

## Using Mantle of the Expert – The Tudor House

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*Following on from his article 'Introducing the Mantle of the Expert', in LCF 26, AST and Associate Consultant, Tim Taylor describes a literacy lesson that uses Mantle of the Expert to first engage children's interest and then involve them in an environment that is co-created by the class, and invested with both purpose and meaning.*

### **'Thrilling yet safe'**

All the most recent research (Learning Sciences and Brain Research Project, OECD 2004) demonstrates that the most effective, memorable learning is learning that affects the emotions. In other words, learning that disturbs, excites and charges experience. If we think back to our own time in school it is difficult to remember, in any detail, the normal, common days. The ones we remember are the days when something unusual happened – the days when we were challenged to work beyond our comfort zone. It was not always pleasant, sometimes it was demanding and difficult, but it was always memorable.

I'm not talking about scaring children or making them do things they feel embarrassed or silly doing. I'm talking about making them feel something significant. As teachers we should be creating learning opportunities in the classroom that are thrilling and yet safe. Learning moments and experiences that excite the emotions, that send a shiver through the soul and put children in 'challenging' situations. In fact, situations that demand imagination, courage and reason to resolve.

And, in my experience, this type of learning experience is exactly what children want. They don't like school to be 'easy'. They don't want experiences that are diluted, differentiated and semi-digested. They want experiences in the raw. They want to be face to face with the great bear as it opens its terrible eyes, they want to be standing beside Nelson as the French sniper takes aim, they want to be trapped in the Icenii village surrounded by Roman soldiers - protecting the bodies of Boudicca and her daughters.

### **Making learning purposeful and meaningful**

Mantle of the Expert was devised by Dorothy Heathcote (The Dorothy Heathcote Archive, <http://www.partnership.mmu.ac.uk/drama/archive.html>) as a way of putting dramatic experience at the centre of learning. She wanted to use moments of shared experience as the engine room for generating genuine excitement and engagement for learning and then to develop this energy as a way of integrating the curriculum and making learning more purposeful and meaningful to children.

The content of this article draws upon a scheme of work designed using Mantle of the Expert. It describes in some detail the opening session of the work (which took about two and half hours).

I taught this lesson three times in the summer of 2006 while working as a Primary Strategy Consultant in Essex. I will draw on the events of these lessons in order to illustrate how, by working in this way, you can fully engage the children's imaginations and inspire them to extend their abilities to speak, listen and use language to the full.

## **Background**

In each of the three classes I worked with the children were studying the Tudors. They knew something about the period, about Henry VIII and about life in a Tudor home. The lesson was designed both as an assessment of the children's understanding of the period and as an opportunity to develop the children's literacy skills, historical understanding and social and emotional aspects of learning. However, although I took the Tudors as my subject matter, the same pedagogical principles and processes described can be applied to whatever topic it is that you wish to explore with the children in order to get them to think and speak and use language creatively and to good purpose.

## **Raising the Curtain**

It is important to state from the outset that Mantle of the Expert is about sharing power. It is not about telling or delivering the curriculum to children. It is about inviting them into an emergent learning situation. Therefore, there are many ways to start a session but the one I adopted in this instance made use of the intriguing nature of story.

## **Talking and drawing**

I had a sheet of paper which was big enough for the whole class to sit round laid out on the floor. I slowly began to draw using a large felt tip pen. While I was drawing I spoke to the class ...

*"There is a house... in the centre of the town... you may have seen it yourself... called 'The Tudor House'... (the teacher is drawing the door as he speaks, filling in some of the detail around the frame) It is said... that Henry VIII stayed here with his first wife, Catherine of Aragon... just before he announced his divorce... of course nobody knows if anything happened in the house to persuade him to make the final decision... as far as we know, there is nothing left, no piece of evidence, that could tell us, one way or the another, for sure..."*

At this point, a look up was all that was needed to start a conversation. But if it hadn't been enough I would have prompted the children with a question – "Henry VIII, you've heard of him?" The intonation of the question would have been gentle, but expecting of a positive response.

Drawing and talking your way into the situation is one that always gets an enthusiastic reaction from children. I've used the approach in many ways:

- with a year 11 class in a special school inventing a retreat for the homeless
- with a year 6 class inventing a computer games design company
- with a year 1 class starting up an emergency response team in a valley threatened by an earthquake.

Moreover, framing learning in this way helps promote the children's understanding by contextualising it and making it more meaningful and memorable. (Kieran Egan, 2006)

## **Edging In**

After introducing and discussing the idea that Henry VIII stayed in the house (and the possible significance of the fact that Henry's divorce was announced soon after he left), I then returned to building the children's belief that they were actively involved in

something significant. I did this by focusing the children's attention on the building. For example:

- the door
- the entrance hall or reception desk
- the old stables
- the court-yard.

One set of children was very interested in the collection box by the door to the souvenir shop. They felt it was obviously important to encourage people to donate as much as they could afford. But it was equally important not to put people off or make them feel they were being exploited.

*(Child 1): "I think they should put a transparent box next to the door."*

*(Child 2): "Yes it could be in the shape of the house."*

*(Teacher): "I was wondering, why here exactly?"*

*(Child 1): "Because if people have had a good time they are more likely to give money on the way out."*

*(Teacher) "Do you think we could make it more noticeable? I mean people might want to give money to us, because they have had such a good time, but might walk straight pass the box, if they didn't know it was there?"*

*(Notice the change from "they and them", to "we and us").*

*(Child 3): "We could put up a notice."*

*(Child 1): "Or better, they could have someone dressed up, like a servant."*

*(Child 4): "They might have a tray of biscuits for the children."*

*(Teacher): "Should we bake them ourselves in the ovens? And should they be like the ones eaten by the Tudors?"*

*(Child 4): "Yes. And we could have a leaflet by the box."*

*(Child 1): "We could have a notice on the box: Give Generously"*

*(Child 5): "Please Give Generously."*

Here, through the careful use of questioning and changing the pronouns, I was able to alter the emphasis in responsibility from one where someone else should do it, to one where we (the class) should do it. This is one of the subtlest processes used in Mantle of the Expert and is worth practicing when planning a session. I often write out the language I think I'm going to use in long hand and practice it in my head, to get the tone and the wording right.

However, not all of the children recognised or took up this change right away. It sometimes takes time, which is why this process is called 'edging in'. As an adult you are helping the children believe in the situation. Not that it is real, but rather that it is realistic and worth engaging in and investing time and energy to make it work. In effect the teacher is in negotiation with the class. All are engaged in a shared creative process, which everyone knows is imaginary but are prepared, for a while, to suspend their disbelief.

### **The 'Big Job'**

Hopefully, it is now becoming clear that 'Mantle of the Expert' always involves the children tackling a 'big job' - that there is always something difficult (perhaps Herculean) that needs doing. This is because this type of challenge appeals to children and grips their imaginations. In this particular case it was the salvation of the house, which had fallen on very hard times and needed investment soon or would have to close as a museum.

In the lesson I'm describing we were in the process of preparing for the visit of an Evaluator from National Heritage, who had a sum of money to invest in the right project and a range of different projects to choose from - not all of whom would get money.

I explained about the Evaluator in the following way:

*"I understand she has been looking at different projects for over a month now. From all accounts she's a difficult woman to please and knows little about the Tudors... Of course she must have a bit of general knowledge.... From what I've heard she is tough but fair and judges each project on its merits... Of course there must be other Tudor-house museums up and down the country. So, she's going to want to know what is so special about us. She's going to be thinking why should the lottery invest in this house when there are others that people can visit, if they're interested in the Tudors? So what do you think we should definitely show her? What must she see? What have we got here that is unique to us and can't be seen elsewhere?"*

When you ask open ended questions like these you are likely to get a reply. But it is always worth having a particular object of interest ready in case the children, for whatever reason, fail to suggest anything. Mine used to be the axe that chopped off Anne Boleyn's head. I claimed it was displayed in the long gallery of the Tudor house. However, a ten year old told me Anne was not executed by an axe, but by a long-sword from France! This reminded me of the importance of always checking one's facts before introducing them to the children. They will happily suspend their disbelief and enter into the situation you are setting up - providing you have gone to the trouble of getting the facts right first. So now my ace is the long-sword from France that executed poor Anne!

### **Moving to the enactive**

In this scenario, the long-sword was hanging in one of the rooms of the house. I drew the sword on a small piece of paper and used the opportunity to demonstrate how to move into the enactive. I asked the children what I was holding. They answered that it was a sword. I then asked them to watch and tell me what they could see. I explained to them that this is a kind of reading, but a reading without words. I then stood with the piece of paper and moved over to a table. I held the piece of paper up and spoke as follows:

- *Can we all agree this is a picture of a long-sword?*

(When the children agreed I put the picture down and reached up to lift an imaginary sword from its place on the imaginary wall and turned to the children.)

- *Did you read what I did?*
- *Is there anyone here who would like to take a closer look?*
- *What do you see? (What would you see on a Tudor long-sword? – scratches, chips and blood!)*
- *This is the sword, brought from France - the sword that executed Henry's second wife Anne Boleyn.*
- *Whatever happens we can't let the Evaluator go without seeing this.*
- *You won't find this in those other Tudor houses.*
- *This is special and unique, something beyond value, something that gets its value from it's place in history"*

### **Setting the task**

Then I set the task.

- What else in the house is special and unique?
- What else must we show the evaluator and make sure she does not miss?

The children became curators and recorded on small pieces of paper the artefacts that might be found in the Tudor House. Around the room there were project books for them to use for research purposes. After drawing their object I encouraged them to make notes of why it is so special and unique. The purpose of this was so they could give their notes to the evaluator when she left as a record and a reminder to help inform her decision as to whether or not to award our Tudor House Museum the funding it needed.

### **The Client**

In Mantle of the Expert, as well as a big job (a commission) there is always a client. This is someone who sets high standards, someone we need to keep in the forefront of our minds as we work on the commission. The client at the start of this lesson is clearly the Evaluator, but as the situation develops and evolves it is possible that the client might change. For example, it might be more appropriate that the Evaluator be replaced as the client by the family who owns the house, the British Museum or an overseas investor. However, the key thing to remember is that whoever the client is, their role is to ensure the work is meaningful and has purpose.

### **Maintaining distance**

To begin with I wanted to keep a distance between the client and the experts (the children) and I did this by using drama conventions. Dorothy Heathcote has identified 33 such conventions. (For a current list see the planning resources on the Mantle of the Expert website). The frame-distance created by using one of these conventions can allow students to learn something about the client and prepare for meeting them face-to-face. This is an inductive process, where learners are given clues or keys into a situation, but not the whole picture, all at once. This process encourages learners to ask questions, make observations, speculate on ideas and try to make meaning from a situation.

For this part of the lesson I needed an adult in role. I positioned them at the edge of the room on a chair and introduced the scenario by saying:

*“She’s arrived. I can see her outside sitting in her car. Can you see what she’s doing?”*

This situation created many different options. The convention allowed us to stare and intrude on the client’s personal space in a way that would have been impossible if she was in the house with us face to face. We were able to take a look at the file she was reading. (What might it say about us?) We could hear her thoughts, and listen in to her talking to a colleague on the phone.

### **Freezing time**

Of course this convention also allowed us to freeze time. While the Evaluator was sitting in the ‘car’ we were able to get the house ready, prepare the artefacts, sign the rooms, draw the plan of the house etc. etc. The tension was created by her impending visit - she was coming and we needed to be ready. If we were not, then we wouldn’t get the money and the house might have to close. The frame distance and tension were sustained by the convention, holding the moment and making the work of the children now both urgent and important.

Situations of this kind are difficult to create in a classroom without using drama. Drama opens up the possibilities of space, time and events. In the dramatic frame we can be anyone, anywhere and at anytime. Mantle of the Expert formalises these possibilities, creating rigour, purpose and direction. Teachers using the system can then exploit these situations to expand the learning opportunities across the curriculum.

Then, at the most appropriate moment, the Evaluator left her car and approached the house. Again there were many dramatic possibilities. We could hear her thoughts as she walked to the door. We ourselves could put the thoughts into her head. We could even be the windows and other features of the house's facade seeing her walk towards us, knowing the importance of her visit to our continued existence.

### **The Armoury**

We had decided that the Tudor house had a wide range of medieval and Tudor weaponry. (Don't forget the executioner's long-sword idea I mentioned earlier.) So this gave us the opportunity for a group of curators to show the Evaluator all the weapons in the armoury. However, this opportunity had to be carefully negotiated in advance.

*"I'm glad you've brought out all the historically significant weapons... Have they been cleaned for the visit...? Have you thought about what you will say if she asks why they are important...? Do you think she might like to see a demonstration of their use? We could give her a brief look at how they were used... Not a full-scale battle or anything like that, but just an idea of how the long-sword was wielded or the cross-bow fired."*

Of course, we didn't want half-a-dozen, fully armed, berserkers slashing and hacking each other to pieces. We were working with very dangerous, valuable items in a restricted space. Health and safety concerns were paramount. So the demonstrators needed to keep in mind the safety of the spectators at all times. They had to practice a short demonstration of no more than a few seconds, showing the Evaluator how the weapons were used.

When the presenters were fully prepared, the Evaluator was invited to view the demonstration. With the eyes of their colleagues upon them the first of the demonstrators were asked to step forward and show us the use of the weapon.

### **Preparing the children to make the most of opportunities provided by drama.**

As before, the use of dramatic convention opens up a huge range of teaching and learning opportunities. However, this kind of dramatic moment might be very unfamiliar to the class and cause some children distress or embarrassment if the ground hasn't been properly prepared. Occasionally someone may even try to undermine the impact by pulling faces etc. This was the case here. Everything was hanging in the balance, both in the fiction and in the classroom. If we mucked up the demonstration then the Evaluator would leave unimpressed. Our belief was like gossamer. If we chose we could have destroyed it in a moment. This was both the freedom and responsibility represented by Ryan and held by the class.

Of course, moments such as this are likely to arise whenever you are using the conventions of drama and so you, as the teacher, will need to take all the steps

necessary to preserve the world you and the children have created. I acted proactively to save the situation by saying:

*“We won’t wreck this... I won’t let anyone giggle or laugh at Ryan... We’re not here to have a laugh... if we get this wrong then everything hangs in balance... Ryan could you demonstrate that again? And this time we will give you the respect you deserve.”*

Ryan stepped forward and demonstrated the use of his long bow. He took an arrow from the quiver strapped to his back, fitted the arrow to the bow, pulled the string back, closed one eye to aim, and fired. This was an example of dramatic action. It was an enactive moment, representing the firing of a weapon as part of a current day demonstration of the use of Tudor and medieval weapons.

### **Extending and deepening meaning**

However the action can take on a different level of representation and meaning if we look at it through the eyes of someone who used the weapon for its original purpose.

*I stepped behind the archer and looked down the arrow. “If I stood here and looked down the arrow, what might Ryan be firing at, if he were using it around the time it was made?” Ryan listened to the class as they give him a range of possibilities then made his choice, either from what he has heard or an idea of his own. He chose an enemy soldier climbing up the wall of the castle. So I was able to say: “Now we know what he is aiming at, let us see this archer at the moment before he releases his arrow.” I paused the action and asked: “Could we think for a moment what is going through this man’s mind as he about to fire? He is about to become death. To take another’s life...”*

By shifting the archer’s point of view, and adjusting the moment in time and space, the action of firing the bow is now invested with a new range of thoughts and emotions. Furthermore, the class were involved in a moment of co-authoring by creating an episode of a story and endowing the action with poignancy and understanding for those involved.

### **Literacy & Cross-Curriculum Possibilities**

The short description above is a brief summary of a morning’s work. Within the session there are many opportunities for developing and practicing literacy. Beyond the obvious writing and reading opportunities – researching, note-taking, labelling, signing, presenting - there are also all the story-creating and co-authoring opportunities. You could view the whole session as a literacy lesson. Of course it is cross-curricular, with clear links to history, drama and geography, but the class are engaged in an imaginative enquiry, which draws on their abilities to ask questions, make inferences, suggest possibilities, and evaluate and develop ideas. Throughout the whole morning they are using their imagination to create the situations they are engaged in.

### **Conclusion**

Using Mantle of the Expert widens learning opportunities by contextualising them in emergent situations. The acquisition, application and development of knowledge, skills and understanding happens within an environment that is co-created by the class, and invested with purpose and meaning. In the Mantle of the expert, Dorothy Heathcote has invented a

powerful tool for teachers: a tool that can transform learning for all learners and put excitement and enjoyment back into teaching and learning.

**Possible areas of acquisition, application and development of literacy during this session:**

- En1 – Speaking & Listening
- Drama
- En2 – Reading – reading for information
- En3 – Writing – Composition; planning & drafting; handwriting & presentation; standard English

**Possible areas of acquisition, application and development of the key skills during this session:**

- Communication
- Working with others
- Improving own learning & performance
- Problem solving
- Thinking skills – reasoning; enquiry; creative thinking; and evaluation

For more information on Mantle of the Expert visit [www.mantleoftheexpert.com](http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com)

The following articles are all available for download on the website:

Brian Edmiston & Luke Abbott - Curriculum and Pedagogy in the Classroom  
Brian Edmiston & Luke Abbott - Contexts Between Play, Drama & Learning  
Dorothy Heathcote - Dramatic Conventions List

**References**

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*Tim Taylor is an AST from Tuckswold Community First School in Norwich and an Associate Consultant for Essex LA. As well as teaching his own class of Year 3s, he is working with Luke Abbott across the country developing and supporting the use of Mantle of the Expert.*