

## Foreword to Drama for Learning

Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton, both innovative and influential educators, come together in this book to share, clarify, and extend their understanding of what is clearly a vital mode of learning. Although both authors are well known for their contributions to the field of drama in education, the implications of the kind of teaching described in this book go far beyond the concerns of teachers specialising in drama in education. Together, Heathcote and Bolton propose an approach to the curriculum that is purposeful, dialogic, emancipatory, and metaphoric. Students who don the mantle of the expert and its responsibilities are in an active state of attention to a range of projects and plans of action. They begin to generate their own knowing and, most significant, this knowing is always embedded in a fertile context. The mantle of the expert is essentially an approach to the whole curriculum, and one that resonates with current trends toward active learning and whole language. It is a rare example of truly integrative teaching.

In developing this highly articulated approach to the themes and materials of the curriculum, Dorothy Heathcote is proposing paradox. 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. This contextualization is the key to its effect. Thinking from within a situation immediately forces a different kind of thinking. Research has convincingly shown that the determining factor in children's ability to perform particular intellectual tasks is the context in which the task is embedded. In mantle of the expert, problems and challenges arise within a context that makes them both motivating and comprehensible. Imagination is not an optional extra to this way of thinking but is essential to the symbolic and communicative tasks that arise from the work. It is imagination that allows both teacher and students to devise alternative modes of action, alternative projects and solutions, and imagination is at the heart of this complex way of teaching.

Although mantle of the expert does not emphasise its dramatic roots, its purpose is the same as any effective theatre event. It engages the students both cognitively and affectively and requires them not merely to replay and repeat their existing understanding but to see the world afresh. Everything that takes place within the context of the work is elevated into significance. This significance is achieved through situation, role, and task, but above all through the language initially modelled by the teacher but claimed gradually by the students as their own. This

"language" includes not just discussion but also written language and the reading and interpretation of a variety of sign systems. There is a growing sense of audience, both within the work and through the wider community to whom the students become accountable. Role play is an inadequate term for the kind of engagement required. The students inhabit their roles as experts in the enterprise with increasing conviction, complexity, and truth. They grow into their roles in a way that goes far beyond the functional as they experience the enlargement of both identity and capacity within the tasks they undertake and the challenges they encounter.

The significance of the social dimension of this kind of teaching should not be overlooked. Learning occurs most efficiently within a supportive and collaborative community. Here, students work in the kind of teams and collaborative environments that anticipate the challenges facing them in the real world. Instead of sterile competitiveness, everyone's level of achievement is elevated. The mantle of the expert sets up a supportive, interpretative, and reflective community through a pattern of relationships and a network of tasks, all embedded in a flexible context. Students are required to question, negotiate, compromise, take responsibility, cooperate, and collaborate, all in the service of something beyond themselves. Their energies are focused less on these interactions than on the tasks to be accomplished, and they develop an awareness of their own knowledge and competencies. They are active in the learning process, not just cognitively but socially and kinaesthetically. They express their understanding in their response to the variety of tasks demanded of them, and they reflect on their perceptions from both inside and outside the context. As Freire has shown, learners are motivated and empowered by the knowledge that they are learners. In mantle of the expert, responsibility for the learning is shared among the group and with the teacher. The teacher is also admitted as a member of the learning community, one whose commitment and courage, skills and understanding, are necessary to drive the experience forward. The key function of the teacher is to maintain the learning experience and support and challenge the students within it. As teachers work with this method, they will begin to understand more about their own learning processes; as a result they are likely to become more sensitive and knowledgeable about their students' ways of learning. All successful learning depends on the capacity of the learner to bring relevant background and information to bear on a problem and to accumulate further experience as a result of encountering and resolving the problem. In mantle of the expert, the students' prior knowledge and experience is validated and their frame of reference is enlarged.

This approach challenges some basic ideas about the nature of teaching. Many educators recognise the flaws in our present approach to education—the multiplication of decontextualized "skills" and competencies, the obsession with measurement, the lack of challenge, the reliance on a transmission mode of teaching—practices that are visibly failing even where students themselves collude in these practices. Instead, Heathcote and Bolton share the assumption that education can go beyond the prepackaged, bite-size, fragmented, and highly disposable facts with which students' genuine appetite for knowledge is too often assuaged. 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 a position of increasing authority and knowledge. From the firm foundation provided by the teacher, the students gradually begin to take control of the imagined context, a control they have earned in a context they have helped to create. They became experts—experts at learning.

Bolton and Heathcote have much in common, although their backgrounds are very different. Heathcote left school at the age of fourteen without any formal qualifications. After working in a mill during World War II she trained as an actress. Her thinking has been shaped by her love of history, poetry, the Bible, and Shakespeare. Bolton's clear analysis of the processes of drama in education reflects his initial training as a teacher of English with mathematics as a subsidiary subject, and is elucidated in his many books and articles. Heathcote and Bolton taught drama in the Institutes of Education at universities within fifteen miles of each other and have worked extensively with students and teachers in schools. Their related philosophies have influenced educators throughout the world. Both are now retired, Heathcote from the University of Newcastle-upon-Tyne and Bolton from the University of Durham. But as this book demonstrates, both still view themselves as learners, and both continue to influence the field, through workshops, conferences, and writing. An archive at the University of Lancaster documents the work of Heathcote, and Bolton has established an archive tracing the development of drama in education at Durham University. Their work will continue to resonate in the authentic classrooms of the future. The partnership that began in discovering ways to enhance the skills of teachers has flowered in this remarkable analysis of a unique method that provides integrated and authentic occasions for learning.

Cecily O'Neill