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Teaching and Learning in the Crucible: Actors with disabilities as experts preparing pre-service teachers to be inclusive educators.

Jo Raphael
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Abstract

Dorothy Heathcote understood teaching and learning to take place in a kind of ‘crucible’ in which participants, who are both teachers and learners, contribute to the mix and produce new understandings. This paper reports on the ways Heathcote’s ideas have influenced both research and practice in the Teaching for Diversity workshop – a drama workshop that brings together pre-service teachers, teacher educators and actors from Fusion Theatre, a community-based theatre company for people with intellectual disabilities.

In a reversal of the usual relationship, actors with disabilities are positioned as experts leading student teachers and lecturers in the drama workshop. This paper describes their transformation through a kind of mantle of the expert – the expert in the antechamber. Within this space all participants, as if in Heathcote’s crucible, are stirred into new understandings and pre-service teachers are challenged into new ways of thinking about disability and inclusive education.

Key words: mantle of the expert; inclusive education; teacher education; disability; applied drama.
Introduction: Breakfast with Dorothy

In July 2009 I had the pleasure of a long breakfast with Dorothy Heathcote. I had first been introduced to her work thirty years earlier as part of my preparation to become a drama teacher at Rusden, a teachers’ college in Melbourne, Australia. My drama education lecturer, Bob Holden, had studied with Dorothy in the UK and shared with us what he had learned. In classes we watched the films ‘Three Looms Waiting’ and ‘Seeds of a New Life’ as reel to reel projections onto the screen in our theatre. These were wonderful and memorable illustrations of Heathcote’s work but a more profound and practical understanding of her work was gained when I took a unit called ‘Drama and Special Education’ taught by Bob.

The unit involved us in applying Heathcote’s methods, including teacher-in-role, in planning and implementing drama workshops for children with disabilities at a special developmental school called Urimbirra. The model of the unit was such that we all met within the tertiary institution once a week as a teaching team to collectively plan a two-hour drama session that we would team teach two days later at Urimbirra. Each week we had to solve the problem of how to plan a meaningful learning experience that would engage a group of ten to fifteen children, many of whom had profound intellectual and physical disabilities. These planning sessions were intense as we threw around ideas and most of our allotted time would pass without any firm decisions being made. As our teacher Bob held a good deal of expertise, which he mostly withheld, preferring to let our ideas emerge. Occasionally, as a team member rather than a leader, he would give us a little nudge in the right direction. He was as excited as we were in the process, and probably as fearful at times. In true solidarity Bob was running the same risks as we were in the teaching and learning process. Somehow we always managed to come up with a plan just before our class time ended. A couple of days later our dramas with the children unfolded as we tackled the problems associated with hapless cats, scheming witches, shopkeepers with no customers and all manner of human dilemmas.

Thirty years later I found myself on the concourse at Birmingham New Street Station waiting for Dorothy Heathcote. She arrived, as she told me she would, at 7.30am and we were taken to the home of her friend for breakfast. We talked until lunch time, and I noted with interest that for some of this time Dorothy was pasting up a working script of Racine’s Phaedra for some directing work she was preparing to do. We discussed teaching and learning in drama, our recent projects and how we understood ourselves as teachers while at the same time learners. It was then that Dorothy described her understanding of teachers’ paradigms. She explained to me that teachers teach according to how they see students and I made notes:

Some see students as the empty vessel and that the teacher holds the information: ‘I will fill you up.’
Some teachers see students as candles and the teacher as the enthusiastic source of all light and energy: ‘I will light you up.’

Some see students as machines and the teacher is the mechanic: ‘I’ll get you working and by December you will have produced....’

Some see the students as flowers: ‘I’ll nourish and nurture you and grow you up.’

Some see students as adversaries: ‘The trouble with you lot is... I’ll sort you out.’

Finally, she explained that she saw teaching and learning as occurring within a crucible:

‘You and I, we’ll stir it up and find out what’s useful, what you already know and what we can learn together.’

At our breakfast meeting I felt as though we were also mixing it up in the crucible. I approached that meeting in awe of Dorothy Heathcote and despite thirty years of teaching drama, believed I would be the student in this relationship. However, Dorothy listened as much as she spoke, we were finding out what I already knew, what was useful and what we could learn together.

Teaching and Learning in the Crucible

In this paper I take up Heathcote’s notion of teaching and learning taking place in a kind of ‘crucible’ in which participants, who are both teachers as learners and learners as teachers, contribute to the mix and produce new understandings. The term comes from metallurgy; the crucible is a heat-resistant container in which metals are melted. In the context of teaching and learning, I understand the crucible to be a kind of melting pot that presents a set of circumstances, often dangerous, difficult and exciting, in which people are subjected to forces that test and often transform them. An alchemist might use a crucible to turn base metals into gold; an interesting idea in relation to teaching and learning through drama when the transformations that occur can be extremely valuable. Others have also taken up the notion such as Edmiston who reflects that in the crucible learners, both adults and children, ‘may be transformed, often slowly, but also often radically’ (quoted in Bolton 2003: 155).

I recognised that mixing it up in the crucible was what Bob had been doing with our class all those years ago when he positioned himself as an equal in the planning process, in the teaching at the special school and in the reflection on the process. I understood the risk he took, the trust he invested and the learning that he also derived from the process when he came without answers but rather posed problems for us to collectively resolve. His teaching had been heavily influenced by
Heathcote’s and in turn has influenced mine, characterised by bringing often diverse groups of participants together for drama with the belief that the diversity of participants, and the ideas and perspectives they bring, enriches the work. We can all learn something from each other in the process. It is a belief we share with Greene (1978) when she explains that students ‘are most likely to be stirred to learn when they are challenged by teachers who themselves are learning, who are breaking with what they have too easily taken for granted’ (p.51).

Heathcote has suggested that these kinds of encounters with others, teachers and learners together, may be the only way to learn to teach. As a teacher educator I find it a challenging idea that:

No-one teaches a teacher to teach. Teachers are made in the classroom during confrontations with their classes, and the product they become is a result of their need to survive and the ways they devise to do this. (Heathcote quoted in Johnson & O’Neill 1984:11)

**Mantle of the Expert and the Crucible**

The notion of mixing it up in the crucible is clearly demonstrated in Heathcote’s mantle of the expert approach to teaching. In this approach, she explains, the student is together with the teacher ‘inside the structure, taking an active part in the process’ (Heathcote & Herbert 1985:174). She understood mantle of the expert to be a ‘communication system’ in which ‘the power of communication is invested with the group’. As a system of teaching, mantle of the expert involves a reversal of the usual teacher-student relationship. Heathcote explains that the teacher does not assume the role of the main communicant with his or her expertise dictating the communicative network, rather the teacher relinquishes the role of information provider ‘in favour of becoming a member of the group and sharing in the group construction of knowledge’ (Heathcote & Herbert 1985:174).

Heathcote’s rejection of the empty vessel notion of students resonates with Freire’s criticism of an oppressive ‘banking’ concept of education in which teachers are assumed to hold all knowledge and students are considered as empty receptacles who passively receive this knowledge (Freire 2011:72). In such models, the student’s role is reduced to that of processing and storing information deposited by the teacher. A process that regards students as ‘bank’ or ‘empty vessel’ is a dehumanising process according to Freire. He argues that knowledge ‘emerges only through invention and re-invention, through the restless, impatient, continuing, hopeful inquiry human beings pursue in the world, with the world, and with each other’(p.72). Like Freire, Heathcote is interested in what is produced in the mix of students and teachers working and thinking together. Freire suggests such a process requires a particular kind of educator:

Her efforts must coincide with those of the students to engage in critical thinking and the quest for mutual humanization. His efforts must be imbued with a profound
trust in people and their creative power. To achieve this they must be partners of the
students in relations with them. (p.75)
Learning in Heathcote’s crucible involves trusting the collective creative power of all
involved. This is what Freire calls co-intentional education whereby teachers and
students ‘co-intent on reality, are both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling
that reality, and thereby coming to know it critically, but in the task of re-creating
that knowledge’(2011:69).
In the mantle of the expert approach the teacher endows the students with the
expertise in the field of knowledge being explored; for example school students
accept the invitation to become historians and archaeologists with the task of
recreating a Bronze Age community, thereby achieving significant learning aims
across the curriculum for these students. In this model the teacher takes on a more
flexible enabling role and is open to learning along with the students.
In my earlier example, Bob demonstrated a similar system of teaching with his pre-
service teachers. He let go of the usual lecturer-student relationship by enrolling
student teachers as members of a teaching team charged with the task of
developing drama lessons for students with disabilities. Bob took the role of a fellow
team-member. Our role as teaching colleagues was one that we were already close
to; as students attending teachers’ college we were already beginner teachers.
However, Bob created a frame in which our status was elevated to that of teachers
who already can do and must do, rather than students who do not yet know. This
was not a huge stretch of the imagination. We had not entered an entirely fictional
world as had the school students enrolled as anthropologists re-creating the Bronze
Age. Our task, the teaching that we were planning, was to be actually carried out
with real students and real consequences. While Bob was not engaging his students
in ‘mantle of the expert’ as a system, he was teaching according to the principles
that underpin that system, the principles of Heathcote’s notion of the learning in the
crucible. These two examples of learning within the school and the teachers’ college
share many of the characteristics of mantle of the expert that Heathcote describes.
In both examples the students take on and test out the role of expert, the
teacher/student relationship is laid aside for that of colleagues; their prior
knowledge and experience is validated and their frame of reference enlarged
(Heathcote & Bolton 1995).
I believe that Bob, in setting up this learning experience, was mindful of Heathcote’s
commitment to the democratic teacher-student relationship. He had himself been a
student of Heathcote learning with her in very similar ways. I am interested in
elements of the mantle of the expert approach that lend themselves to the student
teachers’ growing expertise and capacity as drama educators in the special
education context. This is the kind of learning that Heathcote suggests occurs in her
notion of the crucible. There is a shared focus, energy and immediacy for learning
that is generated through this mode. Learning in this way impressed on me so much
that I have attempted to recreate teaching and learning experiences like these
throughout my career.
The Teaching for Diversity Workshop

Thirty years after my workshops with Bob and my first introduction to Dorothy Heathcote I find myself tracking their influences on my work as a drama teacher, teacher educator and director of Fusion Theatre, a community-based theatre company for people of all abilities. I see the workshop as an example of Heathcote’s learning within the crucible – lecturers, student teachers and people with disabilities working together through drama to develop their understandings about inclusive education. The workshop draws upon drama as a teaching and learning methodology in its aim to explore the education experience of students with disabilities and inclusive education.

The Teaching for Diversity workshop is a project that brings together the three fields I work within – drama and theatre education, teacher education and inclusive education. The workshop has been offered every year since 2008 as part of a mandatory unit called Teaching for Diversity for all final year students in Deakin University’s Bachelor of Teaching degree. It has been at the centre of a research project that involved reflection on practice and participatory action research. Each year the participants included five actors with intellectual disabilities from Fusion Theatre, two lecturers and approximately eighty pre-service teachers. Data including still and moving images, written reflections and interviews, were collected over three of these years.

The workshop is part of Deakin University’s response to the increasing movement, in Australia and internationally, towards the inclusion of students with mild to severe disabilities in regular classrooms and the increased need to ensure that pre-service teachers are adequately prepared to teach inclusively. One of the drivers for global movement towards inclusive education was the Salamanca Statement (UNESCO 1994) that proclaimed that ‘regular schools with [an] inclusive orientation are the most effective means of combating discriminatory attitudes, creating welcoming communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all’ (p. ix). Over the last two decades institutions and organisations have had to find ways to accommodate this shift in paradigm and teacher education course accreditation processes have increasingly demanded that courses address inclusive teaching practices.

Studies have shown that becoming a successful inclusive teacher is much less to do with knowledge and strategies than with having the right attitude (for example Forlin 2006; Campbell, Gilmore & Cuskelly 2003). Research has suggested that developing awareness and positive attitudes is achieved through positive personal engagement with people with disabilities. However, providing opportunities for this kind of engagement within the time and resource constraints of university courses presents a challenge. Another challenge is getting the right kind of engagement. In some studies pre-service teachers are given the chance to try out their skills and understandings of inclusive education by ‘buddying’ or mentoring students with...
disabilities or by undertaking observations or teaching practice in inclusive settings, special developmental schools or adult education programs for people with disabilities (Ford, Pugach & Otis-Wilborn 2001; Jobling & Moni 2004). However, all of these examples place the student teachers into the positions of responsibility and the students with disabilities as receivers of support.

Some other models turn the tables and invite people with disabilities to speak to pre-service teachers as guest speakers in lectures or tutorials (Mullen 2001; Van Laarhoven, Munk, Lynch, Bosma & Rouse 2007). However, the Teaching for Diversity workshop is concerned with a different kind of contact from examples found in the research to date. In the Teaching for Diversity workshop, not only are the student teachers and lecturers brought into contact with people with disabilities, but they experience them positioned as experts. They have an opportunity to see them as competent adults, able to make a contribution to society, with important stories to tell about their experiences of education and the ability to take leadership in a drama workshop. The second point of difference is that the encounter is in the context of a drama workshop; an aesthetic and embodied experience that involves people with disabilities, student teachers and their lecturers working creatively together towards shared understandings.

**The Workshop as Crucible**

As I have mentioned earlier, I see the teaching and learning crucible as a set of circumstances in which participants, teacher and learners are subjected to forces that test them and often transform them. I have previously referred to the workshop as a disruptive space (Raphael 2013) with elements that can be discomforting for all who come together as both learners and teachers but particularly for the student teacher participants who experience the ‘heat’ of the crucible. There are many reasons for this discomfort and these can be considered under three areas: the strangeness of the space (an open studio space rather than the usual tutorial room); the method (a drama workshop); and the unusual assemblage of people who are brought together to encounter each other in unfamiliar relationships and in extraordinary ways. I consider this discomfort to be a critical element in the learning process signifying the triggering of a series of affects. Such disruption can lead to learning and has been variously referred to as a ‘disorienting dilemma’ (Mezirow 2000), a ‘pedagogy of discomfort’ (Boler & Zembylas 2003), or a ‘shock to thought’ (Massumi 2002; Thompson 2009).

Research has revealed that student teachers are often subject to socially pervasive views and lived experiences in less successfully inclusive settings (Lambe & Bones 2006). For many student teachers, learning to value inclusive education requires the disruption of years of reductionist and positivist indoctrination that has led to the formation of limited clinical views. It is important that students confront unexamined attitudes, assumptions and narrow constructions of disability because student teachers are all too ready to read disability as ‘tragedy, sadness and anger’
(Ware 2008:578). What is needed are pedagogies that provoke and trigger a shock to new thought and disrupt such hegemonic views of disability.

The notion of the workshop as crucible also provides modelling of the kind of collaborative practice that is so important in inclusive education which requires, seeks and values the contributions of educational professionals, families and students with disabilities. Teachers must come with a readiness to listen and learn from students who they recognise may well have ideas about how they learn best and strategies that help them to learn.

**People with disabilities as experts**

People with intellectual disabilities are not accustomed to being positioned as experts. Their disability, if discussed at all, can be most often talked about as a limiting factor in their life, not an enabling factor or something to be celebrated. However, people with disabilities can indeed be experts in areas of their interest and experience and are undoubtedly expert in the lived experience of disability. As such, they have an important role to play in the education of society if that society is to be fully inclusive. Significantly for the Teaching for Diversity workshop, the Fusion Theatre workshop leaders have firsthand experience of what it is like to be a student with a disability and they know what helps them to learn. As the majority of the Fusion Theatre members have been involved in the company for more than ten years, they are also relatively expert in drama and theatre compared the majority of student teachers.

The first publicly presented diversity workshop was presented at the 2007 IDEA conference in Hong Kong. In preparation for our conference presentation we rehearsed the workshop by testing it out on family and friends. We built a sense of a professional team by wearing company T-shirts. When we arrived at the conference we were presented with the accoutrements of conference delegates – satchels, lanyards and programs. This helped as a kind of double framing (Bolton 1997); already in the role of conference delegate, there is a smaller imaginative step to be taken to become conference presenter. Despite this preparation, as the conference got underway we sensed a growing nervousness amongst the actors about presenting the workshop. By this stage we had attended keynotes and participated in many workshops. The Fusion Theatre actors knew that they were in the presence of some eminent drama practitioners, and felt, relatively, they were not so expert in drama. We held a discussion to remind them of the unique perspective they brought as presenters of a workshop focused on inclusive drama practices. We said to them, ‘You have something unique to offer, you have something that no other presenter at this conference has. Do you know what that is?’ There was a silence. Then Vicki had an idea, ‘I know’ she said, ‘we’ve got T-shirts’. This was not the answer we were expecting and it became clear that it was necessary to build appreciation for the experience they had to offer as people with disabilities and as experts in their own disability. As Heathcote suggests, the mantle of the expert is not something that is
simply given but must grow from within (Heathcote & Bolton 1995; Aitken 2013). Their concerns about the limitations of their knowledge were debilitating. What was required, as with mantle of the expert, was a kind of ‘protection into experience’ and we realised it was necessary to provide opportunities for them to test out and grow in the role of expert.

From the tentative beginnings at the IDEA congress the team developed what became known as the Teaching for Diversity workshop for pre-service teachers. We began the workshop with each of the actors leading the participants through a stretching exercise for which each gave an explanation of their understanding of the purpose of the stretch. This immediately positioned each actor as a leader and gave them a chance to experience the powerful effect of which they are capable, when their simple stretch is amplified as the entire group follows that movement in synchronicity.

Working together with me, the Fusion Theatre members led the pre-service teachers through some additional warm-up activities designed to focus and build trust, these included variations of mirror exercises and the team provided a meta-commentary on how the theatre company chooses and adapts activities that facilitate the creative contributions of participants of diverse abilities. They worked alongside me to introduce group problem solving activities, designed to encourage thinking about notions of inclusion and exclusion, such as freeze-frames and group sculptures that involved the pre-service teachers, university lecturers and actors working together.

Significantly, in the middle of the workshop, after some initial fears and barriers had been broken down, each of the actors spoke a little about their education experience to what was invariably an audience of deep and attentive listening followed by some thoughtful questions and discussion. Returning to drama and fiction, participants worked in groups to create and present short improvised scenes based on what they identified as obstacles to inclusion in education settings. The Fusion leaders worked within these groups as actors, they took on the consultant role (able to advise both on the form and content of the scenes) and made valuable contributions in the analysis and reflection that followed. Strategies adapted from Forum Theatre (Boal 1995) were used to probe further into the thoughts of characters in the scenes and to explore alternative approaches that teachers can take to ensure their teaching is more inclusive. Using a case study in one of the unit readings as a basis, the thought tunnel strategy was employed to encourage participants to consider the range of responses the teacher in the case study may have about inclusive education. Finally the pre-service teachers were invited to draw on their understandings from readings and the workshop experiences to imagine the advice they could offer to the teacher in the case study. In effect, this activity served as a summary of what they themselves could do as soon to be teachers.
**Expert in the ante-chamber: a different take on mantle of the expert**

While I recognise the Fusion actors’ developing sense of themselves as experts has something to do with mantle of the expert, I am at the same time acutely aware of how the approach is increasingly described as a ‘system’ (Bolton 1997; Abbott 2013) with clear ideas expressed in the literature about what is and what isn’t mantle of the expert (Bolton & Heathcote 1995). I am aware that the context in which I am applying these ideas is very different from that which is usually described; mostly examples related to children working in a fictional context. There is defining terminology; as experts they undertake an ‘enterprise’, working on a ‘commission’ provided by a ‘client’.

The Diversity Workshop can also be understood as an enterprise, although not a fictional one, undertaken by Fusion Theatre actors (experts) commissioned by the university for pre-service teachers. The actors are not children but adults with valuable knowledge to pass on the pre-service teachers. However, although they already hold valuable knowledge, they were not immediately able to take on the expert role.

During one of my PhD supervision meetings with my supervisor John O’Toole (such meetings being another kind of crucible where we mix it up and see what we can learn together), I mentioned to John that the theatre company actors’ experiences in drama and theatre and their familiarity with taking on roles as part of the drama process was likely to have prepared them for taking on the role of the expert presenter in the drama workshop. After some discussion John coined the term ‘expert in the antechamber’ to describe the developing real-life expert through the drama (O’Toole 2011). We agreed that working in drama provides a space of preparation. The actors with disabilities are trying out the roles of expert in the safe space of the antechamber – the small space that leads into the larger room. In this safe space there is a chance to play at the edge of the blurry line between ‘acting expert’ and ‘actually expert’.

I turn my attention now to describing the ways that the actors with disabilities from Fusion Theatre have attained the capacity to be paid as expert presenters leading student teachers and lecturers. I argue that the drama and theatre medium allows a safe space to explore the necessary change in attitude and stance to facilitate their ability to take on the role of the expert. While the drama-based workshop is not fiction, it includes moments of fiction. Although this is not ‘mantle of the expert’ as it is presented as a system, it shares many of the characteristics that Heathcote & Bolton (1995) ascribe to the approach:

- The actors take on and test out the role of expert
- They require protection into experience of the role
They draw upon latent knowledge
The teacher/student or in this case director/participant relationship is laid aside for that of colleagues
They grow into their roles and experience an increase in both identity and capacity.
They inhabit their role with increasing conviction, complexity and truth.
Their prior knowledge and experience is validated and their frame of reference enlarged.
(Heathcote & Bolton 1995)

One moment that shows the blurry line between acting expert and actually expert involved Jean-Marie, who had taken on the responsibility of introducing an activity in the workshop. To begin she needed to organise the participants in rows along one wall. Rather than politely guide them to move as she had on other occasions when leading this activity, she surprised us all by taking on an unusually authoritarian tone acting something like a drill-sergeant. She was ordering everyone to line up, chastising those not quick enough or in the wrong place and she was saying things like ‘You! Get over there! Now!’ Jean-Marie was smiling between issuing her orders and I could tell that she was enjoying playing with the power of the role. Those of us who knew Jean-Marie knew that this was typical of her sense of humour but I wondered what the workshop participants would make of this sudden change in register. To my relief they were attuned enough to what was going on to laugh with her as they rushed around responding to her orders. While at first Jean-Marie’s choice of tone seemed inappropriate, and in danger of breaking the contract of trust built between workshop leader and participant, it occurred to me that this was a sign that she was ‘relaxed’ enough in her role as leader in the workshop to play with it a little and confident that the participants would play along with her. This was an example of Jean-Marie, as expert in the antechamber, experimenting with and testing out being the expert presenter through playing dramatically with the role. The antechamber is a place of metaxis where reality mixes with the fiction of drama.

Implicit in this contract is that the university educated teachers-to-be and lecturers adopt, in relation to people with intellectual disabilities, a role of submission or deference. In order to be open to learning from people with disabilities they have to relinquish any ableist views or any sense that they must know better being the educated teaching professionals. There is, it seems, a place for a ‘mantle of the non-expert’ in this approach to learning.

The second example of blurry line between acting expert and actually expert is one that typically occurred in relation to the short scenes prepared by groups in the workshop to show obstacles to inclusion in an education context. In one fictional scene a teacher was asking students to spell words out loud. One student, understood by the audience to have a learning disability, attempted to spell a simple word and made a mistake. This caused the teacher and students to laugh out loud and emboldened one student to throw a paper missile. From the audience, Alex, one
of the actors with a disability, called out ‘I know that, I’ve been there’. In the
discussion that followed the scene the audience was invited to ask questions of the
characters. Alex was the first to jump in: ‘I would like to ask the teacher some
questions’; he stood up adopting an accusatory stance. There was theatrical air in his
intervention, the context of performance gave him a platform from which to speak;
Alex was playing himself and he had an attentive audience. ‘Why did you laugh at
that poor kid?’ he demanded prompting subdued laughter from the audience who
were likely wondering the same thing. The student, in role as teacher, responded,
‘Everyone in my class should be able to spell that easy word.’ There was laughter at
the teacher’s arrogance. Alex rolled his eyes,

‘What would you have done if one of the other students had made a mistake
on a more difficult word?’ he pressed.
‘I probably would have given them another chance.’
‘Then why didn’t you give that poor kid a chance?’

It seems in this short scene Alex may have outwitted the teacher and there was
laughter again.

The audience responded with sounds of appreciation to real-life Alex challenging the
fictional teacher – a pre-service teacher in role as actual teacher. We were pleasantly
surprised at the incongruous situation; that of a person with a disability challenging
the inclusive teaching practices of a teacher. Alex was using his expertise and
firsthand experience of exclusion in schools to challenge the teacher and to educate
us all. Several students mentioned the poignancy of this moment in their written
reflection including one student who wrote that they had been particularly surprised
and amused by ‘Alex questioning the teacher character and putting her in her place’.
The situation, although unlikely to occur in real life, is a revolution to behold. It
prompts the question: what would students with disabilities like to say to their
teachers if they were given the chance? It invites us to imagine a world in which
students can challenge the way teachers teach. The opportunity to question the role
of teacher also seemed to give Alex tremendous satisfaction as he became the
interrogator able speak up on behalf of the student in a fictitious scene; one that
seemed to him to be authentic based on his own personal experiences.

I reflected at the time that there was also another layer, that of Alex growing into
the role of ‘drama teacher’. Alex had spontaneously done the thing that I sometimes
did as the facilitator (questioning the role, asking for hidden thoughts) although he
did so in the safety of the role of indignant onlooker (himself in role). His authority
and indignation in questioning the teacher role came from his experience as a
person with a disability who knows what it feels like to be excluded in educational
contexts. In the drama he can be the education consultant but in his regular life
would hitherto rarely have had the opportunity to voice such an opinion.
A mantle to keep

The drama workshop is a space for trying out other ways of being. It is an unusual position for a person with an intellectual disability to be in charge of others. This capacity to lead has been cultivated in the antechamber of drama and it spills over into other aspects of their lives – as representatives of the company, as committee members, co-researchers and so on. It is not a ‘mantle’ that is only given for the duration of the drama workshop. It is a mantle that has become theirs to keep; they have learnt something indelible through the process. This is evident through the changed status they perceive in themselves. Jean-Marie describes the important work she feels she is able to do:

We help the student teachers grow. We do the workshop to help them with their career. When they come across other people with differences they see them as not just disabled but in a positive way.

Andrew explains his sense of satisfaction in his development from actor to teacher:

When I came to drama I did drama, I learned how to act and that, but now, with this, we are not just doing drama we’re helping people understand disability and that is something that I didn’t think I could ever do, ever have the courage to do, to actually get up there and teach or show people, especially fourth year students who are teachers, you know, how to deal with disability and there wouldn’t be very many disabled people in the world who would actually do that so it is a real achievement for me.

Alex considers that their expertise is such that it ought to be applied in other contexts:

I reckon it would be interesting to do the workshop for lecturers or doctors and other professions. We could show them too.

Preparing the pre-service teachers to be inclusive educators is enhanced by a pedagogy that brings people with disabilities together with non-disabled in ways that do not position people with disabilities as needy and powerless and the non-disabled as dominant authorities. This is a necessary kind of pedagogy that positions people with disabilities as capable, competent and confident. Following the workshop many of the pre-service teachers wrote comments that reflected that they saw people with disabilities as capable and confident as in these two examples:

The Fusion team demonstrated just how capable they are! I learned how assumptions could affect my initial understanding – they were the ones who directed the workshops and without hesitation or problem.
The confidence of the participants from Fusion was fantastic and their ability to speak of their past educational experiences was great. They were all able to articulate what they would like to have experienced and gave good advice to us as pre-service teachers.

Through experiencing people with disabilities as leaders and experts, the pre-service teachers are able to understand the potential and capacity of students with disabilities that they may teach, and to shift their focus to what these students can achieve and can do rather than maintain a limited focus on what they can’t do.

Conclusion

I began this paper by tracing a line back from the Teaching for Diversity workshop back to my work with Bob Holden and his work with Dorothy Heathcote. Heathcote’s notion of learning in the crucible includes her philosophy of empowering students as expert and her commitment to the idea of the teacher and student sharing the power and learning together. It is also her understanding of the ways that participants, when positioned as experts, draw on reserves of latent knowledge bringing to the fore the things they know, but do not necessarily know they know. It strikes me that this is at the core of the teaching practices described in this paper — bringing together a mix of people who have something to teach and something to learn from each other. The heated conditions implied by the notion of the crucible suggest that this is not always a comfortable space, rigid ideas might have to melt away, and a transformation is likely to occur.

Mantle of the expert was developed by Heathcote and others over time and yet is increasingly presented as a system with guidelines and core elements delivered with warnings about what is and what is not ‘Mantle of the Expert’. Such guidelines are useful for properly inducting teachers into the approach and ensuring that teachers with some experience can continue to develop their use of the approach effectively with school-aged students for whom it is predominantly designed. However, when presenting the system, it is important that other ideas and applications of mantle of the expert within other contexts are not stifled or overlooked. Consideration of both Heathcote’s notion of the crucible of teaching and learning and mantle of the expert have allowed me to understand the part that drama plays in the preparation of people with disabilities to become effective leaders in the preparation of pre-service teachers to be inclusive educators. If we understand the approach that is increasingly defined as mantle of the expert as an open rather than a closed system, we might see other spaces where the principles of the approach can be applied in surprising and productive ways.

Dorothy Heathcote was always discovering new aspects of mantle of the expert right until the end of her life (Aitken 2013). Openness to possibilities is a key feature of teaching and learning in the crucible. Heathcote’s definition suggests the exciting prospect that something new, interesting and useful is likely to come out of the mix:
‘You and I, we’ll stir it up and find out what’s useful, what you already know and what we can learn together.’

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References


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