALPS (Accelerated Learning in the Primary School). Such models have either enquiry or drama for learning as a pre-requisite. So what makes MoE so special that it can join such auspicious followings?

Mantle of the Expert system

Asking teachers why they go for the system is a very revealing process. For primary colleagues-it's about the almost irritating amount of choice there is in its implementation and planning processes. Primary expertise is based on a supreme knowledge of 'curriculum'-and how it impacts on children across a school. For secondary colleagues it has been about the constructing of CONTEXTS that makes learning interesting and relevant-and does not dispense with the need for subject expertise. Another benefit for many is that to teach it alone as many secondary do is not as enjoyable as working in a team of teachers who need to share their expertise.

Secondary mathematics and science for example needs the eye and overview of trained mathematicians and scientists if a KS3 project on 'Saving Earth' is to work for an investigation into waste and its disposal. The company-'Waste not Want Not Ltd' being one that is superbly environmental not only advises and disposes of the worlds waste safely -it advises on reducing the waste of firms who ask their opinion. In such a project-Science and Maths colleagues may need to services of the Humanities and D&T teams as well. If not in practice then at least in planning!

Whilst other methods will claim the same outcomes-teachers using MoE systems and bumping into it are instantly aware of its appeal to children and young people and the possibility of really ensuring 'personalisation'. (In any case-the system relies along with the others-at a good look at what makes better teaching-and we know the link between the best teaching and progress in learning. Cambridgeshire are currently embarking on a major initiative across its 3 areas as a pilot between secondary schools and their feeder primaries in an attempt to investigate getting better teaching across the transition.)

In KS4-BTEC courses are filled to the brim with enquiry based contexts for students to complete-encouraging the possibility of using mantle of the expert systems here as well.

These are much closer to the practices of universities at the forefront of training for our future medics for example. In Glasgow-medical students are given a practical medical scenario to solve as a team using the knowledge skills and understanding the TEAM has gathered and need to employ. Students report that this form of learning although horribly challenging -they understand at their sore how totally relevant the activity is to the actual jobs they will do-and

feel that they are better doctors at the end of such processes which are also used in assessment practices. Young medical professionals in dialogue with their professional coaches are only too aware of which skills are needed to save lives and take medicine forwards. Such assessment skills are taught alongside the medical ones so that they can assess themselves.

In all of these shifting grounds something is emerging from a teacher groundswell-and is a powerful antidote to the forces of reactionary instrumental empiricism that value children as numbers. Numbers were what is and was used in concentration camps and prisons to take humanity away from people-and in a similar way-our young are given their numbers early (at 3 or 7 or 11) only to be categorised into corals of similar numbers from 11-14 and then streamlined between 14-19. I mean no offence to people here in such a comparison-nor do I use it lightly. The whole machinery of the number crunchers is now beyond useful data management and has gone vastly out of control. This reactionary beast needs to be muzzled and controlled- for any reform to take hold-the adherence to a relentless praying to number gods just has to stop.

If the priorities for any sane government are about the people and their spiritual growth and welfare then a new regime needs to attend to the spirit of our young and often vulnerable. Dr Mary James has attempted to do just this job (2). She alone in the field of the assessment arm of the academic canon has created a model that truly fits the coherence of mantle of the expert and the challenge to any school or setting is how to experiment with its shockingly different practices. (3)

The 'emergent' curriculum (4) as a new force seeks to ask hard questions of school cultures and challenges notions of schooling, de-schooling and schools of the future -at its heart. Some have argued that with the right postcode on a young arm-the future is already self determined from the age of 3 (as in the 'post code' lottery).

Climate changes-the Primary Strategy Learning Networks.

It is unlikely that the DfES (now dcsf) knew what it started by the PSLN initiatives in 2004. These were grants for networked learning communities to try something new and innovative with defined outcomes- i.e. student progress. With such an ill defined view about 'progresses' the door was open to some very outlandish experiments in learning outside the usual. In Essex we encouraged schools to look at 'creativity' the then 'buzz word' and possibly within this umbrella-Mantle of the Expert. I make no excuses whatsoever in the partisan direction I initiated as it was obvious that the time was right to bring mantle work into the main stream. I 'led' tutored and mentored 2 Essex based PSLN networks that formed a nucleus in the county-and eventually the appointment of an AST specifically in the system-Gemma Handley-a fabulously gifted teacher who now leads INSET and consultancy one day a week throughout Essex South End Harlow and the eastern region. From this initiative in Essex-it seems to have sparked off interest throughout the educational system.

Mantle of the Expert. Com

www.mantleoftheexpert.com was born as a strategy to link the then 2 dozen or so people in the Essex Suffolk and Norfolk loop. Tim Taylor's networked group in Norfolk and Julia Walshaw the Suffolk AST. Julia was trained and tutored within the amazing developments of Bealings CP where MoE is used as the main curriculum tool for curriculum entitlement. (It is still even now very satisfying to note that empirically Bealings 'results' were and are so astonishing-that both Ofsted, QCA and HMI judged the school to be outstanding AND unique-a judgement that has yet to be equalled. Essentially MoE was scrutinised and then clearly targeted as the successful ingredient-alongside the leadership of Duncan Bathgate the HT and the incredible levels of outstanding teaching constantly occurring.)

Within months the website increased its readership by several hundred percent and now there are thousands of teachers and others visiting from around the world as well as many hundreds who have signed up as 'interested users'. Of course we have no knowledge of what people are actually doing with what they find or have found. But, the outlook is good as the site puts people into a learning network and in touch with training and coaching events such as the national conferences run for the past 2 years.

Old timers

However- for previous users of the system-[mantleoftheexpert.com](http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com) was certainly not the first to advocate the system as an over riding pedagogy. The Newcastle University networks with Eileen Pennington and Jane Holden and those long established by the inventor herself were also travelling in the same direction-and at the time.

We were amazed to see how parallel our own work alongside the likes Reigate CP and Creative Partnerships as well as the work at Hexham High under Kathy White Webster. They were working quietly and ***empirically*** on the system. Both Hexham and Reigate cleverly pre-empted the standards hunters and its impacts on 'measurable outcomes' with the findings of 'Word on the Street' theatre project using MoE under Red Earth theatre team in partnership with Reigate CP in Derby. The evidence collected and analysed (5) created a huge stir-as standards in progress achievement and attainment for children 'measured' was outstanding. (An Ofsted phrase meaning 'the vast majority' of children.)

Back to the future?

Currently the picture for the development is good. The Rose committee have asked for evidence of impact of the system to be submitted for scrutiny given the vast interest in so many schools and other settings up and down the country.

We will have to wait for the evidence to filter through-but our hope is that the committee will at least place it alongside other talked about pedagogies for the goals Ed Balls requires. As

with any new thing on the block-initially it provides great scrutiny and interest. The sure sign of success will be how far it causes challenges in established thinking and how long it can remain as an interesting newcomer to the scene. My own guts tell me that the system is being understood by more and more teachers. Highly skilled people are now in the system who can pass on the infrastructure of the work to others and the shifting sands of the whole system is asking some very harsh questions of the status quo people such as ‘how come children are finding learning dull and uninteresting?’ and ‘why are we not asking our children what they might find interesting to learn then build a curriculum around that?’

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Notes:

1 & 1a. Gladesmore School Haringey, Burnt Mill HS Harlow Essex and Kingstone HS Bolton are notable examples here.

2. Dr Mary James G3 Assessment Model-moe.com-conference reports Stansted November 2006

3. Jenny Burrell at Recreation Road Infant school is currently researching this model with funding from the OU Curriculum Group under Professor Bob Moon.

4. The emergent curriculum exercise is one Dr Brian Edmiston and I invented together in 2004 for use at a large teacher training week in Columbus Ohio. For quadrants are used for a public exploration of QUESTIONS on one axis of pedagogy and ANSWERS at the other juxtaposed with EMERGENT on one axis of school culture for learning and STATIC on the other end. Participants join forces to tackle questions such as (for whole school context):

- Where are we on the quadrant now? (Our current position and how we know we are where we are!)
- Where do we want to get to? (The journeys and conversations we will need to have to move at all as well as identifying who we will need to talk to etc)
- How are we going to get there? (The strategies we need to deploy.)
- What do we need to do to ensure we progress? (The evaluation processes we need to adopt to maintain and grow?)

5. See the WOTS report published in conjunction with Reigate CP and the Derby Creative Partnerships 2007. Copies can be downloaded from www.mantleoftheexpert.com