

**Panel Address**  
**Presented at Waikato University August 27 2009**  
**to the**  
**International Mantle of the Expert Conference.**

**Outcome of the Visits of Dorothy Heathcote to New Zealand**

**By Susan Battye**

*Susan Battye is the director of Drama Magic Ltd; a company devoted to developing educational resources in print and digital formats, former head of Drama at Auckland's Epsom Girls' Grammar School and Programme Manager for the Bachelor and Certificate of Maori Performing Arts at Te Wananga O Aotearoa. She was the founding president of the New Zealand Association for Drama in Education and is a former student of Dorothy Heathcote's from the 1978 -1979 class at Newcastle Upon Tyne University.*

**Curriculum Development**

Kia ora e hoa ma!

When we look at the curriculum development that has taken place since the visits of Dorothy Heathcote to New Zealand in 1978 and 1984, we have to acknowledge the incredible effect of her work on our Drama curriculum design and content.

Following the 1984 visit, there was much debate about where to begin writing a curriculum. It was decided that a Sixth Form Certificate Drama course would be written first. There were three main strands in that document, including Drama for Learning.

When the Arts curriculum development was called for, a push came from NZADIE, the New Zealand Association for Drama in Education, for Drama to be included. (Battye, 1993)

The ultimate reason for Drama being included in the national curriculum as a stand alone subject was that we already had a nationally recognized Sixth Form Certificate Drama course in place.

### **The Drama Curriculum**

In the year 2000, *The Arts in the New Zealand Curriculum* was published. It consists of 109 pages, sixteen of which are devoted to Drama.

The curriculum strands were identified as, **Developing Practical Knowledge in Drama, Developing Ideas in Drama, Communicating and Interpreting Drama** and **Understanding Drama in Context**. (New Zealand Ministry of Education 2000: 38, 39)

When we look at the content within those strands we begin to see Dorothy Heathcote's influence, particularly in the terminology that is used. I've picked out some of the words that resonate from those visits of Heathcote to New Zealand.

In the strand called **Developing Practical Knowledge in Drama** we see attention being drawn to the **Elements** which were defined as, “**role**, time, **space**, action, **tension** and focus”. Notice the use of

words like **role** rather than **character**. The creation of '**tension**' as in 'dramatic tension' and 'focus', as in 'the point of the drama at that moment in time' are two concepts that were essential to working with the Mantle of the Expert.

Drama **Conventions** such as **narration**, **freeze-frame images** and mimed activity were said 'to **extend** and **deepen**' the drama experience. 'Extending' and 'deepening' are part of the Heathcote phraseology.

In the strand called **Developing Ideas in Drama** words like, 'collaborate', 'negotiate' and 'reflect' stand out as being part of the Heathcote drama language rather than 'theatre' language.

In addition the students were required to, "develop ideas for and participate in classroom **process drama**," aka Mantle of the Expert. Or is it?

Under the **Communicating and Interpreting in Drama** strand, there were words like '**present** drama', rather than '**perform** drama'. Here a different sort of requirement from the theatre tradition was at work.

What is missing from the 2000 Drama Curriculum document is the phrase **Mantle of the Expert**.

Why is this? Well, the 'Mantle of the Expert' technique was seen to be too difficult, and too teacher-centred. Process Drama was 'less

threatening'. It was a sort of half way house. In my experience practitioners of Process Drama don't always enroll students in the drama as adults with responsibility. They stay as students.

Dorothy Heathcote's definition of the Elements differs from the curriculum. She says the Elements are about the manipulation of sound and silence, movement and stillness, light and dark and the use of space in order to produce **dramatic tension**.

The notion of teacher-in-role has been accepted at primary level, but at secondary level it has been problematic. Secondary drama teachers are expected to have a 'cool strip' approach to teaching. Classroom control, skills teaching and assessment are to the fore, rather than being 'in the moment' with an entire class with an unknown outcome.

What happens if the teacher narrates an introduction to 'set the scene' and creates an opportunity for some spontaneous students to shine more than others? Could that be seen as compromising the students' work outcomes or could it affect assessment authenticity?

Mantle of the Expert method is essentially open-ended and therefore unpredictable.

## **2010 New Zealand Curriculum**

When we look at the new, 2010 New Zealand Curriculum, we see that Dorothy Heathcote's terminology is still firmly embedded in the Drama curriculum. (New Zealand Ministry of Education: 2008)

At Level 1 students, develop '**Practical Knowledge in Drama** by exploring 'the **elements** of **role**, **focus**, action, **tension**, time, and space through dramatic play.'

At Level 2 they, "Use techniques and relevant technologies to explore drama **elements** and **conventions**."

At Level 3 they, "**Communicate and interpret**" drama by, "**presenting** and **responding** to drama, and identifying ways in which **elements**, techniques, **conventions**, and technologies combine to create meaning in their own and others' work."

What's missing is any mention of Mantle of the Expert.

How about the Key Competencies? Will they be a help or a hindrance when it comes to introducing Mantle of the Expert into school programmes?

### **Key Competencies**

I think the **Key Competencies** could enable schools to look at Mantle of the Expert as the glue that brings diverse curriculum subject matter

together. (New Zealand Ministry of Education: 2008) The components are:

- Thinking,
- Using Language, Symbols and Texts,
- Managing Self, Relating To Others,
- Participating and Contributing.

Deeply embedded in Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert, is the expectation that the method will enable the teacher to improve '**the social health**' of a class, aka 'managing self', 'relating to others', and 'participating and contributing.

Mantle of the Expert is also about **reading signs and symbols and interpreting texts**. Above all it is about developing **thinking** and shared understandings that rely more on thoughts than outward physical signs like big theatrical sets.

## **Achievement Standards**

There is one place that Mantel of the Expert does get a mention and that is in a Level 1 Achievement Standard, called '**Use elements and conventions to devise, structure and perform a drama.**' (New Zealand Qualifications Authority: 2007)

In the notes there is a comprehensive list of terms that relate not only to the Heathcote Drama tradition but also to theatrical tradition. We are told that, "*Conventions* are the established ways of working in

drama that explore meaning or deepen understanding, *or* established practices in theatre.”

*Conventions* to help with the process of devising or creating character are said to include:

- role on the wall
  - hot seating
  - teacher-in-role
  - visualization
- and mantle of the expert

So there it is finally in black and white.

### **Use of the word ‘Play’**

Which brings me to my final point. One word which is consistently conspicuous by its absence from our Drama documents is the word ‘play’. Dorothy Heathcote often says to her students, “What would you like to make a play about?” This is then followed by, “We’re doing a Drama about x y z.”

Mantle of the Expert can often feel like a deep form of investigation, an uncovering of layers of meaning and a discovery of multiple viewpoints on a topic. But in order for it to be satisfying as in any play there has to be a resolution, a wrapping up of the drama, an end.

For me the impact of not calling the work **a play** denies what happens in a drama classroom. We both **make** plays and we work **with** plays written by playwrights.

I believe that New Zealand Drama in Education is uniquely placed to build a bridge between Mantle of the Expert and a specific form of New Zealand literature, the written play.

If the confusion surrounding the use of Mantle of the Expert is about to change because of a window of opportunity with the introduction of the new 2010 Curriculum then that is all to the good.

I am very excited by this conference and by the excellent programme that has been put together by Dr Viv Aitken, and the University of Waikato. I congratulate all of you for bringing this wonderful International Conference on Mantle of the Expert together. Thank you so much for inviting me to be part of it.

No reira, tena kotou, tena kotou, tena kotou katoa.

## References

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