

The Seven Point Planning-Task Grid

by Luke Abbott

As a result of the 'Dorothy Heathcote Now' conference in Birmingham 2021, I have had several requests to detail the constructs I covered in both the keynote address and the workshops I ran over the weekend.

This short article attempts to define the detailed infrastructure of a Heathcote Archived tool, concerning a unique microplanning matrix especially pertinent to MoE practitioners, but of course to any users of the four pillars, explored over the conference [Drama, Mantle, Rolling Role, Commission Model]. A description of the grid and lineage, as well as exemplars from the author's teaching plans from Reception upwards, are included for practitioners. Matters of significant interest to MoE community members are included, such as the task's metaphoric landscape reach, and the task as minute detailing. The complexity is further deepened by the positioning of learners who, themselves, may dictate micro task inventions, as they too grapple with the concerns of the fictional context under scrutiny, in a manner associated with "convivial" learning.

Introduction

The 7-point planning task grid acts as a micro planning tool, associated mostly in relation to *Mantle of the Expert* models. I am of the opinion that understanding this tool through practical applications, is now an urgent matter for those of us using the drama form. I believe that to move onto ever deeper and more advanced practices, we are in need of examining in detail the 7 point task-grid, as the significant implications to practices in drama and theatre form in learning begin to be revealed. However, even as we do so, associated pedagogic matters are now emerging in attempts to clarify the model. These are currently being encountered as deeply problematic by many practitioners, both novice and advanced, in the MoE community of practice. But, as in any pursuit of excellence, the stony ground has to be walked on, in order to discover the new methods of traversing.

During my long association with Dr Heathcote (along with many others of course), it became very clear, when she deployed MoE, that the emphasis in planning was on the construction of 'tasks' needing to be completed, throughout any structure fashioned to deploy the elements of MoE. Heathcote constantly kept emphasizing that in MoE the process was TASK LED.

For those of us who are hunting down the methodology detailed in the invention known as Mantle of the Expert, attention to the details of the emergent understanding by advanced practitioners is beginning to reveal a number of hitherto unknown factors in sharpening the impacts on learning, leading to significantly deeper engagements and emotional investment by participants/learners. Thus the 9 Aspects of Great Pedagogy (NCSL 2018) embedded in the 7-step matrix, now becomes available to more and more colleagues involved in radical pedagogy.

This paper therefore serves as a signpost to current drama and theatre form practices within the applications of the Mantle of the Expert method, attempting to place new understandings for analysis, review and applications in the hands of interested practitioners.

A close study of this matter is long overdue, as the planning grid has outwitted (though NOT confused) many practitioners in the field for many years, especially since the death of the inventor in 2011, where the key reference source expired. Our researches have, then, had to use the published examples by Heathcote, as well as applications by members of the MoE community. For reference, her published account of her work in Turkey, in the book *Drama to Inspire* (ed. John Coventon), bears testament to the prodigious skill and searing intellect at work in her application of the grid.

The 7 sectioned grids

TASK	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE	DEMANDS	DEVICES	RESOURCES	OUTCOMES
Task 1:						

For many of us in the field, the deployment of this tool has proved too demanding. However, several colleagues in the MoE Training Schools (Woodrow First School, for example) have made significant progress, drilling down into the implications regarding planning and practices in deployment of MoE. One article written by Lisa Hinton - ***The Pilot*** (available on mantleoftheexpert.com site) - is a huge step into the application of the grids in practice.

In the following section, I will attempt to use a simple set of contexts to describe the precision needed, and the holding of ***implication*** in the living make-believe context under scrutiny, when applying the 7-point model.

Example 1: Working with early years children on Giants in fiction.

The Context

The play for the class (Bolton 1979): we are a group of Reception children in the south of Essex, who have been investigating the story of Jack and the Beanstalk with our teachers, under the banner for the term of ‘Well known stories’.

We have begun to ask a range of questions concerning the Giants and their views of humans, given that they seem to be different from us. Today, the teacher has agreed to use the teacher in- and out-of-role device, as well as the full-role projection, to provide *the mother of the Giant*, who seems to be very worried about him, as he has not been seen for a long time, even though she has rung the doorbell of his castle lots of times. She has even

tried to look through the letter box! She can't get in through the letter box as she is too big.....but she says we could get through, as we are smaller than her.....This could be very dangerous if we went in, though, as we don't know what's up with the Giant - he may even be dead, or he could be waiting for us to get in, and then goodness knows what will happen.....

The play for the teacher (op cit): We are attempting to move into an MoE structure whereby the class might end up as Giant Social Workers..... eventually.

The class have become obsessed with the Jack and the Beanstalk story, and it has gripped them for the past 3 weeks. Lots of our play and activities have been about the interests the class have brought to the story, and they have asked lots of questions which we are attempting to tackle together. One was whether the Giant kind have mothers and fathers. In the dialogues, we said we were not sure, but we could find out by starting our next day's learning by meeting the Giant's mum in the story. The last words I spoke to the class before leaving were, that I would find out if there was such a thing as a Giant mother, and contact one for our story if there was. I used the device of a projected phone call to an imaginary Information Service. As I spoke out loud, as if I was indeed asking the question into an imaginary phone receiver, the class observed my progress in silent expectation, some even shushing their talkative friends so they could hear better.

Luckily for us, the Information Service gave a positive reply. Yes, they said, it so happened that there were such things as Giant mothers and fathers. I then informed the class that one such person, a mother, was ready to be summoned to attend our story as the Information Service said that one Giant was in a bit of trouble. The class were enormously excited.

The next day as we got our coats off in the morning, the class brought up the phone call and pressed me a lot, wanting to know if the Giant mother was arriving, and when.

Unbeknown to the class, the adults who were leading this learning had a plan. Between the last afternoon's session and our next morning one, we invented a very tight opening gambit we thought would work. We knew the class were getting excited, so we had to come up with a specifically thought out set of tasks for the class to tackle and in great detail. If you are reading this with the thinking that the class were going to be directed to 'do things' as in the orthodox 'teacher talk' mode and so on, we deliberately worked against the deployment of such strategies and replaced these with a dialogistic set of speech that demanded the class made verbal contacts with us..... but - and most importantly - we didn't seek permissions either. It went something like this.....

Adult: 'Today we have the chance to meet the mum of the Giant in our story as we agreed yesterday. To do this, we will have to see if we can all agree that Mrs. Perkins (class Teacher) will represent the mum, and that we can have a good look at her before she starts off talking.... Can we do that, do you think?'

Girl: 'But she's not really going to be a Giant (giggling) that would be silly.....'

Class: They all get the giggles....

Adult: Well of course you are right (mirrors class giggles)... It's just that, if we want to get into our story, we have to agree that it's not Mrs. Perkins for a minute. it's our mum Giant!

That's all we have to do, I suppose..... Maybe if she wore something else when she's in the story.....'

Looks around and eyes rest on the box, now in a more prominent position..... Class read eye clue.....

Class: We could use the dressing up box/she could wear a crown/we could cover her face/ or the wig/she needs the golden gloves..... etc etc.

Adult: Right, I see, so if she wears something from the box, we know she's in the story and not Mrs. Perkins?

Class agrees.....so we select some items (not the wig as teacher fears nits!)

In effect, in the dialogues, we achieved our first task by what looks like an accident. The task we planned is as follows.

Task 1: (to achieve, or the medium-term task, or the target we are trying to hit, etc.)

To agree with the class that the story-form mother of a Giant could come into our story, for further inquiry about parenting one. *The implication here was that, even with parenting, Giants apparently do like to eat children - so someone/something must have taught him it was ok to do it.....*

Activity:

Teacher and class together, dress Mrs. Perkins as if she represents a giant's mother from a selection of clothing in a large wooden box.

Purpose:

For the class to create and agree a fictional Giant's mother together, without fear, and create a role projection, in order to find out what's up with mum, and what's happening in the land of Giants....

The question is, what this little plan will do in the hands of professional teachers, in the demands it places on the class – if, indeed, they agree to take up such a task.....

Demands on learners:

Firstly, the class will have to foresee the experience in their heads for the moments to come, so there is a demand on the projective imagination in the children's psyche for a start
Then, there is the demand on the use and extension of class levels of language, as well as their states of readiness in interpretation, as well as reading the signs that something and someone can stand as something and someone else.

Then, of course, the shift of the known adult from one they are already aware of, to one that will be different, as the task indicates a change from the normal. Especially if they agree! So, the demands on risk-taking are evident here too.

Devices:

(Here lies the skill set of those who have achieved some mastery of pedagogy, melded with drama techniques applied to learning.)

In this particular example, I will just list the ones we used as a small, tight learning team.

- We used a language code that mixed in-fictional mode and out-of-fictional mode. For example:-
Adult: 'I was just thinking, when we get to Giant land, I'm going to ask his mum what it's like there.....and I'm going to have a good look at the things that are growing on the ground...' This is known as Twilight Role or Shadowy Role.
- We used the box, and placed it prominently in a way that cast the possibility of: *something different will happen today* maybe.....
- We set up a precedent of 'contracting' together, or, in other words, we made agreements as in the above set of dialogues.

Resources

Rather than define in detail the resources we needed, I'll leave the images in your head to fill in..... They are, of course, the obvious ones, such as the box, the teacher devices to go into a full role, and so on. Other resources we wanted were at a later stage. For example, some time in the future of the investigation, we had in our heads that the class would make a castle out of found materials, and a map of where the mum lived, and the one her son lived in, which were accessible....

Outcomes:

As it happened, we achieved the outcomes we expected, in that the class agreed, and conversed with the Giant's mum. But, as we used the CoDA codex (Role seen in the making, objects of significance of the role, role activated to speak only, role activated to hear only), we made a series of discoveries in the dialogues.

One was, that Giants live to a great age. They seem to prefer and like living by themselves, which we thought, when we had a moment, to mean that if they do. they may not be able to ask for help easily..... This was an example of foreseeing the implications, and some would say, perhaps, a matter of reading the future.

In the context above with very young children, the means of sequencing experiences into the context are many, depending on the teacher's skill set.

References:

Gavin Bolton (1979): *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education* (Harlow: Longman)
Coventon, John (ed.) (2011): *Drama to Inspire: A London Drama Guide to Excellent Practice in Drama for Young People* (Stoke-on-Trent: Trentham Books)