

**Mantle of the Expert: a critical evaluation of the ways this strategy might contribute to aspects of children's learning and the development of self-direction.**

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## What is Mantle of the Expert?

*“Mantle is like learning to be someone else, and that helps you to learn to be yourself too.” Georgie, aged 11*

Mantle of the Expert, often abbreviated to MoE, is the name given by Dorothy Heathcote to her approach to learning through whole-group drama. Heathcote, an educational innovator, and latterly Senior Tutor at the University of Newcastle-Upon-Tyne, developed the approach over forty years as a way for students to engage with the curriculum both by using their existing knowledge and by providing a framework in which to expand their social and curricular learning.

In Mantle of the Expert children and teacher work alongside each other in role, as if they are experts in a chosen field. The teacher considers the content from the National Curriculum to be taught, and decides upon an enterprise which will allow the knowledge and skills to be addressed. For example, learning about bullying might be addressed through a business whose role is to troubleshoot other businesses' problems, or learning about the Romans and Celts might suggest a group of archaeologists who have been called in to deal with artefacts found on a building site. The work the children do 'as if' they are a business or organisation is called the 'mantle'. Within the mantle, the children act as if they are the workers, carrying out tasks for the client, dealing with the problems and moral issues that arise, and exploring dimensions of working together to achieve a common goal. In each mantle, however there are some key factors. The students are invited to work *as if* they are an organisation (known as the enterprise), with a distinct expertise (e.g. an animal shelter, travel agents, film makers). There is always a client, who commissions the job or tasks to be done (e.g. a council needing a leisure centre built, a farmers' union with a fox problem). The dramatic tension arises from the fictional client who drives the work to be completed and from the moral or ethical dimension of the tasks. The enterprise is chosen and steered by the teacher to allow maximum opportunity to pursue the mandatory curriculum, and is planned so that it covers a variety of curriculum areas. Certainly in MoE the teacher is expected to lead the learning and to ensure that the best opportunities for expanding the children's experience are taken, but how might this conflict with the intrinsic idea of being

guided by the children's own interests and expertise? The teacher in role is responsible for the direction of the mantle, and whether the role they are currently taking is directional or subversive, they can steer both the children's learning and their emotional involvement. I will be asking whether and how a zone of proximal development can be created within the drama, and how the teacher is best able to ensure that the mantle creates opportunities for learning, and what learning might most effectively take place within it.

Mantle work happens in the *now* time, although the class and teacher can also work together to form the history of the organisation, to help explore what expertise they hold. The teacher works in role alongside the pupils, choosing a powerful, equal or subordinate role as is needed to move the learning forward. The teacher also decides when it is appropriate to work in role and when more didactic classroom teaching needs to take place. 'For Dorothy Heathcote... the teacher, as the most mature member of the group, has not merely a right but a responsibility to intervene, since learning is the product of intervention.' (Johnson & O'Neill, (Eds.), 1984 p.42 )

This essay will consider, in the first section 'How might children learn in Mantle of the Expert'. This includes how both the social constructivist and Piagetian ideas of peer to peer learning and the apprenticeship model as proposed by Lave & Wenger and Rogoff may go some way to explaining how MoE could function as a more effective way of learning than traditional transmission modes of teaching might allow.

The nature of intervention to create circumstances for learning will be discussed in the section 'Why might children learn in Mantle of the Expert'. The idea that MoE may succeed in inducing children's internal locus of control to motivate their learning will be examined, and Dweck's work on the importance of goal-centred tasks to engage a self-mastery approach will be considered.

One of the key tensions within MoE is the claim that 'The teaching is authentic, and yet it achieves its authenticity through "the big lie", since it operates within a powerful *imagined* context, created through the inner dramatic rules of time, space, role and situation.' (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995, p.vii). In the section 'What can children learn in Mantle of the Expert' I will be asking if authenticity in learning is desirable and achievable, and to what extent MoE can lay claim to authentic teaching.

Also here will be considered the extent to which the statutory curriculum can be covered through a MoE approach and where the tensions between a child-led curriculum and external demands might lie. The apparent flexibility of MoE planning to be led and changed by the pupils' interests will be weighed against the idea that the teacher domination (especially in the initial stages) of MoE (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995) makes any assertion of child-centred learning a false claim. The possibilities of MoE's impact on linguistic and social learning will also be explored. A significant problem when looking at research into any form of collaborative learning is that the extent to which learning takes place as a direct result of the collaborative experience is always difficult to quantify. The same problem occurs when trying to elicit how much self-regulation of learning enhances the amount, quality or depth of learning, and these issues will be encountered throughout the essay.

### **How do children learn in Mantle of the Expert?**

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) is defined as,

The distance between a child's 'actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving' and their higher level of 'potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers'. (Vygotsky, 1978 as cited in Daniels, 2005, p.5)

If learning occurs through Mantle of the Expert, social constructivist approaches are worth examining since they may help to explain how children learn within the constructs of the setting. Vygotsky's ZPD has been subsequently developed, notably by Lave & Wenger (1991 and in Daniels (Ed.) 2005) who explored different interpretations of proximal learning: the traditional interpretation of a scaffolded approach where the learner is assisted by or collaborates with more experienced people; a cultural method where knowledge which an individual already holds is made more accessible through instruction, which links everyday experiences and the knowledge to create a more thorough understanding of a concept; and a collectivist model, where societal knowledge and personal knowledge is exchanged in a constant two-way process.

The creation of a learning situation within which a child's ZPD is open is a key feature of MoE, but the scaffolding for learning must here also be taken to include situations where the teacher, or more experienced learner, specifically creates situations which children will need to engage with each other to enhance their knowledge. The active participation of a more experienced other is usually explained as the key to opening up the ZPD required to move a specific child's learning forward, but the construction of a relevant and suitable learning situation could also be seen as a non-participative scaffold to the learning. This could appear to align more with Lave and Wenger's third (societal) model, but it could be argued that within a MoE environment, all three interpretations of ZPD formation might be happening concurrently. The teacher-in-role might, through careful questioning, move a child's learning forward in a traditional scaffolded manner. The creation of a realistic learning situation may provide for the cultural method, whereby the child's knowledge is deepened through the experiential links. The transverse knowledge between learners can be seen to form the third, collectivist, aspect of engagement, when 'a person's intentions to learn are engaged and the meaning of learning is configured through the process of becoming a full participant in a sociocultural practice.' (Lave and Wenger, 1991 p.29).

Lave & Wenger (1991) talk about the anecdotal evidence surrounding the rapid spread of knowledge between peers and near peers, but do not go on to explore whether misinformation or redundant avenues of learning are also more likely to be encountered when there is not a teacher-mediator leading the learning. It could be seen that the redundant paths taken through the learning are as valuable in terms of learning about learning as the paths that lead directly to an answer or completion of the task in hand. Their theory of Legitimate Peripheral Participation is 'not in itself an educational form, much less a pedagogical strategy or teaching technique. It is an analytic viewpoint on learning, a way of understanding learning.' (Lave and Wenger, 1991 p.40). The focus on understanding how communities of practice operate is directly applicable to the formation of the learning community that is the shared MoE experience. It builds on the apprenticeship model to understand how learners can take on different types of participation at different times, both as directed by their own learning needs and by the changing nature of the community itself. In one sense, in a MoE classroom, all the learners including the adult teacher are journeymen, as they

pass through different cycles of knowledge in order to fulfil the wishes of the fictitious client.

The social learning communities discussed by Lave and Wenger can be augmented by considering the work of Rogoff (1990). Like Lave and Wenger, Rogoff realises that only a small part of the social world (frequently that of the home or the classroom) is considered when social learning groups are discussed. She explores the apprenticeship model with due regard for the idea that caregivers and children are not ‘separate influences, but actors whose roles *with regard to each other* are of interest [original italics]’. Rogoff gives consideration to the different perspectives of Piaget and Vygotsky on social interaction. She represents the Piagetian view as peer to peer interaction which is most effective when the discussion between two equal peers brings about cognitive conflict, and each individual works independently on their own and their partner’s ideas. With this theory, the process of intellectual conflict may be considered to bring about a Piagetian shift in perspective, as the learner logically compares their own and their partner’s views with the information available from the physical world. Rogoff contrasts this with the Vygotskian view that the interaction between unequal peers provides the optimum learning conditions, resembling apprenticeship. She explores the idea that these two theories are not mutually exclusive, but instead postulates that they seek to explain different aspects of cognitive development. However, the key divergence remains: for Piaget, the back and forth nature of discussion serves to advance an individual’s own development (albeit in a social context), whereas for Vygotsky, the individuals use that dialogue to create a shared understanding, through the unequal partnership of one learner scaffolding the other’s traverse through the Zone of Proximal Development.

Piaget’s emphasis was on children’s qualitative shifts in perspective on logico-mathematical problems, whereas Vygotsky was interested in children’s development of skills and information useful for the application of culturally developed tools for thinking. (Rogoff, 1990, p.141)

## **Why might children learn in Mantle of the Expert**

In collaborative learning, learners are typically supposed to construct knowledge by working on complex problems together, including individually contributing to solving the problem, partaking in discussion of the individual contributions and arriving jointly at solutions. (Roschelle & Teasley as cited in Weinberger, Stegmann, and Fischer 2007 p.416).

There is of course a significant body of evidence which draws on the Vygotskian tradition of self-regulation in learning and social constructivist ideas of learning as outlined in the previous section, and this essay does not seek to investigate further the historic research which underpins this theory of learning, but instead to consider more recent examples of research in the field and to assess whether learning within a MoE environment may contain aspects of similarity to these studies.

Gnadinger (2008) raises the question of whether peer interaction, which forms the majority of communication in a MoE classroom, is an effective strategy for all learners, or mostly for the less able child. Her study provided examples of peer-to-peer scaffolding where children's interactions appeared to be closely modelled on those shown by the teacher. The study was limited by a lack of diversity within the student body, and the inability of the author (by her own admission) to be able to draw conclusions about how much the children learnt as a result of the scaffolded learning. This second drawback is of course, pertinent to much of the literature, as we are unable to demonstrate how learning which takes place would have occurred differently (if at all) without the peer-interaction being studied. One of the key issues in 'proving' or otherwise the efficacy of MoE is the same problem of attributing outcome to method. However one of the fundamental aims of Mantle of the Expert is to enable children to know when they are learning and to control the direction of their learning 'The students must be conscious of what they are learning, as they continually record and assess new skills' (Bolton & Heathcote 1995, p.18) so the child's view of themselves as a learner must in any study form a significant part of any evidence of learning which is presented. Because children in MoE are working in role, they are not just acting as child-peer-learners, but are interacting within the constraints of the role they have taken. Mantle of the Expert does not involve play-

acting, the children are not method actors imagining themselves to be a character, but are instead invited to consider what someone in the context of the situation presented might think, say and do. Because of this factor, Gnadinger's observations about the potential for teacher effect on peer interaction do not account for the environment of a MoE classroom where the teacher is frequently not modelling the type of interaction the children display. Gnadinger explored whether children provide scaffolding, similar to that of adults, to move each other into and through a zone of proximal development, and points out the importance of the teacher valuing the contributions peers make to one another, but the idea that the peer-tutor contributions reflect and mimic adult-as-tutor interactions reflects a different power balance to that sought within MoE. To say that peer interactions 'as Damon (1984) suggested, free up the teacher's time and energy for extra individual attention allowing teachers to do more of what they were trained to do: educate children' Gnadinger (2008, p.139) seems to be the antithesis of valuing peer-learning. Instead, together with the findings about the children's mimicry of their teacher's support strategies, it seems to suggest that peer-learning can take the place of teacher-led small group input. I would counter that when used within the experience of MoE, the peer interaction does not follow such a model but instead allows for the formation of a far more collaborative template for working.

'In educational practice, an important question is what kind of peer interaction promotes conceptual understanding and how such interaction can be provoked and supported' (Van Boxtel, 2004 p.125). Van Boxtel goes on to suggest that for peer interaction to be successful, it needs to be directed towards four characteristics: talk about the concepts, elaborative participant contributions, co-construction (reaching a shared understanding of the concepts) and using tools (including verbal tools) productively. The 'careful construction of the task', 'establishing and sustaining a broader setting' and 'managing the participation of the students' that she advocates are hugely reminiscent of the key tenets of Mantle of the Expert, where the task is constructed to allow for the widest range of curricular objectives to be addressed, both from the statutory National Curriculum and to meet the wider social and developmental needs of the pupils. In traditional 'topic' work, where there is a central theme but no central concept or idea (e.g. studying Egyptian maths, gods and hieroglyphs) the learning is clearly linked, but the learning is parallel not holistic, and

there is no 'centre' to the knowledge, but instead a title. The broader setting that MoE offers may give purpose and cohesion to the learning, and the dramatic tension employed provides the sustaining feature of the learning. The human dimension, where children have a duty of care implicit in the enterprise that they run, is a key tool for managing the participation of the pupils both with regard to motivation and the way in which they approach the tasks involved.

Mantle of the Expert provides a *centre* for all knowledge: it is always experienced by the students in terms of the responsible human being. Thus, interconnectedness between one aspect and the whole is *unquestionable*. There is a sense in which an aspect *is* the whole and vice versa. (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995, p.32).

Within MoE, the children are encouraged to think about the moral implications for their decisions through their taking on the mantle, or responsibility for them. As the children are invited to become part of a drama, they are asked questions such as 'If we were responsible for x, what could we do?', and the dramatic conflicts that are introduced serve to sharpen the children's joint moral code to allow them to make decisions which take into account the complexities of the situation.

The students are empowered, not by giving them a spurious 'freedom', but by encouraging them to accept constraints within which they will work to encounter challenges and take decisions from increasing authority and knowledge. (Bolton & Heathcote 1995 p.ix)

Instead of studying pictures of, for example, Egyptian artefacts, the children are acting as if they are responsible for the artefacts, and with this comes a responsibility both to those who own them now, and those who made and owned them in the past. The element of ritual is very important within MoE, and this enhances and provokes the sense of a duty of care within the children themselves, as artefacts, issues and ideas are placed firmly within the context of human experience.

Dekker, Elshout-Mohr and Wood (2006) used Van Boxtel's framework to analyse the dialogic learning of students and concluded that during collaborative work the teacher's intervention should be minimal, and aimed at ensuring that the students

themselves take responsibility for monitoring their own learning process. This supports the notion within MoE that students taking on the mantle in so doing accept the responsibility for the learning required to enable them to complete the task or challenge set. They suggest that teachers shape students' collaboration through means such as careful task construction, behaviour management and expectation setting, and modelling of effective working practices. Dekker et al. say that 'during periods of collaborative work, the best approach of the teacher might be to merely encourage students' own processes' and that 'this may result in minimal interventions which rather aim at long-term effects than direct profit' (2006 p.77). However, MoE does not advocate minimal intervention but instead allows for a variety of roles to be taken by the teacher, either supportive or oppositional to the children in role within the mantle. The teacher might decide to be the 'interested listener' if they thought the group needed to explore orally the way they had come to a decision, or the 'devil's advocate' if they wish to give the group something to fight against, in order to enhance the students' moral identification with the work. The teacher can choose to give or to take responsibility from the group with the aim of steering the learning, so the idea of 'minimal intervention' is only one register amongst many that the teacher can choose to use.

Van Boxtel (2004) suggests that for peer interaction to be productive, it needs to include the following aspects:

- \* talk about the concepts to be learned,
- \* elaborative contributions from the participants,
- \* a continuous attempt to achieve a shared understanding of the concepts (co-construction),
- \* making productive use of the mediational means (tools) that are available.

(Van Boxtel, 2004, p.137)

So how else can productive learning be defined and recognised? Anecdotal evidence from children, teachers and parents tells us that children enjoy working within Mantle, but enjoyment itself is not enough to anticipate learning taking place.

People learn when they are provoked by an event that interrupts their goal pursuits – the *why* of learning. They engage with the event by altering their

expectations, choices and actions to control the event – the *how* of learning. And they adjust by altering their beliefs and patterns of responding to the event – the *what* of learning. (Mithaug, D. E., Mithaug, D. K., Agran, Martin, & Wehmeyer, 2003 p.ix)

MoE offers an environment where the use of dramatic tension interrupts the children's goal pursuits and not just allows but expects the children as active participants to engage with the task and subject matter. However, as the learning takes place within a fictional environment, a key question must be whether learning, specifically learning where beliefs and patterns of responding to events are changed, has a validity which is transferable to the 'outside world'. The children are certainly asked to engage with the scenarios and tasks presented, and anecdotally can be shown to have demonstrated behaviour and linguistic registers far beyond their everyday discourse. Istomina's studies and more recently Schneider and Lockl (2002, cited in Whitebread et al. 2005) demonstrated young learners performing better in memory related tasks when set in a realistic play situation, rather than when presented as a neutral task. The ability of these young children (under 7) to transfer and develop the skills of metamemory was questioned in the early studies in this field. Whitebread et al. (2005 and in press), have observed and recorded learning events where children show metacognitive or self-regulatory indications and suggest that views of young children having underdeveloped metacognitive structures may be due to issues around the methodological difficulties, including an over-reliance on verbal indicators, and from the limitations of working memory in children aged 3 to 5. Whitebread et al. (2005) divided the metacognitive indicators into: emotional, pro social, cognitive and motivational, and suggest that their developmental importance is both equal and intertwined. As *Mantle of the Expert* is able to provide a learning environment in which these four factors have equal significance, it could be construed that across the whole primary age range, not just the youngest children, MoE allows pupils to develop their metacognitive processes. A question that needs to be asked of the research is how much are the tasks observed allowing children to show that they have metacognitive processing skills, and how much are the tasks and resulting interaction able to show the development of those metacognitive processes actually occurring? To answer this one would need to look at the primary evidence sources as the study presents only numerical not case study data in relation to the metacognitive

behaviours observed. The possibility of using a similar methodology to assess the impact of work in MoE is certainly an interesting option which would bear development elsewhere. Whitebread (in press) suggests that interventions specifically designed to improve self-regulation could help young children develop meta-cognitive skills. Mantle of the Expert could be seen as a possible such intervention to enable children to both contextualise their learning and reflect upon it, and the strategies they used, outside of the work in role.

As well as the ability to understand their learning, children need a motivation to learn. This may be thought of as external (directed), or internal (self-directed). The child's internal locus of control may be engaged by a Mantle of the Expert scenario in a way that traditionally teacher directed activities may not. Dweck (2000) discusses the value of learning or task goals as opposed to performance goals in developing mastery-orientated patterns of behaviour. It seems that as MoE makes the assumption within the fiction that the pupils have self-evident mastery of their subject, and so focuses on task goals rather than personal improvement goals, children's intrinsic motivation may be further engaged. Although the motivation for learning within the mantle may be seen as characteristic of an internal locus of control, the extent to which the direction of the learning is also guided by the child is cause for debate, especially within the early stages of the mantle. The teacher planning and direction necessary to both start the mantle and to sustain it in a direction that suits the learning goals for the children (as decided by the teacher) does not have to be seen as a straitjacket. Although some elements of the statutory curriculum will be planned to be taught through MoE, this does not negate other elements from the National Curriculum or indeed a personalised curriculum as dictated by an individual or group, being covered. The initial focus on teacher direction may be seen to be paramount to ensuring that the children earn the mantle by virtue of their increased skill and knowledge, rather than through merely being labelled as experts. '[The students are] gaining sufficient expertise to make *real* decisions. If the teacher hurries the process, the students' judgements will be derived from their labels, not from their minds.' (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995, p.189).

## **What can children learn in Mantle of the Expert?**

The National Curriculum (1999) says that teaching and learning,

...should build on pupils' strengths, interests and experiences and develop their confidence in their capacity to learn and work independently and collaboratively... By providing rich and varied contexts for pupils to acquire, develop and apply a broad range of knowledge, understanding and skills, the curriculum should enable pupils to think creatively and critically, to solve problems and to make a difference for the better. (DCSF, 1999, p.11)

Mantle of the Expert aspires to provide a context through which the National Curriculum (NC) can be delivered: both the skill statements and soft indicators found at the start of the NC document, and the statutory coverage detailed in each subject area. The Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum: Interim Report (2009), commonly known as the Rose Review, identifies that the primary curriculum should teach both in a cross-curricular fashion and with discrete subject teaching as appropriate to the needs of the students and the subject. MoE practice is to teach discretely the skills the children need to acquire to progress within the mantle. There is an expectation that the locus for learning within the discrete skill or subject teaching will still be maintained as internal, because the student wants to acquire the knowledge or skill in order to progress within the mantle scenario more effectively.

Although there is one primary school in the country which endeavours to teach almost everything in the statutory curriculum through MoE and realistic learning experiences (Bealings, Suffolk), it is more usual for primary schools to put aside a few afternoons a week where many of the Foundation subjects are addressed through a single mantle, and Core subject content is overlearned or contextualised. Although it is difficult to consider many specific National Curriculum objectives which would be unable to be taught through MoE, many schools still seek refuge in the National Strategies for Numeracy and Literacy to provide the bedrock of their core subject teaching, but this may be as much as a reaction to the current testing regime, where children are asked to write or calculate set tasks within a small timeframe with little external stimulus, as for clear pedagogical reasons. The significant use of MoE within a classroom inevitably brings into question the current modes of assessment and their suitability

for assessing learning outside of set tasks. The new model of Assessing Pupils' Progress (APP) may go some way to address this, as it provides an open framework of levelled criteria for assessment, rather than a series of marked tasks. In this way, work completed in and out of role can be judged against the criteria, allowing teachers to assess what is learnt, rather than to teach what will be assessed.

Of course MoE does not seek just to give pupils the opportunity to improve within traditionally academic boundaries. The linguistic and social developments of children are two areas where MoE can be seen to have a significant impact. Working in role gives children the opportunity to practise different oral registers and to employ a variety of linguistic codes as appropriate to their current role and circumstance. Bernstein's theories of restricted and elaborated codes (in Wood, 1998) suggest that the language variations in the home and school environment of different children lead to a variance in academic performance and so into the workplace. Moving beyond differences in accent, grammar and dialect, Bernstein theorised that children whose parents were from particular economic and educational backgrounds would be exposed to either restricted or elaborate linguistic codes. His theory postulated that those who had encountered elaborate codes in the home environment (where oral language was more similar to written language, and where more abstract contexts could be articulated) would be more able to progress with ease in the school environment, where speech which is independent of a specific physical context is usual. Mantle of the Expert may be seen as giving children a chance to acquire and practise these elaborate codes and thus develop ownership of them. Personal observation of children in role suggests that they readily seek to acquire the manner and speech of educated adults when they are working in role running an organisation. Whether the speech patterns are gleaned from adults around them, their more eloquent peers, or other media and social sources is unclear, and perhaps an area for future research. Certainly the unique situation within the mantle may give children opportunities to transform language learnt receptively into more advanced productive language than they might otherwise have had opportunity to produce. Their engagement with the role appears to provide a stimulus for adopting and thus internalising the elaborate codes which Bernstein argues are important indicators of success within an educational setting.

With regard to social development, there are two key areas which need to be further explored: child to adult interaction and peer to peer interaction. Hoogsteder, Maier and Elbers (1996) explore adult-child dyads and refreshingly, they do not start from the perspective that the dyads will always consist of instructive interaction with the adult in the transitional role, making their research a valuable perspective on the possible engagements within MoE. 'The process of doing a task is not unidirectionally dominated by an adult, but jointly regulated by both adult and child' (Hoogsteder et al. 1996, p.346). They further challenge the assumptions that the learning a child takes from an interaction is "rigidly related to the instructional behaviour of the adult" and they seek to move beyond determining the type and abstraction of adult interaction which might be employed, to look at the potential benefits of the child's disagreement and misdirection on their own learning process. Hoogsteder et al. (1996) divide the interactions they saw into three distinct groups: a playful mode, where role play was frequent, and the quality of interaction took apparent precedence over the task; an economic and efficient mode, where the correct and efficient completion of the task appeared to be the key indicator of the interactions noted; and a didactic mode, where exploration was encouraged and mistakes taken as opportunities for expansion, evaluation and explanation. The layered structure of the didactic mode they identified involved both symmetric and asymmetric responsibilities, i.e. where the adult mediates the task, but where the child may often suggest and trial different approaches, refining or dismissing suggestions and negotiating with the adult. Similarly to Rogoff's view of caregivers and children as mutually dependent influences, Hoogsteder et al. (1996, p.358) conclude that 'learning [is]... developed and constructed jointly by adult and child in a social history' but note that "learning and learning to learn are not the same'. Though their research draws many valuable parallels with the learning in a MoE setting, they do not record or explore interactions which move through two or three of the modes, either over the course of the same task or concurrently. Their research observed children aged 3 to 5 with their parent or carer, and so it might be expected that similar to the findings of Whitebread et al. (2005), parents might engage in directed role play where the contextualisation of the task within a fictitious environment combined both the playful and the dialogic elements. Certainly, the drama based scenarios that MoE generates might be seen to take features from both of these types of interaction, combining them so that the quality of interaction played an equal (not a diminished or a dominant) role alongside

the dialogic opportunities to instruct and explore the task, enabling the children to develop self-direction and what Hoogsteder et al. (1996) described as ‘learning to learn’ or metacognition.

The quality of children’s interaction is the subject of Howe and Mercer’s research survey in the Primary Review (2007). Like Decker et al., they draw attention to the importance of tasks which are designed to encourage co-operation, and they state that tasks should include controversial elements which require more than one person to solve or complete, where group members have been appropriately trained to recognise and value their own and others’ contributions, and where the tasks move children into their zone of proximal development. Howe and Mercer looked specifically at the quality of talk within learning situations, referring to the concepts of cumulative, disputational and exploratory talk (Mercer 1995). If MoE can engage children in exploratory talk, then it is more likely to create effective collaborative learning situations. Certainly MoE aims to move children beyond cumulative talk by providing an appropriate level of challenge to the tasks set through the use of dramatic tension, and also beyond purely disputational talk, by using the teacher in role or the fictitious client to move children towards the need for consensus or at least more effective dialogue.

The current educational drive towards creating authentic learning experiences for children might be seen as an endorsement of the Mantle of the Expert approach, ‘The enterprise world within a world offers them [the children] a vision of the possible.’ (Bolton & Heathcote, 1995). The Every Child Matters aims ask that children have opportunities to make a positive contribution and to achieve economic well-being, and the running of a (fictional) organisation clearly creates significant opportunities to meet these aims. However the question of how desirable it is to work within fictional settings must be raised. Certainly the creation of the setting must leave the pupil participants with no doubts that they are working within a fiction – the ethical considerations here are significant, and children must opt in to the context, rather than be misguided about the veracity of what they are doing.

I consider that Mantle of the Expert work becomes deep social (and sometimes personal) play because a) students know that they are contracting into fiction, [and] b) they understand the power they have within that fiction to direct, decide and function. (Dorothy Heathcote in Bolton & Heathcote, 1995, p.18)

The authenticity of the experience is protected by a key feature of working in MoE, which is that within the fiction, the children are never asked to create the actual objects concerned with the enterprise they are running. They may model, describe, design, explain or draw to scale, as appropriate to the task, but will never attempt to create the life-size objects from within the fiction. ‘If they had to do this, their *inexpertness* would become immediately apparent. So conventions are used to avoid the authentic making.’ (Dorothy Heathcote in Bolton & Heathcote, 1995, p.18). This distance can be seen to create the conditions within which the children become and remain aware that they are learning, and the metacognitive aim of the learning experience is thus realised.

Many instructional arrangements seem “contrived,” but there is nothing wrong with that. It is the teacher's function to contrive conditions under which students learn. It has always been the task of formal education to set up behaviour which would prove useful or enjoyable later in a student's life.  
*B.F. Skinner*

## **Conclusion**

*Non scholae, sed vitae discimus (We do not learn for the school, but for life)*

Dewey is quoted extensively as saying ‘Education is not preparation for life; education is life itself.’ (Dewey cited in Mithaug et al. 2003 p.91). The function of learning as preparation for life in free society is the basis of the progressive systems of education developed over this and the last century. The idea that learners must have the ability to control their own learning to have ‘a coherent and robust set of personal values and beliefs that give consistency... to life’ (Candy, 1991, as cited in Mithaug et al. 2003, p.90). Mantle of the Expert can clearly be seen to provide significant opportunities to develop children’s learning, their metacognition and to offer experiences which encourage self-direction. Learning aspects which can be developed through this approach include considerable prospects for working with peers both of similar cognitive abilities, to offer discourse which may stimulate new

thinking for the individual, and with peers with a variety of dispositions and attitudes to co-construct new knowledge. The ability to step in and out of role enables learners to participate fully in thinking about their learning, by considering and addressing outside the mantle, the learning which will be needed to progress towards the tasks required by the fictional clients. Because the pupils are working within a fiction, discussion about the nature and benefits of the tasks can take place with the pupils themselves identifying how and where their learning could progress. These aspects of self-direction are more likely to lead to mastery-orientated learning behaviours as the pupils are motivated to identify areas of skill and knowledge acquisition through internal, rather than purely external locus of control. As the tasks are goal not performance orientated, a collaborative spirit is more likely to be engendered than one of competition, and children and teachers alike can support each other to create ownership of new knowledge.

The impact of using Mantle of The Expert within a primary classroom context can be seen to have many positive associations, but how much of the theoretical basis described herein can (and should) be translated into measurable learning opportunities (including social, linguistic and academic)? An adaptation of Whitebread et al.'s metacognitive indices may provide one means of assessing classroom impact, but further investigation into both perceived and measurable learning achievements would be an interesting and necessary course of study and research.

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