

## CHAPTER THREE

# Dorothy Heathcote's Mantle of the Expert Approach to Teaching and Learning: A Brief Introduction

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## Introduction

In four of the case studies described in this book, teachers opted to teach using the dramatic inquiry teaching approach known as Mantle of the Expert. It is the aim of this chapter to provide the reader with further background information about this approach, including its core principles, impacts on learning and place in the New Zealand educational context. Of course it will only be possible to offer the briefest of summaries here. For fuller description and discussion, please refer to Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton's *Drama for Learning* (Heathcote & Bolton, 1994). Also useful are Sandra Heston's very thorough PhD study, available online at <http://www.partnership.mmu.ac.uk>, the numerous articles and materials available at <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com> and Bolton's excellent biography of Heathcote's life, which describes how the approach developed (Bolton, 2003).

The Mantle of the Expert approach was developed by UK-based drama educator Dorothy Heathcote (1926–2012). It was the culmination of over 40 years of practice, which saw Heathcote lauded as “one of the greatest teachers of the twentieth century” (John Carroll, cited in Heston, 1993, p. 1). Heathcote saw Mantle of the Expert as a “clear system” with “operant laws”, which she defined and explained through numerous charts and

addresses over the years (see <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com>; Heston, 1993). At the same time, Heathcote always acknowledged that the approach had enormous complexity and fluidity, and she considered herself to be learning, uncovering and discovering new aspects right to the end of her life (Heathcote, 2009). Heathcote's work has been further developed and theorised by academics and practitioners around the world, including Brian Edmiston (Edmiston, 2003), Luke Abbott (Abbott, 2007), John Carroll (Carroll, Anderson, & Cameron, 2006), Stig Erikson (Erikson, 2011) and others.

## **The metaphor of the mantle: The child at the centre**

The name "Mantle of the Expert" evokes the idea of learning growing like a mantle, or cloak, surrounding the learner. In some ways the image resonates with the concept of the Māori korowai, or feathered cloak, which is bestowed as a sign of mana, or respect, knowledge and status. However, Heathcote makes it clear that unlike the korowai, the "mantle" in Mantle of the Expert is not a garment to be gifted by another, but a quality that grows from within:

Mantle is not a cloak by which a person is recognised. This is no garment to cover. I use it as a *quality*: of leadership, carrying standards of behaviour, morality, responsibility, ethics and the spiritual basis of all action. The mantle embodies the standards I ascribe to. It grows by usage, not garment stitching. (Heathcote, 2009, pp. 1-2)

As Heathcote's words imply, the Mantle of the Expert approach places the child at the centre of the learning. The teacher's role is to create the conditions whereby a mantle of leadership, knowledge, competency and understanding grows around the child. This approach assumes a progressive view of learning, responsive to the needs of the child (Heston, 1993). The child centrism begins in the planning stages, with the teacher starting from the children's interests and needs, alongside the curriculum objectives, and continues in the classroom interactions, where the teacher consciously positions the children as competent co-constructors of the learning. Although placing the child at the centre, and including strong elements of inquiry, the approach is far from child-led. The role played by

the teacher, both in and outside the drama, is a crucial part of the success of Mantle of the Expert.

Broadly speaking, Mantle of the Expert draws on three teaching modalities: inquiry learning; drama for learning (closely related to drama-in-education, or, as it is sometimes called, process drama); and what we might call “expert framing”, which involves children being positioned as adult experts. This reframing asks the children to “frame” or think about their learning in a new way. It also involves a conscious repositioning of power within the teacher–student relationship. Abbott suggests that for Mantle of the Expert to work at its best, the teacher needs to be conscious of, and adept in, all three of these modes of teaching (2007, pp. 3, 23).

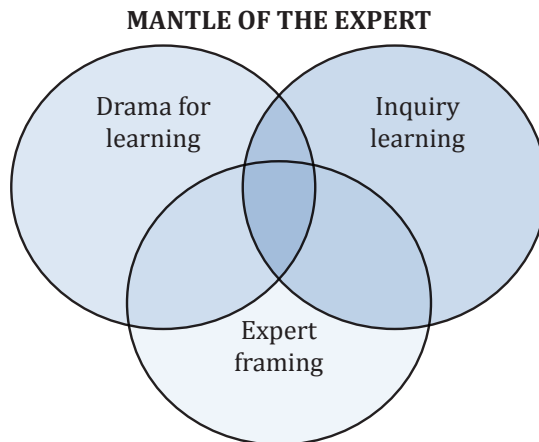


Figure 3.1 *The three pedagogic structures of Mantle of the Expert*

Source: Adapted from Abbott (2007)

In our research project we found that teachers using Mantle of the Expert had different strengths depending on their prior teaching experience. For teachers with a background in inquiry learning it was often the drama for learning aspects that challenged them, while those familiar with process drama often needed to build skills in guiding student-led inquiry. As for the third of these modalities—the systems and strategies that comprise the building of the expert frame—these were a new challenge for all involved, and they are the main focus of discussion in this chapter.

## Core components of the approach

### Overview

So, what does Mantle of the Expert look like in practice? Although each Mantle of the Expert experience is unique, there are certain core components, as italicised in the following description. In its very simplest terms, Mantle of the Expert is about teachers and children taking on *roles* as *experts* in an imaginary *enterprise* (this might be a full-blown “company” or simply a “responsible team”). The company or team is set up in such a way that the issue being explored is *framed* from a certain point of view. Within this *fictional context*, the children work together as a responsible team to carry out an important job, or *commission*, for a high-status (fictional) *client*. Along the way, they encounter problems, or *tensions* (either naturally arising, or planned and introduced by the teacher). The element of tension is essential to all drama, and in a Mantle of the Expert experience tensions add complexity to the commission, keep it interesting and promote new tasks for learning. At the same time, through episodes of *drama*, students are encouraged to explore multiple perspectives on the issues at hand and to *reflect* deeply on their learning and on the process of learning itself.

In Mantle of the Expert, curriculum is encountered in the same way as in real life: not as a set of separated “subjects” or “learning areas”, but as landing points within an holistic ongoing experience. Mantle of the Expert, then, is an approach to curriculum integration. Abbott prefers the term “curriculum *incorporation*”, because it resists seeing curriculum as separated in the first place (L. Abbott, personal communication, 2009). Learning in Mantle of the Expert has a strong element of inquiry, in that students may pursue their own directions and interests within the bounds of the wider commission. The possibilities for cross-curricula learning mean that the Mantle of the Expert approach is particularly well suited to the primary generalist classroom. Having said this, some secondary specialists also use the approach within particular curriculum areas, achieving focus by narrowing the commission and limiting the scope for student-led inquiry.

It can be seen from the other chapters how the core attributes of Mantle of the Expert were manifested in the examples in the research project. Teachers selected various enterprises, ranging from designers of interactive museum displays (see Chapter Five), to expert documentary researchers (see Chapter Four) and archaeologists (see Chapter Seven). The expert roles were framed as having a particular specialism or world view: the archaeologists were particularly experienced with Māori taonga (treasures), while the visitor centre designers (see Chapter Six) had a focus on sustainable practices. The commission and client in each case were chosen as suiting the children's interests and to promote curriculum tasks within the areas the teacher wished to focus on. For example, the documentary makers in Lynette's class were asked to imagine they had been commissioned by the WWF (the World Wide Fund for Nature) to carry out research and produce storyboards for a complex environmental issue (as a means to explore ethical issues and promote work in visual arts), while the cave experts in Whakarongo and Michelle's classes were commissioned by the land owners to explore and excavate the caves in a respectful way (leading to opportunities to explore ideas of respect and cultural ownership).

In every case, the curriculum tasks were framed as professional tasks that were necessary for the company to undertake. For example, instead of producing some persuasive writing as part of a "lesson" called "literacy", students in Lynette's room were asked to take a position, in writing, as part of writing a professional report for sharing at a company meeting. In Mantle of the Expert, the purpose of learning is clear and immediate. This is not learning for its own sake, nor for the teacher or "for your own good". Neither is it learning for some time in the future or for a test. Rather, it is learning because someone actually needs it done now, and needs it done well. In other words, each task is purposeful and occurs within a real-life context.

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In each example from our project we can also see how drama for learning was used to explore multiple perspectives. Michelle asked children to create vignettes exploring the ethical issues arising from amateur treasure collecting. Coryn used teacher-in-role and story drama to explore a dilemma with children in role as members of a Stone Age community. Meanwhile, Whakarongo's town meeting allowed children in role to debate the pros and cons of goldmining in their town. All the teachers introduced tensions to keep students engaged. These ranged from the pressure of limited time to open a museum (Coryn's class), to the question of how to put right an accidental, but serious, breakage of a treasured object (Elicia's room), through to the chance discoveries of covert activity and threats to personal integrity (in Lynette's room). It can be seen, too, how, in every case, the teachers used a combination of teacher-led tasks and student inquiry to pursue learning goals, and that curriculum learning was approached in an incorporated way rather than within discrete boxes of time labelled as "maths" or "science" lessons.

Having identified the core elements that make up a Mantle of the Expert experience, the next and more important question to consider is *how* these components combine to influence learning. I have attempted to show this in the following table. The core elements are listed down the left side. The central column gives a definition, and in the right column an analysis is offered of how each element supports teaching and learning. The table is offered as a starting point and is expanded on, using examples from the project, over the rest of the chapter. It is worth noting that Heathcote herself identified six core elements for Mantle of the Expert practice (Heathcote & Bolton, 1994), but for our purposes I have subdivided some of these, giving a list of 10 core elements.

Table 3.1 *Ten core elements of Mantle of the Expert*

Core element	Definition	What it means for the learning
Fictional context	The children and their teacher agree to operate together in a fictional context, using their imaginations to “agree to see” or “pretend” together.	A fictional context means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning tasks are both playful and serious</li> <li>• there is dual awareness of both fictional and real worlds (<i>metaxis</i>)</li> <li>• safety is ensured—there are no real-world consequences</li> <li>• learning is not bound by real-world limitations (time, power, finance, age).</li> </ul>
“Company”, “enterprise”, “responsible team”	The children and their teacher take on a collective identity as members of a collaborative enterprise or company. Sometimes this may not be a fully realised “company” but some other “responsible team” with a common goal.	Taking on a collective identity means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• learning in collaboration</li> <li>• a shared sense of mission, values and morals (e.g., through a mission statement)</li> <li>• a shared <i>past</i> history of excellence</li> <li>• opportunities for kinaesthetic response (e.g., setting up office space)</li> <li>• a real-world context</li> </ul>
Frame	The enterprise or company is “framed” as having a particular specialism or point of view on the issues being considered. Any further roles adopted during the drama are also “framed”.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• being framed as a certain “kind” of company enhances collaboration and builds shared perspectives</li> <li>• by framing roles, the teacher can increase or decrease the intensity of the experience and explore from a particular perspective (frame distance).</li> </ul>
Commission	The enterprise or company is asked to undertake a particular important job.	The commission provides: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• clearly expressed long-term learning goals—a shared purpose</li> <li>• an authentic bounded inquiry.</li> </ul>
Client	The commission, or important job, is for a very important (fictional) client.	Involving a client means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• there is a clear purpose to the learning beyond “for the teacher” or “for its own sake”</li> <li>• a real-world context, that is relevant but safe</li> <li>• high status, high stakes, high standards</li> <li>• having a sense of audience, which gives a sense of obligation.</li> </ul>

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Core element	Definition	What it means for the learning
Curriculum framed as professional tasks	The tasks the children carry out in response to the commission are both appropriate curriculum tasks <i>and</i> professional tasks for the company.	Framing the curriculum as professional tasks: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides a real-world context</li> <li>• gives an immediate purpose for learning</li> <li>• involves an “incorporated” curriculum rather than discrete “subjects”.</li> </ul>
Powerful repositioning	Children predominantly interact as “themselves” within the company, but they are positioned as <i>experts</i> : people who have been doing this a long time. The teacher positions children as knowledgeable and competent colleagues.	Power repositioning: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provides a shared sense of past success, which increases group and individual self-efficacy</li> <li>• involves high-status positioning—learners as experts</li> <li>• results in shifts in language register</li> <li>• causes lasting shifts in the power relationships between teacher and student.</li> </ul>
Drama for learning/conventions	Along with their ongoing roles within the company, children and their teacher explore the perspectives of “others”—people with alternative points of view on the issues being explored. Various “conventions of dramatic action” are used by the teacher to evoke these other roles. Heathcote listed 33 conventions, and others can also be used (see <a href="http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com">http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com</a> ).	Using drama for learning means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multiple perspectives are explored</li> <li>• an embracing of complexity/postmodernity</li> <li>• contesting binary/black-and-white thinking</li> <li>• exploring paradox and ambiguity</li> <li>• taking an approach that is not necessarily linear</li> <li>• not necessarily employing “naturalistic” drama.</li> </ul>
Tensions	The teacher plans for certain obstacles or difficulties to arise during the completion of the commission. Often drama is used to reveal these tensions.	Introducing tensions means: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• embracing the complexity and “messiness” of learning</li> <li>• providing authentic contexts for learning</li> <li>• engaging the children—maintaining their interest and intrigue</li> <li>• grappling and struggling, which teaches resilience.</li> </ul>
Reflection	The teacher will allow times (both within role and out of role) for discussion and reflection on the learning <i>and</i> the learning process in multiple worlds.	Reflection involves: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• meta-learning</li> <li>• an awareness of multiple worlds (classroom, company, client, content), which makes meta-awareness more vivid.</li> </ul>



## **Core element 1: The fiction**

Crucial to the operation of Mantle of the Expert is the fact that the children and teachers are operating in a fictional context. They do not form a company or responsible team in the real world, but operate in role, or at least in a shadow role (in that participants remain largely themselves but agree to act as if they were operating in the imagined context). The intention is not for students to get swept away in the imagined world, but rather to inhabit a state of *metaxis*, with an ongoing awareness of *both* the fictional world of the company and the ongoing social reality of their classroom (Boal, 1995; Edmiston, 2003).

During our project we saw evidence of children operating in a metaxical space, in which they remained aware of their ongoing identity as school children while responding as a member of the company. For example, in an interaction between classroom teacher Elicia and a child in her class, the child showed that he still saw her as “teacher” even as he was exploring his adult role: “Can you write how you spell ‘established’? I want to say ‘I helped established [*sic*] the company. I’ve been here 20 years.’” As in this example, the fictional context allows the teacher and students to operate in a dual reality, where learning can be playful and serious, risky and safe, pretend and realistic. There are no real-world consequences for the actions students take, but there are plenty of real-world learnings.

## **Core element 2: The enterprise, company and responsible team**

For some, the language of the “company” or “enterprise” might evoke somewhat unwelcome associations with business and moneymaking. However, this is not how the concept operates in Mantle of the Expert. Here the notion is closer to the one explored by Czikszenmihalyi (2003) in his explorations of collaboration or “flow” in various settings where humans collaborate, including in business. The agreement to operate as a responsible team, company or enterprise allows participants in a Mantle of the Expert experience to enter a collaborative learning arrangement with a shared sense of purpose, a set of values (often written up as a “mission statement”) and, crucially, a shared past in which each person

imagines “We have done this kind of thing before”. It is the sense of individual and group efficacy that arises from membership of the team that is of key importance here.

Within our project, teachers reported that working in a responsible team in this way seemed to facilitate the inclusion of peers. Children previously treated as outsiders seemed to be regarded by their peers as valued members of the company. In Lynette’s words:

There seems to be a want to listen, and take on everyone’s ideas. More able children lead the others, delegate and empower others to share their ideas. There’s definitely more input from the children who are often disengaged.

Not every Mantle of the Expert experience involves adopting the identity of a full-blown company. Sometimes, particularly with younger children, a sense of being in a team is enough. However, the setting up of the company offices through things like defining the space, designing logos and organising communication systems is an opportunity for rich curriculum learning in itself, much of it kinaesthetic and tangible. Moreover, a full company identity can afford opportunities for teachers and students to adopt conventions of behaviour and speech that allow things to be organised and run in a formal, grown-up way (meetings, memos, pigeonholes and so on). Some teachers in our project found that they needed to remind children of the behaviour expected at board meetings, while for others, the shifts in behaviour seemed to happen as an automatic response to the repositioning. Teachers observed changes in body language, with students sitting “like adults”, involving greater alertness, listening and turn-taking, along with more students opting to take notes during discussions.

#### **Core element 3: Framing**

The concept of framing, though complex, is crucial to Mantle of the Expert. Heathcote developed the concept after reading the sociological writings of Erving Goffman, who used the idea of “frame” to refer to the range of available viewpoints, or sense-making “frames”, that humans inevitably bring to any social situation (Goffman, 1986). Heathcote recognised that by putting students into role, the teacher is also asking them to adopt a point of view, or “frame of reference”, and suggested that a skilled teacher could plan to take this into account.

We can see how this was done in our project. For example, Lynette's students were not simply "documentary makers" but were framed as researchers with a particular dedication to telling the truth and dealing with difficult issues. This frame was established through clues, including letters from past clients and award citations. Having framed the students' role in this way early on, the teachers were later able to plan tensions that put this identity to the test. Another way teachers can manipulate the frame is to plan ways that increase or decrease the intensity of students' emotional relationship to the material. For example, in Coryn's classroom, students dealt with the world of the Stone Age through very different frames and with very different emotional involvement. As museum curators, they were distanced from the material in time and relationship. In contrast, during the episode where they took on roles as members of the community offering advice to the trainee shaman, students were taken right into the action, which increased the intensity of their personal emotional investment in the material. Such varied uses of the frame provide multiple learning opportunities within the same study.

#### **Core element 4: The commission**

The fourth core element of Mantle of the Expert is the presence of a specific commission that the enterprise, or team, is asked to undertake. The commission is generally delivered to the team a short while into the Mantle of the Expert unit, after the teacher has spent some time first building belief in the fictional enterprise. In all the examples in our research project the commission was delivered in the form of a letter. The advantage of this format for teachers and students is that the commission letter can clearly express the learning goals and set parameters for the experience. Unlike open-ended inquiry, where the teacher will support the student to go in his or her own direction, the teacher in Mantle of the Expert has a document that sets out shared goals and clear limits for the unit.

Although the students are aware that the commission is a planning device produced by the teacher, there is nonetheless a sense of being accountable to (and limited by) an "external" request. The commission has a contractual element, in that students will respond formally to it and will refer back to it for requirements. Many important learning opportunities arise from negotiating the commission. For example, in the

case of Lynette's classroom, the students became concerned that they would not be able to fulfil the original specifications of the commission, so they requested a renegotiation of terms. This required formal letter writing and taking responsibility for time frames and standards.

### **Core element 5: The client**

Associated with the commission, another important aspect of the Mantle of the Expert approach is the sense of working for an important (but fictional) client. The client is generally portrayed as someone of high status who expects top standards. For example, in Elicia's classroom, the client was a local preservation society, while in Whakarongo's class the commission came from a family of land owners. Evoking these external figures gives a clear purpose to the learning beyond doing what the teacher says or picking up skills that may be useful one day. The presence of the client gives us a clear sense of who we are working for (and "we" in this case includes the teacher). The teacher can also use role conventions to bring the client in to the classroom to check in on progress, or to attend a presentation at the end of the project. The client, then, supplies the sense of an audience to enhance the intrinsic motivation for learning that other elements can produce.

### **Core element 6: Curriculum tasks framed as professional tasks**

Having established the enterprise, and having received a commission from a client, a range of tasks will naturally suggest themselves. In the case of the Years 5/6 museum curators in Coryn's class, for example, once the commission for the interactive museum exhibit had been received, there were endless curriculum possibilities: responding in writing to the commission; carrying out research into an aspect of Stone Age life; designing and testing interactive features of the exhibit; constructing signage; advertising; budgeting; catering for visitors; and so on. In our project, teachers found this aspect of curriculum planning a relief: instead of having to try to find ways to bring real-world contexts into their teaching, they now had a real-world context out of which curriculum tasks seemed to fall quite naturally. As Heathcote put it, "The teacher can trust any Mantle to take them to curriculum" (Heathcote, n.d. b). The

challenge is to ensure the learning experiences arising are appropriate to the curriculum level and have the same integrity as traditional stand-alone tasks. As one teacher put it, “they still need to do the maths and the literacy”. This is where careful teacher planning is needed.

In our project, teachers found it helpful to mix periods of student-led inquiry with teacher-led tasks. Ideally, in Mantle of the Expert, even during the teacher-led tasks teachers will avoid telling the students things, but instead look to support students to discover understandings for themselves. At the same time, Heathcote herself acknowledged that, from time to time, straight teaching has its place in Mantle of the Expert (Heathcote, n.d a). A useful strategy developed by some teachers in our project was to frame traditional teaching episodes as professional development for the company. In several cases, this was provided by a real-world expert such as a professional artist or designer coming in to the company to offer professional development.

Perhaps the most important aspect of planning tasks for Mantle of the Expert is that everything the students are asked to do should have relevance to their identity as professionals. Nothing is asked of the students unless it serves the purpose for which they are working. This is where Mantle of the Expert differs from many typical lessons, where students might be asked to carry out a piece of writing “because we are learning about persuasive writing”. Here, instead, the persuasive writing has a purpose within the fictional context. For example, in Whakarongo’s room, students constructed arguments for and against a proposed goldmine development, while in Lynette’s room children wrote at length in an attempt to balance the two contrasting sides of the Kaimanawa horse debate.

Sequencing of tasks within Mantle of the Expert is a balance of teacher-directed planning and emergent inquiry. Sometimes the teacher will take the learning in a particular direction to fulfil a preplanned intention or to lead into a particular task they want the children to undertake. At other times the teacher might respond to quite unexpected directions emerging from the work. For teachers who like to be thoroughly planned in advance, the more flexible aspects can be a challenge. One of the teachers in the project, Lynette, admits that she struggled with emergent inquiry at first, but ultimately found it empowering:

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For teachers starting out the scary thing is you feel you are not owning it—you don't know where you are going next. Every day after school I'd be thinking 'Where are we going next?' But it's actually great ... Or to put it another way, you are owning it *more*—you are right inside it. You become more caught up in it. I think that's the beauty of it.

The important challenge for teachers, of course, is to ensure the children themselves understand the direction of the experience and are not confused by shifts in direction. Elicia found that “storying” the emergent adventure on the classroom walls was a very useful device, while other teachers made use of class blogs for a similar purpose. One challenge experienced by several teachers in our project was how to work with children who had missed out on part of the Mantle of the Expert experience. This seemed particularly difficult where children missed early stages of the programme and had not been part of the co-construction of the company identity.

#### **Core element 7: Conscious repositioning of students**

Issues of power and positioning are absolutely pivotal to Mantle of the Expert. The way children are invited to take on roles, and the ways these roles are framed, leads to a conscious repositioning of relationships and an attempt to shift the way power operates within the classroom. First of all the children are repositioned as members of the team or company. It is important to note that while in role in the company, students are not expected to take on a character any different from their own. Though some teachers in our project favoured the use of name tags with made-up names, this is not necessary: children are essentially playing themselves but adopting the position of experienced professionals in a particular field. The most important aspect of the company or team role is the way the students are positioned—by the teacher and the other students—as both competent and experienced. The aim of this repositioning is to prime the students' and the teacher's attitude so that they encounter new learnings and new knowledge from a place of self-efficacy. Learning is presented as a growing-on of existing expertise rather than as a leap into unknown territory. This is one of the most subtle, and yet most fundamental, cornerstones of Mantle of the Expert teaching.

Teachers involved in our research noticed a difference in student self-efficacy, which they attributed to this repositioning of students. As Lynette put it, “The drama put them ‘up there’, and they wanted to remain.” Teachers also reported that this sense of self-efficacy seemed to persist beyond the intervention. Several weeks after the end of the Mantle of the Expert experience, teachers felt that children were still interacting with each other, and the teacher, from this position of competence. Children, too, noted the lasting shift in relationship that occurred through working in Mantle of the Expert, as in this quote from a child in Lynette’s class:

MOTE [Mantle of the Expert] gave Room 10 a chance to be ‘adults’ ... It was really interesting to discuss and be with people in the class when they are being ‘adults’ because it was very different than when we are doing work normally. Because everyone is treated equally it is amazing when children and teachers alike all come together to work.

Though more research is needed into the effects of repositioning on student achievement in the context of Mantle of the Expert, other studies have been carried out in which repositioning of subjects has been found to significantly improve achievement (e.g., Kahnemann, 2012).

The repositioning of students in a Mantle of the Expert classroom is made manifest in a number of ways. For example, Elicia experimented with alternatives to the classroom tradition of putting up your hand. Several of the teachers reorganised the space to reflect the equality of teachers and students during meetings (sitting on chairs rather than the floor, rotating the position of “chair” for the meetings, using pigeonholes or memos to share important information). Perhaps the most obvious way of signalling a shift in agency is through the teacher’s talk, and indeed our researchers saw teachers shifting to a quite different register when speaking to the students in role as experts.

More important than any of these outward indicators of power shifting is the underlying shift in attitude that is required, as Elicia describes here:

It’s really easy when teaching to think you’ve handed the power over but that can be a trap. There’s a difference between saying ‘Here you have my permission to take some power now’ and the kids understanding the power they already have within them. The kind of thing I’m talking about here is something I’ve only noticed within a mantle. It’s not a sudden shift or a gift from the teacher. It’s a subtle process of growing into status. It is evidenced in their body language and their side conversations with you and with each other.

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This fundamental shift in attitude is not always an easy move for teachers to make because it does imply a ceding of agency in a situation where most teachers are very concerned with managing and controlling the class.

Another reason why the repositioning of students may be challenging for some teachers is that it has quasi-political overtones, to do with shifting the underlying locus of power within the classroom, the school and even the wider world. Brian Edmiston expresses this very well:

One of the core reasons why as a teacher I use drama is because when we create an imagined world, we can imagine that we frame events differently so that our power and authority relationships are changed. A long-term aim of mine as a teacher is as much as possible to share power and authority with students. I want students to have more opportunities to use words and deeds to act appropriately but in ways that are often not sanctioned in classrooms.

Additionally I hope that students' sense of their personal and shared authority will become more secure and more extended while at the same time more aware of others' authority. I want a culture to develop that is more egalitarian than most students expect walking into the room. (Edmiston, 2003, p. 225)

As Edmiston's words imply, the reconceptualising of children that occurs within Mantle of the Expert is, for many teachers, part of a deliberate attempt to reconceptualise young people within the real world. For many teachers, using Mantle of the Expert is not using an approach so much as adopting a world view.

#### **Core element 8: Drama for learning**

Along with the roles set up within the company or team, the teacher using Mantle of the Expert will plan additional role-based activities so that children have the chance to explore different points of view on the issues being explored. For example, in Michelle's classroom the students (in company role as cave experts) were invited to step into the past and role-play a moment in the lives of the earliest dwellers in the cave. An important artefact from this episode (an arrowhead, lovingly carved) was then shown, in another episode, being handled disrespectfully by a modern-day visitor. In Lynette's room children had the opportunity to take on roles as protesters, police officers and even horses as they explored the different perspectives on the issue of the Kaimanawa horses.



Dramatic role-taking permits the exploration of multiple viewpoints by giving students the opportunity to “walk in the shoes” of people other than themselves. It even moves them beyond their responses as experts within the company. The adopting of multiple perspectives strengthens the children’s reflective discussion and supports them to realise that there are multiple possible answers to any given issue.

Heathcote has identified 33 different drama conventions that can be utilised to deepen role-taking, so that students can not only walk in the shoes of someone else but might also speak their thoughts, write their words, ask or respond to questions, engage in dialogue with another and so on (see role conventions at <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com>). In our project, the teachers were more familiar with the process drama conventions as identified in *The New Zealand Curriculum* (for example, freeze frame, hotseating, spoken thoughts) and so tended to make use of these (Ministry of Education, 2000, pp. 48–49).

It is not only the children who can take multiple roles within a drama-for-learning segment of a Mantle of the Expert experience. The teacher can also take on different identities through teaching in role. The teacher can choose from a variety of different status positions and so utilise their role-taking for a number of different purposes (Edmiston, 2003). Within our project, teachers adopted roles in order to bring information to the team, represent a point of view, issue a challenge or introduce a new problem. For example, Coryn took on the role of village elder during a drama-for-learning episode in her class. She evoked an atmosphere of respect and seriousness while the children in role as people of the village discussed whether a young woman from the village should become a shaman or stay with her family. Elicia took on the role of Joseph Banks, the botanist who travelled with James Cook, to describe to the archaeology team the way New Zealand looked and sounded when he first arrived, and to ask for their help in reproducing the lost pages of his sketchbook. Some teachers in this project were more comfortable relying on more experienced teachers to take on the roles in their classrooms and invited outside teachers in as in-role visitors. It may be worth mentioning, too, that in this project the researchers also took on roles at times, including one researcher going into role as an apprentice to hold learning conversations with the children as they taught her the ropes in the company.

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There is insufficient space here to describe the many benefits for learning that arise from role-taking. However, one of the key benefits is the capacity to explore multiple perspectives and the breaking down of binary black-and-white thinking that results. In drama we are not bound by one identity (we can walk in different shoes and see the issue through other people's eyes). Nor are we bound by time (we can see the same moment over and over, change it or play out several possibilities at once). We are not bound by conventions of social behaviour (we can shift the conventions to play a moment naturalistically, melodramatically or in a range of different ways). Nor are we bound by rules of nature or physics (we can hear people's thoughts, see through walls or invoke a magic potion to force someone to speak the truth). Far from being "just" pretend, drama is an emancipatory device that frees its participants from the constraints of reality. Drama encourages an embracing of complexity by acknowledging and embodying multiple "truths". This was illustrated within our project when one of the children in Lynette's class, grappling with how to portray both sides of the Kaimanawa horse issue, stated, "I don't think there *is* such a thing as one truth." One wonders whether he could have reached such a conclusion without having engaged with all the different stakeholders through drama. In the broadest sense, then, drama offers children access to a post-structuralist view of reality, with its inherent openness to multiple perspectives. As O'Neill has pointed out, process drama's postmodern, fragmented, nonlinear way of presenting the world also aligns it with developments in contemporary theatre performers (O'Neill, 1995, p. xvii).

#### **Core element 9: Tensions**

Whether in the theatre, television or children's socio-dramatic play, all effective drama relies on tension. The same is true in classroom drama, where, as Heathcote puts it, "the teacher puts the tension in and the rest follows" (quoted in Smedley, 1971). Throughout a Mantle of the Expert experience, then, the teacher will plan for certain obstacles or difficulties to arise. To help in planning for these tensions, Heathcote offers a taxonomy of 12 levels of tensions, which outlines the different

qualities, or intensity, of each tension.<sup>1</sup> At level 1 of the scale, the teacher might evoke a vague sense of tension by implying someone is watching or scrutinising the company. A slightly more intense tension can be conjured up through pressure of time (level 7 on the scale). At the very top of the list comes “loss of faith in some companions”. Here the teacher might plan an episode in which someone in the company (a fictional “other”, of course, not one of the actual children) has carried out their work inadequately. As well as ongoing “productive” tensions, the teacher may plan to introduce a particularly challenging “key tension” that really tests the mettle of the company. For example, in the case of the documentary makers in Lynette’s class, a serious case of subterfuge was uncovered and the members of the company were placed in an ethical dilemma about whether they should report it and thereby betray a friend.

Using tensions like this serves a number of purposes. First of all, tensions or problems are a part of life, so by introducing them the teacher can offer authentic contexts for learning in which learning is complex and messy and not overly simplified. Second, tensions help maintain a sense of interest and intrigue in the drama. Children become accustomed to the fact that twists and turns are to be expected, and this builds their engagement in learning and makes it fun. Third, and significantly, tensions mean that children have to “grapple” in order to learn. They are not simply given expert status in an empty way, but are encouraged to earn and justify that position. The skills, understanding and attitudes that have been so carefully set up in the early stages of the drama (through the timeline, mission statement, profiles, etc.) are tested through the tensions, challenging the child to defend their point of view and operate from that heightened state of agency. The mantle of expertise is not given, but earned and worked for in a gradual and authentic way.

### **Core element 10: Reflection**

A final, but crucial, element of Mantle of the Expert is reflection. The teacher will allow times (both inside and outside the fictional frame) for participants to engage in discussion and reflection on the learning that is taking place. The dual realities operating within the Mantle of the

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1 See <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com>

### 3. DOROTHY HEATHCOTE'S MANTLE OF THE EXPERT APPROACH

Expert classroom make the learning context very explicit and a distanced relationship, which enhances reflection on what is being learned. As Edmiston (2003) points out, the participant in Mantle of the Expert is always aware of *both* the “as if” *and* the “as is” worlds operating together. The teacher can, at any time, signal a step out of the fictional company back into the real-life classroom to discuss and evaluate what is being learned “over there” in the fictional context. In our project we found that one of the simplest yet most effective reflection strategies was for a teacher who had been working in role with the children to step out of role and ask, “So what happened while I was away?” Children were happy to recap and reflect on the work they had just done, even when they were aware this was the very same teacher they had just been working with in role. At other times, children asked teachers to move into role so that they could explain something that the teacher in role figure needed to understand.

The dual realities of Mantle of the Expert encourage reflection not only on *what* is being learned but *how* it is being learned. As *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) reminds us, the ability to notice the ways one is learning (meta-learning or learning as inquiry) is an important skill and one that should be fostered by teachers. Mantle of the Expert, with its clearly signalled multiple contexts, brings the child’s awareness of their learning into consciousness and makes the structures under which learning is happening very explicit. With skilful questioning and negotiation the teacher can encourage students to reflect on how the learning is going, and even renegotiate aspects of the learning environment before stepping back into it. All teachers who used Mantle of the Expert in our project remarked on this as a key feature of their experience with the children.

Indeed, in our project we found evidence of children continuing to reflect on the systems and structures of their learning even beyond the Mantle of the Expert intervention. For example, in one classroom, some weeks after the Mantle of the Expert experience was over, some students respectfully asked the teacher whether they might re-organise the reading groups. In our view, it is exciting to think that Mantle of the Expert might encourage this kind of agentic positioning of learners.

## Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to outline 10 core components of Mantle of the Expert. Of course none of these components works in isolation: each depends on the others to be successful. For example, it is not enough to simply tell students they are experts: if a genuine shift in *power and positioning* is to occur, the teacher must spend time building belief in the *company*. Similarly, if the teacher wishes to introduce *tensions* to really challenge the students, they will need to plan tensions that confront the values and shared history set up within the *company identity*. The subtle and sophisticated teaching required to interweave the components of Mantle of the Expert has led to its being described as a “system”, which takes years to learn to use successfully (Abbott, 2007, p. 3). Though complex, the “system” provides structures and practices that seem—almost in and of themselves—to encourage shifts within the traditional classroom attitudes to teaching, learning and the curriculum.

The complexity of Mantle of the Expert should not be viewed as a discouragement to teachers interested in trying the approach. The teacher’s learning in how to use Mantle of the Expert can be seen in the same light as learning for the children in the fictional enterprise. With time and experience, and a striving for high standards, the “mantle” of experience and expertise will surely grow around the teacher’s shoulders. In the case of our project, all the teachers were relatively inexperienced in Mantle of the Expert and, apart from attendance at a 3-day conference, had had very little exposure to it. Nevertheless, with the support of members of the research team and each other, these teachers were able to introduce features of the approach into their classrooms and see the effects. The teachers involved would all say that they learned from the experience and all have seen it as worthwhile to continue to develop their practice. Like any complex teaching approach, the teacher wishing to use Mantle of the Expert must be willing to embark on an ongoing learning experience akin to an apprenticeship. However, it is an apprenticeship that can be started at any time and, in the case of teachers in this project, one that is gladly continued.

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### **Further resources**

Mantle of the Expert (NZ) website: <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.co.nz>

Mantle of the Expert (UK) website: <http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com>