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BOOK REVIEW

Tim Taylor

A beginner's guide to Mantle of the Expert: A transformative approach to education.

Norwich, United Kingdom: Singular, 2016. 253 pp. ISBN 978-0-9935572-00

UK RRP £21.50 plus P&P, Limited copies NZ \$55

The teacher begins ... 'Imagine you are' (p. 11).

With these two lines Taylor sets the tone for *A beginner's guide to Mantle of the Expert*. It situates the audience's—teachers, and the currency of instruction—imagination. It draws the reader into classrooms where play is welcomed and students and teachers imagine and learn together. It provides a concise yet readable account of the dramatic inquiry approach known as Mantle of the Expert (Heathcote, 1995) and guidance on how to use it.

Tim Taylor's warrant for this book is drawn from his classroom experience of using the approach; interactions with Dorothy Heathcote, Luke Abbott, Brian Edmiston, and other experts in the field; time involved in researching the approach, and as a consultant teacher educator and visiting lecturer at Newcastle University.

A beginners guide to Mantle of the Expert is Taylor's first book. It adds to the literature describing the Mantle of the Expert approach from a teacher's perspective. It is not research based but pertinent literature is drawn upon and acknowledged. It is important because it distils a complex pedagogical approach down to its essential elements and provides guidance on how to successfully incorporate the pedagogy into practice. While the main audience for this book is the "ordinary teacher" who wants to know more about Mantle of the Expert (p. 17), it also provides extension for more expert practitioners, and academics wanting to deepen their understanding of the pedagogy.

The book consists of a foreword, an introduction, two main sections, the appendices, and acknowledgments. In Part One, the structure of Mantle of the Expert is explained, while Part Two outlines how the approach can be used in the classroom. The tables, figures and diagrams are clear and support the narrative but could have benefited from precise numbering. In the notes section, Taylor highlights the literature he has drawn on, acknowledges other people's influences, adds supplementary notes and directs the reader to other resources. It does not have a standalone bibliography, or index. His acknowledgments section is extensive.

Luke Abbott, a long-term colleague of Tim Taylor and Dorothy Heathcote, lauds the book as important in the foreword. He claims the author has defined Mantle of the Expert clearly, and provided a pathway and planning resources that teachers can follow.

In the introduction Taylor invites the reader to learn through Mantle of the Expert, which he describes as using "drama and inquiry to create imaginary contexts for learning" (p. 13). He introduces the reader to the progenitor of Mantle of the Expert—the late Professor Dorothy Heathcote. He outlines his authority to write about Mantle of the Expert, and why he thinks it is needed.

Part One outlines the theoretical underpinnings of Mantle of the Expert. Taylor divides the elements into *Foundational Elements*—fictional context, narrative, and inquiry (Chapter 2); *Core Elements*—expert team, client and commission (Chapter 3); and *Drama Elements*—tension, different points of view and drama strategies and conventions (Chapter 4). While the core elements of expert team, client, and commission are the same as other theorists (see for example, Aitken, 2013; Heathcote, 2009), he differs in how he structures the rest of the components. This variance, like Heathcote, he attributes to the evolving nature of the approach (p. 34). This is an area that will be the subject of much debate, as theorists endeavour to bring clarity to the approach.

In Part Two the tone of the book becomes more practical, describing how the process works through multiple examples. Taylor sets the scene by talking about the use of imaginary contexts for learning

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(Chapter 5). He then shows the planning process (Chapter 6) and outlines step-by-step how to build belief and take the students into an actual Mantle of the Expert drama (Chapter 7). Chapter 8 discusses some of the issues that teachers (and principals) must consider when contemplating a new pedagogical approach, such as behavioural management. It also provides extension for the more experienced practitioner, drawing on other strategies that Heathcote used in teaching to deepen learning.

The appendices contain useful resources for planning and teaching in Mantle of the Expert. They include: Mantle of the Expert unit plans, Dorothy Heathcote's conventions list, a planning booklet and a resource booklet.

A strength of the book is the strong examples from practice. While the word 'transformative' is used in the title, Taylor does not suggest that Mantle of the Expert is a panacea for all that is wrong in education. His book is measured, acknowledging the complexity of the approach, but also the benefits. He honestly describes his challenges and identifies pitfalls for the new player. It advises that one should start small and gradually build up experience in the approach.

This book could have been strengthened by including other voices. Taylor says his book was built upon his involvement in the Innovation Unit Project on teaching Mantle of the Expert and subsequent projects and through analysing the approach with the teachers and other experts over the years (pp. 16–17). It would have raised the criticality of the book to include the voices of other teachers, or more importantly, student voice. Another weakness is that it does not provide an index of where the main ideas are situated in the text.

In closing, Taylor has provided a valuable resource that meets the needs of the target audience—classroom teachers. He also has provided a reference book for the academic reader that solidly examines the components of the approach and synthesises the literature and practical knowledge cohesively.

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