
'Mantle of the Expert' as a Route to Irresistible Learning and Transformative Teaching

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ABSTRACT This article is an attempt to re-imagine the professional positioning of schooling, learning and teaching by offering an account of approaches adopted by 'Mantle of the Expert' practitioners.

Different Points of View

In the past decade a new and transformative learning and teaching approach has emerged among those who hold fast to learner-led values within a community of practitioners. The inventor, Professor Dorothy Heathcote [1], termed the method 'Mantle of the Expert' (MoE). This title carries a mystical feel, off-putting to some. However, it is under the sign of this homey set of words that a counter-process can be enabled in the face of extremist dogma which so freely abounds in the world of what is supposed to be 'education', and which all too often is actually just 'instruction'. That world is obsessed with *knowledge acquisition*, testing and league tables, and gives little thought to *using knowledge* for human growth and progress.

In essence, deploying the methods comprising MoE transports learners from being mere *receivers* of knowledge to being *voracious seekers and appliers* of their own knowledge goals (and shifts learners themselves from impotence to importance). It does this through a switch in the mind: through the use of '*make-believe*', where so much more is possible. This simple drama-based device, by which educators actively harness and use the possibilities of *different points of view as if they are our own*, holds the seeds of a new set of possibilities for learning. In such circumstances we can investigate what it means to be human, in a safe way.

This is all it takes to make MoE happen. Some teachers use this new skills-set to highlight a straightforward 15-minute exercise – for example, to change a dull area-based arithmetical exercise into a dynamic purposeful problem that can come alive.[2] Others use these methods as their main teaching approach, to enable learners to engage with the multi-layered requirements of learning, as defined both in formal curriculum needs and in the current National Curriculum's parameters. So learners gain in spirituality, personal growth and the use of self-assessment for reflection. They construct personal moral values and challenge our ethical understandings.

The simple switch, the drama switch, exploits *a fictional event happening as if it is happening now*. In this simple key lies the pioneering, highly developed and dynamic pedagogy, with its almost limitless application potential. All we have to do as teachers is to create the imaginative contexts specifically designed to carry the curriculum we need for the necessary goals selected, engaging the active imagination *as if* we are there. More of this later in the article...

Transformative Pedagogy?

The associated suite of pedagogic practices used by practitioners of MoE seems to apply the best practices of what has been coined 'Great Pedagogy' by researchers at King's College London (Husbands & Pearce, 2012). What we know to date about MoE is that these combined and holistic practices have been applied, researched and developed in schools and other settings throughout England, Eire, Wales, Portugal, Palestine, Ohio (USA), Switzerland, New Zealand and Australia.

This is a pedagogy that *values and uses contributions* from the learners. It is a co-constructed learning context which:

- is planned for challenge and excitement;
- can engage all learners in the classes or groups;
- uses reflective assessment for learning to enable rapid progress;
- uses a range of cutting-edge methodology enshrining the nine aspects of great pedagogy identified by researchers at Kings College London in 2012, and including dialogistic teaching; and
- uses *questioning* as an art in teaching.

This pedagogy depends not on a long list of activities and strategies but, as we knew long ago, on a set of *teaching dispositions* that come alive in the space between teachers and learners, in the *now*. It generates the spiritual spark of interaction with the world of knowledge, and of intellectual and emotional puzzles.

Practitioners in the regions named above consistently report that applications of MoE tailored to their learners seem to cause rapid, deep and lasting effects on learning, and on teaching outcomes. This has been observed especially in settings where teachers have embarked on longer-term

personalized coaching and training in MoE, often in schools where poverty and social challenges are immense.

More and more, countries are concerned to re-enable education to reflect and mitigate the massive elemental changes occurring throughout the world. Within this revolutionary period, as educators we grapple with huge and urgent questions. Learning experiences need transforming in order to equip our young people to co-construct with elders (that is, with us), to take leadership to heal humanity. But most urgent of all is for the passing generation to hand on to our next generation the tools and know-how to invent their ability to create a global civilization that seeks peace and shared plentifulness.

Evaluating Impacts

Scrutiny of MoE approaches by the inspectorate in English-, Welsh-, French- and Arabic-speaking countries in particular has confirmed some extraordinary impacts, including steep rises in the levels of learning, progress and achievements, particularly where such teaching takes place in multicultural areas and where the incidence of social deprivation is extreme. This has been doubly confirmed by a multitude of research activities at universities in the UK, the USA and Palestine, and more recently in Belgium, Spain and Bulgaria. Many of these findings are published on a dedicated website.[3]

The most recent developments have resulted in countries in the European Union (EU) and beyond investing in further research and training opportunities. In Belgium, for example, in 2016, European funders financed a large-scale research project with teacher trainers in Antwerp to identify how MoE works for Belgian children. More importantly, the project will research how teachers can learn the scaffolds of applications of the unique teaching toolkits invented by Professor Dorothy Heathcote in 1980, which comprise the basis of MoE approaches.

Additionally, in the Arabic Palestinian Territories, the A.M. Qattan Foundation funds major training grants for Palestinian and Levant teachers by funding and enabling the re-building of damaged teacher workshop community venues. The A.M. Qattan Foundation also funds a long-standing summer drama school in Jordan, as well as a multitude of year-on-year placements at centres of excellence in teaching and learning for young academics at universities in the West Bank and elsewhere. The goal is to research new methodology across the globe to bring about major and much-needed change in the Middle East's education system. On discovering MoE, the Foundation has now embarked on long-term investments in trialling the approach, starting with children in nursery and infant schooling in Jerusalem and Kalandia. The Foundation has for the past four years funded an exchange programme with a school in Redditch that uses MoE as its core teaching method, with a view to adopting these methods in schools in Arabic-speaking Jerusalem. Teachers from Redditch have coached and taught teachers and classes in Ramallah and Jerusalem. All senior inspectors and advisers in all schools on the West Bank have now been trained

to understand how MoE works. Consequently they have been involved in using MoE and training their teachers in it in very difficult school settings.

The results have, thus far, been startling. Results in science learning throughout the Palenstinian Territories in schools under the keen eye of Dr Nader Wahbeh and his science team at Birzet University Ramallah have been sensational. He had the vision to see how to apply MoE in the science curriculum of Palestine as it was under renovation.

At the time of writing, Newman University in Birmingham has hosted an MoE research week. Participating countries included Portugal, Germany, Turkey and the UK. Teacher trainers and leaders in education came to learn how to use MoE in a more systemic way in their own settings by visiting UK schools. They will invest in similar work on return to their home countries.

Rationale behind MoE

The drama-based method, originally labelled 'Mantle of the Expert', now also commonly referred to as 'Imaginative Inquiry' [4], is an elegant sequence of highly planned, active classroom tasks that lead learners into an imaginary emotional and intellectual relationship with mandated learning contexts. Trained practitioners are able to apply a dynamic tailored learning model that moves rapidly through an educator's engagement framework. This is common to all teaching, of course.

First, the planning ensures the teaching tasks to be undertaken, and their pedagogy, are attractive enough for learners to become interested by willingly giving their attention to matters that raise concern for them. In other words, learners make the learning relevant to themselves.

The *context* is planned to include an intrigue or mystery, or the taking of a risk (perhaps endangering ourselves in the fictional setting), or some other emotive hook we know is likely to be motivational to our learners. Through this pedagogy, learners apply their developing interest to become motivated to take actions within the context under investigation. In optimal learning conditions, this then leads to deep learning as the experiences generate concern, requiring personal levels of intellectual and emotional investment, reaching down to the deepest learning perhaps, to become even obsessive. This rubric follows the main research tenets that scientists and pioneers in the arts and elsewhere have adopted. A hunch becomes an itch which needs scratching until the itch goes... Look at the world's attack on cancer or AIDS, blowflies or locusts; look at the harnessing of solar energy, the development of ambient music, natural art and so on: people with passion, obsessively hunting their quest as a lifetime's work.

Motivation of Learners: influential factors in MoE

Much has been made of motivational teaching strategies and the impacts these have on learners. For most professional teachers there is a direct line between

motivation achievement and growth and progression. It is not hard to see why this would be. To create settings where our young, and especially our adolescents, conduct their learning in sterile spaces with sterile social interaction, and with sterile knowledge to acquire, can only lead to one set of behaviours. Common among these are disruptive, disengaged activity, using off-task learning methods and exhibiting a constant craving to leave the teaching space as quickly as possible.

And of course such soul-sucking spaces are also common in the adult world. In the past these have been named as the three Ds: after an often exciting and fulfilling pre-adolescent experience in primary settings, young adolescents then experience their secondary schooling as one of the disengaged, disappointed and disaffected youth (Hopkins, 2001). Not all schools are like this, of course, but enough are to worry government agencies across the world, as disengaged, disappointed and disaffected young people often have the capacity to enter criminal communities and are far more likely to experiment with harmful substances. The statistics unfortunately speak for themselves. In the UK they are a constant source of anxiety, especially at Westminster.

What we as experienced teachers do know is that whatever we teach, it has to be at least *interesting* to our classes or we are lost. In the worst cases, of course, we blame the classes for being poor learners instead of looking at the pedagogy. Does it start from a position of making learning attractive? Not just attractive to some – but to ALL learners? Such an inclusive/democratic ideal is achievable if we manage to switch the *power to influence* learning episodes from teacher to learner. This may sound vacuous or even dangerous. However, we are talking about the power to influence learning, not the power to be disruptive, or the power to walk out of a lesson, or the power to disengage and so on. In the context of a classroom, that encourages power sharing; pedagogy that invites the class to 'buy in' somehow is what enables such a position to prevail. It is in the linguistic and attitudinal skill-set that we as educators learn every day of our lives, and it is no different from any other teaching and learning encounter.

However, the single and most significant discovery by Dr Professor Heathcote was the unique shift that the method of MoE brings to the learning, in that the class are treated *from the outset* as people who can do the job required. It is within the make-believe context that such a *social/linguistic* positioning of the class is possible, and actively encouraged by the MoE practitioner. This unique characteristic, we have discovered in countless training sessions with teachers, is deeply counter-intuitive.

MoE: what is it? The Three Rubric Goals

1. *There is always an imagined enterprise, or an 'expert' team who can become responsible for their activities and actions.* This is a great trigger for the curriculum tasks and it is the gift of the teacher to construct it with the class to suit the curriculum goals. Obviously, if the teaching goals were to investigate the state of the oceans and our collective responsibility to stop pollution, a context that focuses

on space travel is unlikely in the short and medium term to work for the busy teacher!

2. *There is always an imagined client of some sort whose needs are proper and need to be met by the responsible team (or the 'expert team').* This stresses the importance of quality, as our work will be 'publicised' – that is, read and replied to!

3. *There is always a commission/job to be done for the client, and tackling it includes creating updates and information processes for both public scrutiny and information giving, or just for the private ear of the client/agents of the client.* This construct helps the class decide on its own interests within the context, and with practice, teachers and class can make huge gains, as the implications for research and for following ideas are inexhaustible.

As mentioned earlier, since the first set of experiments in applying MoE, practitioners have recorded that learners make astonishing levels of progress, not only in the personal growth of their intellect but also in the growth, exposure and *rethinking* of deeply held sets of human and societal values. The hallmark of the work is that it is possible to *re-imagine* through taking an active different point of view and to live with what we create, but with no real-life consequences.

For example, we can re-imagine and create a possible future society where people can decide the actual date of their death, the means by which it will happen and the circumstances in which it will occur.

Using MoE to explore the context takes the work from an intellectual discourse into a 'now' experience which feels real, as the 'as if' element of it takes us into the context rather than our intellects keeping us out. For example: *We can imagine ourselves as a team of monitoring staff, whose role is to ensure no coercion from other sources takes place during an individual's end of life plan. The team's client is the Medical Council who are monitoring the new Laws for the government. The job is to create a plan of action whereby the team can investigate the first set of cases and make a report of their effectiveness. There are tensions of course – as many religious communities are standing firm against the new laws and advising their members to disregard them entirely. Questions have also been posed by those who are caring for people without the capacity for a voice in the new legislation.*

Such an imagined position would create a huge set of implications for older students to tackle in a world that has many ways in which people end their lives. The massive sets of implications come into play, as, within a make-believe setting, matters concerning the human condition are open for deep scrutiny and investigation. However, we can also imagine the tasks needing completion in the planning of the learning. The class can have the task to draft the new laws, which will ensure a deep investigation into human rights and researching how different cultures past and present manage(d) the end-of-life points of their members. We can imagine how the legislation made its progress through the legal hurdles and the sceptical or highly vociferous opposition that might arise. Much to plan for and many curriculum possibilities, especially in science, politics, the law, human rights and cultural comparators?

Schooling often insists that such contexts are avoided. Yet in the revolutionary world we are in, educationalists at the forefront of practice cannot avoid supporting our next generation's attitudes, dispositions and possible actions. Otherwise all they learn is a doctrine which proceeds as follows: if we always do what we have always done, we will always get what we have always got.

Such a highly emotive learning arena will have many ramifications of course – but not anything ACTUAL. The make-believe element keeps it safe but does not inhibit the flow of re-thinking where much learning and reflection can take place. The practice is both within the fiction *as participants* and (at ANY time decided by teacher or class) as *participants/reflectors* of actions outside the fiction. Both positions create a space in between the curtains of theatre where we can allow deep considerations to enter into us in a way that is safe.

Who Dares Take the First Step into Such Learning Arenas?

As we have seen, MoE's main element is the application of the imagination, harnessed to summon up in participants a sense of the actual world and therefore providing decision making that requires deep considerations and, more importantly, direct action. The beauty of drama, of course, as said above, is that it carries no real-life consequence, as the fiction protects. However, this very safety net provides for the examination of humankind, and of what we are capable of, at very close range. Drama creates the emotional distance, but we can look at human matters even more closely with the knowledge that we are 'safe' in the make-believe.[5]

So a real skill in professional teachers is understanding the difference between *make-believe*, *dramatic play* and *pretence*, and knowing when it is appropriate to deploy each one.

In essence, the triad structure (responsible team, client and commission to be tackled) is deceptively simple, requiring an application of a set of principles associated with developing ways to indirectly include curriculum domains required in the teaching episodes planned by the teaching team.

From Instrumental to Transformative

When, for example, witnessing an MoE episode in which the class imagine themselves to be a responsible team of five-year-old children dealing with an injured giant, alone in a big castle, as social workers for giants from the outset, sceptics often ask: How can they know what to do as experts – they are only five years old? Surely you have to tell them first?

Our intuition as teachers starts to become an encumbrance as we begin to see other ways learners can engage for themselves. But when we understand the power of language codes [6], and of creating make-believe with learners as a strategic teaching goal, all becomes clear. Teachers have discovered how to remove the 'glass ceiling' they had previously placed on their expectations of

learners. It is worth noting that schools using MoE as a method to remove the metaphoric ceiling have, in the UK at least, been judged by our inspectorate as at least 'Good' schools, but more often as 'Outstanding' ones. In one case, the school's MoE curriculum has been deemed as 'Outstanding and Unique'. This school has been practising MoE for the majority of its curriculum for the past 10 years. And yes, the school is in the state school system!

This wonderful little school defies the common orthodoxy, having hundreds of study visitors from all over the world. It has amazing results in public testing regimes. Although the school itself is set in among the most affluent communities in the country supported by parents who are at the cutting edge of their professions and creating vast wealth for us all, we have to ask: what motivates parents to send their children to such a school and not to a privately run establishment that creates orthodox routes to Oxford and Cambridge?[7]

How is it that such a school is on the UK HMI (government school inspectorate) list of the most outstanding schools in the country? We can report without doubt from the experience of many hundreds of teachers trialling the system that deploying MoE methods has not only increased professional skill, it has also led to the upscaling of motivational learning in classes. However, one hidden impact has been that in all schools using the system an upsurge in parental interest has been significant, having major impacts on community involvement and healing. Woodrow First school in Redditch is one such example where a deprived community comes together through its children and via the incredibly inventive curriculum created for the classes using MoE as the main pedagogy. The results in learning, progress and achievement have been extraordinary.

In the meantime, coaching to develop and maintain the sharpness of the pedagogy, notably to include drama in teaching, is not only desirable but essential to the lifetime activity of raising the game of the professional teacher to levels of transformation and excellence. Or, as has been said by significant theorists (Hopkins, 2013; Fielding, 2013) in the field, *moving from an instrumental model of learning and teaching to a transformative one*.

The only difference here is that the *theoretical* desirable vision is achieved by the deployment of a deeply rooted rigorous child-centred *practice*, that has stood the test of time again and again.

Notes

- [1] Professor Dorothy Heathcote (2001), recorded her teaching in a series of filmed seminars with a research student. During these recorded seminars Dr Heathcote explains where the term Mantle of the Expert originated from. In *Drama for Learning No. 8*, available from the University of Newcastle upon Tyne School of Education Communication and Language Sciences.
- [2] A teacher in a primary class some years ago invented a carpet-laying firm to tackle the issue of area and perimeter as a half-term unit using an MoE structure that tackled a lot more than mathematics. In this case the teacher created a

mysterious client (a solicitor) who commissioned the imagined carpet-laying firm in Basildon (the class in role) to carpet a new office from floor to ceiling in the best carpet possible. The intrigue here for the class in the dual space (in fiction mode and out of fiction mode) was to grasp the reason why a solicitor wanted a fully carpeted space ... security perhaps, or privacy, or even the flaunting of wealth or maybe just sound insulation... In these circumstances we can see as teachers many possible undefined investigations and many defined outcomes both in mathematics, English, communication matters, science design and morality, as well as in deciphering what is appropriate to ask a client in the completion of a job to be done! The class also had a very torrid time trying to wrestle with what to do with the offcuts and whether the final price should be reduced for the carpet cut-outs from the window openings, with all having to be measured, calculated and decided upon.

- [3] www.mantleoftheexpert.com
- [4] See Brian Edmiston and Tim Taylor in the article section of www.mantleoftheexpert.com
- [5] See Heathcote (2002). This is another recording of a dialogue between the inventor and a great teacher-collaborator, Eileen Pennington.
- [6] 'A language is not just words. It's a culture, a tradition, a unification of a community, a whole history that creates what a community is. It's all embodied in a language' (Chomsky, 1977).
- [7] Visit Bealings School's website (www.bealings.net) to browse how a school can hold to the ideals and values against the odds and still remain 'Outstanding'.

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