

# Notes on Signs and Portents

Dorothy Heathcote & Maggie Whitelaw  
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## 1 The role actually present, naturalistic, yet significantly behaving giving and accepting responses.

- a) Practical considerations - Another person(s) displacing space, who is 'locked' into role (unlike the teacher, who may shift from being a facilitator into twilight zone and back again). Costume, props etc. which are significant must be considered. Also signing of person playing role.
- b) Impact on pupils - Very direct, multi-dimensional, personal, unpredictable, fluid and naturalistic.
- c) Some implications for learning - Role demands attention and interaction from pupils. There is not much detachment so the reflective element must be built in by the teacher's intervention in this interaction. Pupils 'doing' will tend towards role rather than anything more abstract (i.e. the project you as teacher may have in mind).

## 2 The same, except framed as a film. That is, people have permission to stare but not intrude. 'Film' can be stopped and restarted, or re-run.

- a) Practical considerations - As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - Once seen it is predictable, direct and multi-dimensional, but no personal interaction is required. Invites staring and comment.
- c) Some implications for learning - Power to stop, start and re-run, provides scope for reflection on role. Possible to note how details build up, perhaps how we know things on subliminal levels i.e. "I noticed that look she gave him but didn't know I'd noticed because he was demanding most of my attention; but when we ran it again slowly and looking, I saw what it was I had seen."

## 3 The role present as in 'effigy'. It can be talked about, walked around, and even sculptured afresh if so framed.

- a) Practical considerations - As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - Mainly visual, impersonal, direct, static, invites staring and comment.
- c) Some implications for learning - Effigy comments on what people found memorable about this person. It is not the person 'frozen'. Therefore we are dealing not just with the person but also with an interpretive layer of the effigy-maker. If pupils were to be allowed to sculpt afresh they would have to have some information or opinion about the role to be able to do this significantly. Teacher may want to use this

re-sculpting as a diagnostic tool to assess what pupils do know about role.

**4 The same, but with the convention that the effigy can be brought into life-like response and then returned to effigy.**

- a) Practical considerations As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - multi-dimensional, alternatively invites staring and interaction. Pupils have power over duration of interaction and can choose when to comment in "private" by de-activating effigy.
- c) Some implications for learning - reflective element inherent. Not the same as No. 1 even when activated, as an effigy is made after a person dies, by somebody else. An activated effigy can tell the effigy's story, not the person's (although, of course, the effigy may know about the person it represents). Thus one may tap into how public interest and opinion of role has changed over the years (i.e. the effigy may have been moved from a prominent position to a dark corner where nobody noticed it, etc.)

**5 The role as portrait of person. Not three dimensional but in all other ways the same as effigy.**

- a) Practical considerations - As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - Visual, movement into the symbolical, invites staring and comment.
- c) Some implications for learning - Again one has the added element, not only of the person but also how the person was seen by whoever painted the portrait. The two-dimensional aspect allows for significant background and significant arrangement of artefacts/symbols on each side of role, (A glimpse at some Holbeins will give plenty of ideas as to how this may be done.)

**6 The role as portrait or effigy activated to hear what the class is saying. This causes selective language.**

- a) Practical considerations ~ As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - Move from what we see to what we say. Focus moves from role to pupils' selves without appearing to.
- c) Some implications for learning - Pupils have to really think about what they say, especially as there is no response. Because what is said does not invite interaction, it must be sufficient unto itself. Thus is thought provoked. Invites inner work; therefore teacher must be aware if pupils have sufficient social health to maintain this. Demands great belief.

**7 The role as above, but activated to speak only, and not capable of movement.**

- a) Practical considerations - As for 1.
- b) Impact on pupils - Visual, auditory, personal, immediate, non-threatening as role is clearly limited and restricted.
- c) Some implications for learning - Interaction is now possible. Role must speak as portrait not person ~ (as with effigy) so there will be a certain

amount of de-coding for pupils to do. Because role is static, permission to stare is continued throughout interaction. This allows a mixture of personal and impersonal response. Role is both object and person.

**8 The role depicted in picture: removed from actual life, as in a slide of role, a painting, a photograph or drawing. This includes those made by a class, as well as prepared depictions.**

- a) Practical considerations - Teacher must prepare a picture and consider how it is to be displayed. Are pupils going to be 'allowed to handle it and study it closely or will it be mounted on a wall or board to give distance? If pupils are to make the picture appropriate materials must thoughtfully be provided (for example; would the drama be served better by a painting made in various shades of blue or a collage from magazines? Consultation with the art department may help here.)
- b) Impact on pupils - We are now dealing with 'things' not 'people'; so we are moving into the realm of the symbolic much more. Visual. Or could be creating their own picture; busyness of 'doing'.
- c) Some implications for learning - With things there is more distance which allows for affective exploration in a non-threatening way through the symbolical. Pupils are not asked to interact with the actual person but with the meaning of the person. Does not have the immediacy of No. 5, but there is more scope for the symbolical, abstract and representational, which would demand more decoding from pupils; or if they were making the depiction, a coding in of significance.

**9 A drawing seen in the making, of someone important to the action, as on a blackboard.**

- a) Practical considerations ~ a blackboard would be by far the best medium for this as lines drawn on a blackboard are not permanent so a drawing can evolve and change through observation and discussion without being messy.
- b) Impact on pupils - The act of joint creation - visual growing. Teacher-talk is important here to keep the pupils empowered; "Does that look like you want it?", "I'm not sure what kind of eyebrows a person like this would have" etc.
- c) Some implications for learning - A great opportunity for teacher to consciously create a climate in the class that shows the pupils they will be heard. The evolving of the picture taps into the element of mystery and suspense. Pupils can choose what they will have to deal with. This requires that they should be inducted into the implications in their choices and foster an understanding of the nature of foreshadowing.

**10 A stylized depiction of someone. For example an identikit picture made by the class in frame as detectives.**

- a) Practical considerations - Paper, pens, paints, crayons etc. Teacher must also ensure that style of depiction and frame of children are complimentary.

- b) Impact on pupils - Creating. Discursive in the making and building. Co-operation is required and an ability to forge consensus with each other. Visual.
  - c) Some implications for learning - Stylization relieves anxiety about drawing ability. Also opens the notion of 'genre' each style of depiction carries different and specific implications with it. c.f. a design for a mosaic of a person with a newspaper cartoon of the same person. Some styles might date the depiction: "That looks Medieval" or classify where the depiction might be found: "You get drawings like that in children's books." Pupils must be able to de-code. Style can also confirm frame, as in Dorothy Heathcote's example.
- 11 The same, except made beforehand, so is a fait accompli.**
- a) Practical considerations - As for No. 10, but teacher controls what signs are laid in.
  - b) Impact on pupils - Visual - discursive in the forging of understanding.
  - c) Some implications for learning ~ As for No. 10. The difference being are teasing out rather than laying in meaning. Teacher may prefer to do it this way if there is a need for tight control of input.
- 12 A life size (cardboard) model with clothing (real) of role. For example, 'framed' as if in a museum or sale rooms. 'This is the dress worn by Florence Nightingale when she met Queen Victoria after Scutari.'**
- a) Practical considerations Cardboard model, or a dressmaker's model would do. Clothing use could be made of the school costume-cupboard here without the fear that the children will spoil the clothes or get involved in meaningless 'dressing-up'.
  - b) Impact on pupils - Visual, immediate - through the realness and presence of article. Tactile if children are allowed to touch clothing (this would depend on frame).
  - c) Some implications for learning - Opens up the whole importance of what we wear (an issue that youngsters are highly aware of) Presents them with an opportunity to recognise the universal aspect of their expertise in this area instead of the emphasis being on the externals of changing fashion. Subtleties in appearance can also be engaged with. The example given by Dorothy Heathcote, for instance, might lead to a noticing that the dress was very worn but the collar was of the finest lace.
- 13 The same, except the class is dressing the model so as to see 'how it was' on that day when these events happened.**
- a) Practical considerations - As for 12.
  - b) Impact on pupils - Selecting sign in arrangement of dress. Visual. Tactile.
  - c) Some implications for learning - Affective and immediate exploration of what particular clothes may signify on a particular day. The person becomes accessible through the pupils' understanding of the choices they made; i.e. "Wearing this tie lets people know that I went to a good school, and that will be important today."

- 14 The clothing of a person cast off in disarray. For-example, remains of a tramp's presence, or a murder, and escape as in a highwayman situation.**
- Practical considerations ~ Clothing - which must be carefully chosen as to what can logically have been left behind.
  - Impact on pupils - Visual, tactile, muddle evolving into meaning.
  - Some implications for learning - A making sense out of apparent chaos - a realization that the most unpromising looking mess often holds the most fascinating story. Pupils as 'detectives' with a puzzle to solve. Does what was left give any clues as to what was taken? Does how it was left tell us anything about the manner of leaving?
- 15 Objects to represent person's interests. This works as above, but more intimate things can indicate concerns rather than appearance. For example, a ring of a Borgia.**
- Practical considerations - Teacher must foresee implication in objects chosen.
  - Impact on pupils - Visual, tactile, kinesthetic on class in frame so as to be able to handle objects; (it is worth noting that neither handling nor not handling objects is "best" ~ what you gain in intimacy you lose in distance and vice-versa).
  - Some implications for learning - Clothing is to do with how we choose to present ourselves to the world. Objects can serve this public function too (as in the 'status symbol') or they may be much more private i.e. a pressed flower given many years ago by a lost or secret lover. Objects can symbolise events or intentions in a life and can be endowed with a great significance by their owners i.e. 'she once went back into a burning room for that little statuette; and I wouldn't have said it was worth much.' In such cases, objects are keys into what drives their owners.
- 16 An account of a person by another person in naturalistic fashion. For example, 'Well when I saw him last he seemed all right. I never dreamed anything was wrong.'**
- Practical considerations - There are several ways to do this. Obviously the teacher can give the account in role and can probably slip into that role quite easily. Another possibility is to have a secondary role present to give the account. In this case they must be clearly briefed that it is their account rather than their role that the pupils should engage with. In other words the role is very limited. A third possibility is the use of a taped account which can be prepared beforehand and will leave the teacher free in the role of facilitator. Each way will give a slightly different emphasis which it would be as well to consider before choosing.
  - Impact on pupils - Immediate - limited to the account, role is a vehicle for this. Use of tape will focus on auditory signs; role introduces potential for other signing systems.
  - Some implications for learning - Account gives the person it is about an external validity somebody knows them. At the same time, pupils are engaging with another person's perception. They therefore have to make judgements about how they feel about the person telling the account. If

they have already encountered the person the account is about, this convention enables pupils to weigh their perceptions and judgements against another's.

- 17 An account of a person writing as if from that person, but read by someone else. For example, a diary.**
- a) Practical considerations - As for 16.
  - b) Impact on pupils ~ Auditory. Limited to account. Personal.
  - c) Some implications for learning - Writing that is not specifically designed for public gives insight into personal thoughts and feelings the writer is willing to give permanence to. The way the account is read can layer in judgements/attitudes of reader. Possibility for covert information about relationship (if any) between reader and writer.
- 18 An account written by the person who now reads it to others, for example a policeman giving evidence or a confession. The role is present in this case but in contact through their writing as an author might well be.**
- a) Practical considerations - Role present, but limited to reading account.
  - b) Impact on pupils - multi-dimensional. Limited to reading of account. Interaction with account not role therefore role is purely functional not personal.
  - c) Some implications for learning - Account was written knowing that it was to be public and this will influence what is put down. Learning is possible in noting what is not said as well as reading how what is said, is spoken.
- 19 An account written by someone, of someone else and read by yet another.**
- a) Practical considerations - As for 17.
  - b) Impact on pupils - Very subtle. Mushrooming effect. Very tight focus.
  - c) Some implications for learning - This one is very complex. Information presented to pupils is layered. Overtly there is one bit of information: an account of a person. Covertly there is the potential for: (i) the attitude of the writer towards the person, (ii) the attitude of the reader towards the person, (iii) the attitude of the reader towards the writer. The permutations of these can be made very complex. How do pupils decode all this?
- 20 A story told about another, in order to bring that person close to the action. For example, 'I saw him open a safe once. It was an incredible performance. I'm not sure if he would assist us though.'**
- a) Practical considerations - Teacher in role or another role. Need to consider what will be foreshadowed by story. This is different to No. 16 as the emphasis is on bringing the person close to the action, therefore the focus of the story must be specific.
  - b) Impact on pupils - Immediate contact with role telling story. Limited to story - tight focus.
  - c) Some implications for learning - Reality of person established because somebody knows him/her. Opportunity to build a reputation and layer in

status for person. Pupils may observe how they react to and are influenced by other people's opinions.

**21 A report of an event but formalized by authority or ritual. For example, an account of bravery in battle on an occasion of the presenting of posthumous medals.**

- a) Practical considerations - Teacher in role or another role.
- b) Impact on pupils - needs to be carefully controlled so that it is contained and dignified.
- c) Some implications for learning - Through formalization, the event is given social significance. This is the first step towards the mythical element in life. What is selected from reality to honour or vilify? How does solemnity and formality transform feeling? How are responses conjured from the sense of occasion? The way events are given social significance is a tremendous power that can be used for good or ill in a society. This convention opens up a very important area.

**22 A letter read in the voice of the writer. This is an emanation of a specific presence, not just any voice, communicating the words.**

- a) Practical considerations - As for 16. If role is used they must preserve auditory quality.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory, intimate, insightful, direct.
- c) Some implications for learning - A letter is a particular kind of writing as it is an attempt at communication from one person to another. It is of its nature one-way because response is always delayed. Thus a letter comes close to a person's thoughts. However, it is most important to remember that a letter is always written with the reader in mind. A letter to a bank manager will be very different in style and content to a letter between close relatives or friends. When read in the voice of the writer we are brought closer to them as they were when they were writing it.

**23 The same, but the letter is read by another with no attempt to portray the person who wrote it, but still expressing feeling.**

- a) Practical considerations - As for 16.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory, more indirect.
- c) Some implications for learning - This time the overlay of feeling does not belong to the letter but is evoked in the reader by the letter. Thus we may get information about the reader: for example a love letter read by the lover would sound very different to the same letter read by a disapproving parent. If the letter is read by an 'empathetic outsider' that is somebody quite uninvolved with the contents of the letter, the pupils have an opportunity to decide that person's attitude to the content. Or judge whether the letter has been read truthfully.

**24 A letter read without feeling. For example, as evidence, or accusation in a formal situation.**

- a) Practical considerations - A for 16.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory. Cold and dry. Impact of what is not there.
- c) Some implications for learning - Emphasis is very much on the words in the letter. Lack of emotion can sometimes throw things into relief. This demands that the pupils be able to read significance and meaning behind words for themselves. Demands more projective imagination on their part. Can be used to show that emotion is often a purely personal thing an emotional empathy is something that is in our gift to others.
- 25 The voice of a person overheard talking to another in informal language, that is using naturalistic tone.**
- a) Practical considerations - A tape is much better than a role here because it focuses attention on the voice.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory. Intimate. Limited to what is on the tape.
- c) Some implications for learning - Pupils have no interaction with roles (another reason that tape is better) but the conversation opens up the possibility of observing how role person interacts with others. Obviously information can be fed in. Class are listeners. This convention can function rather like No. 2 (film) except that it is a voice only. It is to No. 2 as audio tape is to video tape.
- 26 The same, but in formal language.**
- a) Practical considerations - As for 25.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory. Distant. Limited.
- c) Some implications for learning - Formal language, as opposed to social or personal language, indicates an interaction of functional roles rather than personalities, i.e. assistant manager reporting to company director or monarch congratulating minister. There may also be an element of ritual here as in a coded exchange that gives entrance to a criminal's den or secret society.
- 27 A conversation overheard, the people are not seen. Deliberate eavesdropping as in spying.**
- a) Practical considerations - Role is more suitable here as it allows the element of "don't let them know we're here". However to maintain auditory focus it is important that visual impact is curtailed either by having role behind a screen or with backs turned.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory. Limited. Direct, non-interactive but immediate.
- c) Some implications for learning - Emphasis is on what we learn from what we hear. What judgements do we make about persons from their voice: what they say, how it is said, tone, pauses, hesitations, chuckles, signs etc.? What is heard is memorable because it is not meant to be heard.
- 28 A report of a conversation, written and spoken by another.**
- a) Practical considerations - Role or tape, or teacher in role.
- b) Impact on pupils - Auditory. Indirect. Distanced. Limited.
- c) Some implications for learning - Here pupils are hearing what somebody else is reporting. Again we have this second layer

of the reporters' attitude to what they are reporting. Writing adds authenticity to what is reported as it is slightly more formal than a purely verbal report. What is written is fixed, what is said can change with each telling.

**29 A reported conversation with two people reading the respective 'parts'**

- a) Practical considerations - Tape or roles.
- b) Impact on pupils ~ Direct. Auditory and possibly visual. Limited.
- c) Some implications for learning - The fact that the conversation is reported means it is removed or distanced from pupils as in No. 28 (above). Readers give impression "as if" it were really happening; "as if" they were really overhearing (as in No. 27). But they are not. It is important that pupils are aware of this. This awareness gives them the opportunity to judge how parts are being read. The readers obviously put their interpretation on the words; the pupils can decide how truthful this interpretation is, act as directors or maybe even take over as readers.

**30 A private reading of a conversation, reported as overheard.**

- a) Practical considerations - If done with a role, it is important to have another role present to listen.
- b) Impact on pupils - Direct. Visual. Intimate.
- c) Some implications for learning - Similar to No. 28, except that private nature of the report allows for more blatant interpretation of what was said in conversation. Because it is not written down word for word, general tenor of the conversation and occasional phrases that stick in the mind can be reported.

**31 The finding of a cryptic code message. For example, tramps or spies.**

- a) Practical considerations ~ preparation of message.
- b) Impact on pupils - Puzzling. Visual. Intriguing. Demands action of solving.
- c) Some implications for learning - Mystery. Pupils can either be framed to be 'in-the-know' or, more productively, have to decode from outside. Taps pupils' natural inclination towards solving puzzles and bring meaning to things. Having to work to find out information brings commitment and investment to further developments.

**32 The signature of a person found. For example, a half-burned paper.**

- a) Practical considerations - preparation of signature (and document to which it is attached).
- b) Impact on pupils - Visual, tactile - can be passed around. Direct.
- c) Some implications for learning ~ What can you tell about somebody from the way they write? What attitudes/judgements are formed by seeing a person's signature? What sort of document is the signature attached to? What does that tell us?

**33 The sign of a particular person discovered. For example, the special mark of the Scarlet Pimpernel.**

- a) Practical considerations - preparation of sign.
- b) Impact on pupils - Visual, tactile, can be passed around. Speculative.
- c) Some implications for learning - Secrecy/Mystery allows pupils to speculate about the person who left the sign. This can inform teacher who the pupils would like to meet. Also invites comment on the effect of the sign. Is it scary/exciting/ disturbing/irritating/etc. to have this enigmatic contact with the person? What is c-he person trying to do with it? What does the sign represent?