The ‘authentic teacher’: Heathcote’s notion of ‘authenticity’ in second language teaching and learning

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Abstract

In this paper I draw on Heathcote’s notion of the authentic teacher as a framework to analyse a reflective practitioner research on process drama for second language teaching and learning. I introduce Heathcote’s (1984) notion of ‘authenticity’ and ‘the authentic teacher and analyse the elements that Heathcote identified as essential for authentic teaching’. I situate these elements within other notions of ‘authenticity’ in the literature, and I use Heathcote’s framework for authentic teaching to make sense of my reflective practice. I highlight how, while facilitating the drama, I engaged in different kinds of reflection-in-action, both at an intra-episode and inter-episode level. I conclude by pointing to reflective practice as a form of authenticity-in-process.

Key words: Heathcote; authenticity; authentic teacher; drama; Second Language; reflection-in-action; inter-episode; intra-episode
Introduction

Authenticity as ‘process Dorothy Heathcote will always be remembered as a charismatic educator who has inspired the drama education community in a variety of ways. In this paper, I focus on one Heathcotian concept, authenticity in teaching. I draw primarily on Heathcote’s essay The Authentic Teacher and the Future, originally written in 1971, and subsequently published in Johnson and O’Neill’s (1984) publication. In her essay on authenticity, Heathcote comes to the realisation that what she had previously referred to as ‘excellence’ in teaching could be re-framed as ‘authenticity’ in teaching. She reveals having contemplated the idea of authenticity in teaching for a long time: ‘[Authenticity is] a notion I only recently perceived, but now realize that I’ve been dealing with it for a long time – possibly all my teaching life – without being able to grasp hold of it’ (1984: 173). This suggests that ‘authenticity’ is a notion that Heathcote valued, making it worthwhile to explore it further. So what is Heathcote’s concept of authenticity, and how does that relate to drama educators several decades later? In the rest of this paper I attempt to address these questions: first, I explore Heathcote’s notion of authenticity in teaching; next, I situate the notion of authenticity within the context of my research, drama-based pedagogy for second language learning, and I analyse some reflective data. Finally, I point to reflective practice itself as a form of authenticity-in-process.

Authenticity as ‘process-orientation’

Heathcote stresses that first and foremost a teacher needs to pause and question whether she/he wants to be an authentic teacher. In other words, she considers intrinsic motivation as a primary factor underlying authenticity in teacher education. Heathcote does not subscribe to the view that teaching skills are related to personality traits. She refers to those statements that define authenticity as ‘something extra good that teachers have’ as a kind of ‘mythology’. On the contrary, she believes that what is important is for teachers to have a ‘sharply honed range of skills’ (1984: 179), through which they can allow their personal styles to create authentic environments. She believes teachers should honour their personality, and, at the same time, build an ‘internal structure’ that they can rely on when working in the educational environment. She calls this internal structure a system of approaching work other than the transmission model. She defines this system as ‘process-orientation’, that is, ‘devising programmes and tasks which induct through first intriguing, then engaging and interesting our pupils’ (1984: 179). She proceeds to illustrate some strategies related to process-orientation. These include:

a. Learning to frame problems differently to our students;
b. Creating more subtle forms of communication;
c. Encouraging student interaction and promoting decision-making processes;
d. Giving more freedom to students, enabling them to discover alternative ways of tackling situations;
e. Imagining and converting into action a wider range of tasks;
f. Engineering a wider variety of feedback strategies;
By analysing these strategies in the drama education classroom, some underpinning elements emerge: first, Heathcote’s artistry appears to be devoted to managing the elements of drama, like focus and language, in point (a), role and dramatic tension; in point (g), space, movement, symbol; in point (i), time and tempo. Second, Heathcote is committed to fostering dialogic communication (c), promoting learners’ agency (d), operating through reflection-in-action (e), constructive feedback design (f); relinquishing control (h). Finally, she points out that these factors need to be carried out while being committed to one’s best practice (j).

Table 1. An analysis of Heathcote’s ‘process-orientation’ (1984: 179) and the concepts underpinning it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategies for process-orientation</th>
<th>Underpinning Concept</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Learning to frame problems differently to our students</td>
<td>Focus; language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creating more subtle forms of communication</td>
<td>Role; dramatic tension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encouraging student interaction and promoting decision-making processes</td>
<td>Dialogic communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Giving more freedom to students, enabling them to discover alternative ways of tackling situations</td>
<td>Agency; self-regulation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imagining and converting into action a wider range of tasks</td>
<td>Reflection-in-action</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineering a wider variety of feedback strategies</td>
<td>Constructive Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daring to take more risks with the resources</td>
<td>Space; movement; symbol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerating more ambiguity in the classroom</td>
<td>Relinquishing control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structuring time differently, not necessarily in chronological sequence</td>
<td>Time and Tempo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constant attention to detail</td>
<td>Complete dedication to the work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Table 1 I have summarised these concepts. In the left column, I have outlined Heathcote’s strategies to create process-orientation systems; in the right column, I have annotated the concepts that I see as underpinning these strategies.

**Factors related to ‘authentic climates’**

At the onset of her discussion on authenticity, Heathcote identifies a number of factors she sees as essential to create ‘authentic’ classroom climates:
1. Seeing students as they really are demonstrating themselves to be.
2. Being interested in students as they represent themselves to be.
3. Having a personal ‘something’, a philosophy, a belief, a creed, whatever you call it, to stand for, from within yourself or derived from the establishment you relate with.
4. Defining tasks in a realistic manner and setting about their accomplishment from within the realities of the situation: working conditions, pupil attitudes, time, numbers, standards and forms of achievement demanded by the task.
5. Open-ness to others’ ideas, ways of working, possibilities for improvement, change, re-orientation and preparedness therefore to take considered risks.
6. Sharing of informational strategies and knowledge, trusting people’s capacity to grow in response.
7. Realization and recognition that because one feels to be acting with authenticity, it does not mean that others perceive it as such whether they are participating or observing. Any teacher who has taught in front of others knows this one! (1984: 175-176, original emphasis).

The last point in particular becomes paramount in second/additional (L2/AL) language teaching, where the teacher is using a language that is foreign to the learners – a language that may be perceived and experienced as ‘unauthentic’, unless its use is authenticated by the learners.

**Authenticity in the Second/Additional language classroom**

In second language pedagogy, the concept of authenticity dates back to the late 70s, when Widdowson (1979) introduced the notion of ‘genuine’ and ‘authentic’ language use. Since then, it is now a truism to refer to authentic material as resources written for and by native speakers; however, in Widdowson’s original view, authenticity was the response to a material, rather than a quality of it. Authenticity is framed as ‘a characteristic of the relationship between the passage and the reader and it has to do with appropriate response’ (1979: 80). Widdowson argued that ‘genuine’ texts must be authenticated by the learners.

Van Lier sees authenticity as the result of ‘acts of authentication’ by students and their teacher, the learning process and the language used in it (1996: 128). His notion of authenticity refers to a personal process of engagement in the learning situations – how teachers and learners respond to each other, to the material, and to the context in which they operate. He believes that in a L2 classroom environment, each learner, individually and in negotiation with one another, authenticates the setting and the actions in it; ‘when such authentication occurs en masse, spontaneously or in an orchestrated fashion [...] we may well have the most authentic setting possible’ (1996: 128). This aligns well with drama, a collective form through which dramatic contexts are co-created by a group.
In the context of L2/AL learning, authenticity is a complex issue. The language used to communicate is a language that is non-native to the students, functioning both as the vehicle, and the educational objective. Often, in order to be understood, teachers adopt a simplified register, referred to as ‘teacher talk’. As Van Lier notes, teachers in using ‘teacher talk’ to communicate effectively with their students, are using language authentically for L2 settings. However, students also need to be exposed to a variety of registers beyond simplified ‘teacher talk’. He continues: ‘in the interest of authenticity, the [L2] classroom must become inauthentic, as a classroom. We are therefore confronted with a paradox, and to unravel this paradox is central to any discussion of the issue of authenticity in language teaching’ (1996: 123).

I believe that the use of drama can attempt to address this paradox in the language classroom. Heathcote herself reveals that it is this paradox that has motivated her to develop her own system of drama: ‘my own despair at not being able to find ways in the classroom to make work feel “real for society in action” let me to develop [a new] system of drama’ (1984: 192). Heathcote describes drama as a means to demonstrate interactive social behaviour. Indeed, through teacher-in-role, L2/AL teachers can expose the learners to a richness of language used by native speakers. Since Kao and O’Neill (1998), this has been the cornerstone of L2/AL process drama literature (Kao et al. 2011; Stinson 2008).

The findings from the research described in this paper reinforce this view; suggesting that, through drama, and teacher-in-role specifically, the participants were exposed to richer language registers. Exposure to a kind of language that was perceived as ‘authentic’ activated cognitive, social and affective responses in the learners. As a result, the participants became engaged not only at a communicative, but also at an intercultural and affective level, authenticating their actions and language.

**Research Background**

As seen so far, for Heathcote’s (1984) notion of ‘authentic teaching’ refers to the artistry of creating experiences that can engage our students. In my doctoral research, I examined the nature of these two constructs, namely teacher artistry and learner engagement, in drama-based pedagogy for second language teaching and learning. On the one hand, I explored the nature of engagement in L2 process drama. On the other hand, I considered artistry, and specifically how can a L2 teacher develop and harness process drama artistry to facilitate engagement.

In order to explore these constructs, I considered three case studies, teaching Italian as a second language (intermediate to advanced level) in a public university and two adult language schools, in Milan, Italy. I have discussed the methodology in a previous issue of this journal (see issue 4, 2013); in this paper, I focus on a different angle of the research background: the case study context, and my response to it with regards to authenticity. I limit the discussion to Case Study One’s context, to later connect it to findings related to teacher artistry and authenticity. Case Study One
(CS1) took place in a Milan university, within a second year linguistics unit for international students, part of a Cultural Mediation undergraduate degree, in June 2010. The majority of the international students were Chinese, because of an exchange between a Chinese university and this university. All of the CS1 student-participants were Chinese, in their second year of studying Italian. The gatekeeper for the case study was the course convenor of the linguistics exam for international students. We agreed to run the process drama intensive at the end of the academic year, just before the commencement of exams.

This incident deserves attention, as it inspired the creation of the process drama. During our first meeting, the convenor agreed that, in line with ethics protocols, the students’ participation was to be voluntary, free of charge and not assessed. However, when I met her again, just before the data collection, she reported that, anticipating difficulty in recruiting student-participants during the exam period, she had promoted participation in the research through what I define a ‘bargaining deal’: students who participated in my process drama intensive could study one less chapter of their media communication textbook for the oncoming linguistics exam.

To fully understand this ‘bargaining deal’, it needs to be situated within the broader Italian cultural context. Within the Italian education system, assessment at tertiary levels is centred on the accumulation and reproduction of factual knowledge. Typically, exams at university level in Italy consist of a large number of volumes that students are required to memorise. Within the Italian educational context, these kinds of ‘bargaining deals’ are a common negotiation between students and lecturers. In the context of L2 learning, this approach to exams can be intimidating. In offering this bargaining deal, the convenor’s intention was that of a ‘helpful ally’.

When I was notified of the bargaining deal for the participant selection, I experienced mixed reactions. From my Italian identity, I naturally understood the context of the arrangement; from my Australian identity, I was annoyed and frustrated. I felt that this ‘deal’ clashed with my research ethics, my educational beliefs and my values in conducting a drama workshop. Specifically, I found this deal devalued experiential learning, situating practice below theory; it positioned drama as an easy alternative to more ‘difficult’ subjects such as linguistics; and it drew on the extrinsic, rather than intrinsic motivation of students to participate in my research. Yet, I understood that it would have been culturally inappropriate for me to contest this arrangement.

Thus, I chose to oppose this arrangement with the only power I felt I had at my disposal: dramatic irony. I used the bargaining deal as inspiration to design the process drama. I located the chapter that the students could skip, ‘La lingua dei quotidiani’ (the language of newspapers) and I designed a process drama based on that very chapter. In The language of Newspapers, Bonomi (2003) argues that, in Italy, the traditional profession of chief-editor is undermined by the rapid rise of on-line editorials, which do not need this professional figure. This inspired me to create a process drama set in an editorial office, taking on the role of a proud and nostalgic chief-editor, who felt threatened by information and communication technologies.
Within that dramatic context, the editor had banned his employees from mentioning *The Language of newspapers* chapter, albeit expecting employees to know its content back to front. In other words, through the dramatic world, I framed the journalism chapter as a forbidden but essential item to the success of the apprentice journalists’ careers. In this way, I was able to transform my initial frustration around the bargaining deal into productive tension to fuel the drama. In hindsight, it could be argued that this dynamic was my own personal way to respond authentically to the context, the setting and the participants of the case study.

**Findings: Authenticity and the Construct of Teacher Artistry**

As Heathcote states, ‘authenticity is practice informing theory’ (1984:187). Reflective practice can be viewed as a dynamic strategy through which practice can inform theory, and vice versa. Reflection-in-action can be defined as a process of flexible decision-making, occurring as an action unfolds. In drama, reflection-in-action is essential to manage and negotiate the dramatic elements with the group. Indeed, as it has been argued, reflection-in-action is at the heart of teacher artistry in process drama (Dunn et al. 2011; O’Mara 2006).

Discussing reflection-in-action and drama for L2/AL teaching, Dunn et al. differentiate between *macro* and *micro* levels of reflection-in-action. *Macro* reflection-in-action refers to those decisions made before a drama begins, like selecting a pre-text, preparing artefacts and designing the drama structure. *Micro* reflection-in-action refers to ‘the in the moment artistry needed to make effective decisions in light of the participants’ responses’ (2011: 619). In L2/AL process drama, little attention has been given to the active relationship between the macro and the micro levels.

In order to explore how this reflection-in-action process unfolded in my reflective practice, I analysed the ways in which my tacit knowledge informed attitudes and beliefs underpinning my choices in the classroom. Initially, I structured the analysis dividing my reflection-in-action according to the ‘macro’ and ‘micro’ levels (Dunn et al 2011). I found that, while I felt comfortable in operating at a macro level, a certain aspect of micro reflection-in-action felt intimidating. I analysed the ways I responded to the drama structures I had created, and how they changed based on the groups’ dynamics. I recognised there were two distinct strands of micro reflection-in-action at play: a) thinking on my feet while improvising within one episode of the drama; b) thinking on my feet to connect and/or create new episodes. I found that, while I thrived on the former, the latter was at times challenging for me.

This discovery helped me to make sense of an underlying, tacit uneasiness related to managing the dramatic process in the classroom. This gave rise to a new layer of analysis, a distinction within my micro reflection-in-action:
• The intra-episode level of reflection-in-action, referring to micro reflection-in-action within one episode of the drama; thinking on my feet to manipulate the elements of drama, in one particular dramatic frame, with the co-participants;

• The inter-episode level of reflection-in-action, referring to micro reflection-in-action to re-structure across episodes; thinking on my feet to re-organise the drama structure and the way the episodes are inter-connected.

I focussed on my inter-episode reflection-in-action, and identified a clash between my overt and covert beliefs in the classroom. I mapped this process from Case Study One to Three, by a painful introspective analysis of my reflective notes, log book, interviews, conversations, and teachers’ observations. Ultimately, I was able to trace a journey towards a behaviour that went progressively from holding control, to relinquishing control in the drama process.

For the rest of this section I provide an example for each of the three strands of reflection-in-action (macro; micro intra-episode; micro inter-episode), analysing the tacit knowledge that informed the overt and covert attitudes behind the choices taken in my attempt to relinquish control in the classroom. Rather than a journey ‘towards’ authenticity, I see this as my authenticity-in-progress, as I was learning to negotiate the dramatic boundaries with the group.

**Macro reflection-in-action**

The first key point related to macro reflection-in-action is the genesis of my creative process in writing the drama structure. First of all, I chose to write my own drama structure, rather than using a pre-existing one. This is because pre-existing process dramas (see, for example, O’Neill et al. 1990) are based on cultural contexts different from what I needed. As Fleming points out, since ideas for drama are drawn from specific cultural context, ‘to take someone else’s lesson plans or ideas and try to use them uncritically can often lead to disaster’ (1994: 2-3). I knew from the start that I would not adapt a drama from English into Italian; I had to create one specific to my students’ needs as language learners of the Italian language and culture.

In designing the drama, the first step was the creation of a pre-text. As O’Neill argues, in process drama the quality of the pre-text is essential to launch the dramatic action. Effective pre-texts transform an idea into dramatic action, however ‘it may not always be easy for the leader to identify the most fruitful pre-texts for process drama’ (1995: 33). Below, I analyse what informed the choices that led me to the pre-text creation, and how they relate to the Heathcotian notion of authenticity as process-orientation. I analyse and discuss three aspects of my macro reflection-in-action: a) searching for a pre-text idea; b) creating the pre-text material; c) using the pre-text to design the drama structure.

**Searching for a pre-text.** I had limited time to find a pre-text for Case Study One. After the introductory meeting with the gatekeeper (course convenor), I had four
days to get an idea, source a pre-text, and design a drama structure for a 15-hours drama. Initially, in my pre-text hunt, I considered creating a drama on the participants’ coursework in their geography exam, as this was the only resource that I had access to at the time. This proved a sterile operation, as I could not resonate with that material. I wrote:

Pre-text: HELPPPPP!!! I've been searching for pre-texts desperately for the last 24 hours. I feel a lot of pressure. The course convenor and teacher-participants have high expectations of the process drama and I'm kind of stuck. The only resource I had access to was their geography exams. Lots of graphs and stats about earth population, density, growth, city structure and agriculture. No pre-texts there. I would like them to be in role as experts of something [...] BUT I'm stuck, I cannot find an idea for a pre-text, I've seen thousands of photos and short films. I need to have a solid idea... I am looking for something with intercultural and dramatic tension. What kind of expert needs to research geography stuff? And where? Italians in China or Chinese in Italy? What would produce enough motivation for them to stop speaking Chinese in their own groups?

This piece of writing is fruitful for reflective practitioner analysis; its immediacy in style exposes the beliefs which, at a time of stress, I called upon to guide me in the pre-text selection. Embedded in these lines are a number of imperatives informing my pre-text search: role and status (‘Experts in something’), dramatic tension (‘Looking for something with intercultural and dramatic tension’) as well as motivation to communicate in Italian (‘What would produce enough motivation for them to stop speaking Chinese’), dramatic and intercultural focus (‘Where? Italians in China or Chinese in Italy?’). These aspects suggest an implicit agenda in my pre-text hunting, informed by three inter-dependent domains: drama education, intercultural education, and second language acquisition. These features shed light on my overt attitudes on the artistry of L2 process drama, at the beginning of the drama intervention in CS1. In Table 2, I unpack these aspects. [Insert Table 2 here]

Inspiration came the next day, as I was forwarded an email thread between the convenor and the students. The email was a ‘friendly reminder’ to attend the workshops, with a reference to the chapter that they would need to study (The Language of Newspapers), should they choose not to join the research. This message sparked a certain degree of frustration (see above), which I quickly transformed into an insight: I would base the drama on that very chapter. In this way, I would offer participants an experiential taste to that chapter, helping them to live it, rather than just read it. This decision instantly resonated with me, and illuminated the journey in my pre-text hunt. In my reflective journal, I commented:

What I learnt from this is that I cannot design a process drama if I don’t get a gut feeling for it. It’s got to work for me, first of all. I need to feel it; it’s my creation as a story. No feeling; no resonance; no inspiration.
Thus, in order for an idea to work, there needed to be a certain level of affective resonance; in my own words, a ‘gut feeling’. This ‘resonance’ resulted in setting the drama in a context inspired by the journalism chapter. Indeed The Language of Newspapers chapter (Bonomi 2003) shaped the dramatic context through roles, status, situation, focus, language and tension. The chapter also informed my educational objective, as writing a newspaper article became the educational goal underpinning the dramatic work. Having an educational goal proved important to help me focus the drama structure. Paraphrasing Van Lier (1996), these factors contributed to authenticate the context, the setting, the participants, the materials, and the roles I was playing – in the research, and in the drama.

Creating a pre-text. In order to create a pre-text, I needed to create a ‘hook’, that is, something of interest for the participants (O’Toole et al. 2002). I used my knowledge of the cohort to find a hook within the broad area of journalism studies. I knew from my key informant that this cohort of international students was business-oriented, of Chinese background, and committed to getting an education in the Italian language and culture. I decided that the setting of the drama would be a business-oriented environment. To this end, I researched various websites, and found the Italo-Chinese Chamber of Commerce. I noticed that it issued a quarterly newsletter. This was the perfect sort of editorial that could allow for the dramatic context I envisaged: participants could enrol as jobseekers, applying to work as apprentice journalists for the business newsletter of the Italo-Chinese Chamber. This provided the link between the hook (business-oriented) and the educational objective (journalistic language), from which I created my pre-text (Figure 1).

Figure 1

![Figure 1](image-url)
Analysing the construction of the pre-text, a degree of ambiguity is present in the words ‘once again’ and ‘must be willing to work alongside’. Those two sentences contained implicit dramatic tension, in terms of the Chamber being a suspicious workplace environment. The pre-text also implied roles for the participants, dramatic focus, and inferred an intercultural dimension. At the time of creating the pre-text, I did not explicitly acknowledge these features; they were embedded in my understanding of what a pre-text is, rooted in my tacit knowledge of pre-text creation.

*Designing the learning sequence.* As the idea for the pre-text came to me, I did not have a detailed set narrative in mind; rather, I was guided by a dramatic structure. Below is an extract from my reflections, written the day before beginning the drama. This entry sheds light on how I framed my decisions, and is useful to unravel some attitudes towards my macro reflection-in-action.

I’ve had an idea for tomorrow’s process drama! As pre-text, I’m using a JOB OFFER (I’ve written) to potential journalists, fluent in Mandarin but experts in the Italian culture. The offer is from the Italian Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai and in particular from an editorial [...] I’ll open in role as Vice-president of the Chamber congratulating the students for their new job as journalists. I’ll say that, if this trial goes well, they will be hired. Then I’ll be in role as the (controversial) Editor, giving them a task which implies flying to Italy and interviewing someone that they believe is important to portray the Italian culture in Shanghai. The 1st task will be to decide on what topic to portray the Italian culture in the interview itself. There will be tension between the journalists and the editor because he strongly dislikes the newspaper they will be using do to their research. This might go for a few sessions; I’ll see about the others.

From this conversation, my beliefs seem to be that, in order to design a process drama, some elements needed to be figured out straight away (pre-text, role, situation, tension), while others (the constraint, or impediment) could be resolved later. Although I had not resolved every detail in the planning, I seemed to be content, as I could rely on a drama structure. From the way this text is construed, it is possible to identify an attitude towards structure, rather than a plot-bound approach. In other words, at this stage, it was not important what the constraint would be, as long as something obstructed the completion of the task. This is a classic narrative device related to the build-up dramatic tension, described by O’Toole as ‘retardation’: ‘the function of the teacher is to create retardation towards the urge of swift gratification’ (1992: 134). As I created the drama structure, this concept was tacit in my attitude.

To sum up, in order to source a pre-text I relied on resonance with an idea, finding a hook, setting an educational goal, researching the context of the case study, creating an artefact that contained a degree of tension, implied intercultural roles and
situation, and resonated with the participants’ interest and backgrounds. In order to write the drama structure, I channelled these elements and envisaged a constraint towards the accomplishment of a dramatic task. These features of macro reflection-in-action appeared to be covert, part of an intuitive process of creation. However, while this structure-based attitude was tacitly in place at a macro level (i.e., planning), it became more problematic as I stepped from planning to facilitating.

**Micro *intra*-episode reflection-in-action**

By ‘micro’ reflection-in-action, I refer to those in-the-moment choices taken during a drama workshop. In particular, by ‘intra-episode’ I refer to the flexible decision-making that occurs while improvising within one episode, negotiating the elements of drama in real time with the group.

This kind of reflection-in-action came to me quite spontaneously; it was something I thrived on. This may be due to my background in theatre improvisation, a form that I was comfortable with and enjoyed. For example, below I describe how, in role as the editor, I improvised the way of handing out the fraudulent train tickets, which would later cause the journalists’ arrest.

**TEACHER-IN-ROLE**: Because the chief-editor is an obsessive compulsive, disturbed editor, any stuff up is easily justified (if I drop something, if I forget something etc.) and this gives me great freedom to stuff up in every way. I love it! I quickly approve their projects and inform them that the interviews have been arranged for the day after tomorrow, in Milan. I supply complimentary train tickets for the train trip from Rome to Milan. As I hand out the tickets, two things happen: 1. I begin to shake, first slightly then more fiercely; 2. I keep counting these tickets, many times, as I hand them out to the group leaders. This reinforces my obsession with counting things which was mentioned earlier. The group plays along with this and helps me to count the tickets over and over and to re-assure me.

A number of aspects related to teacher artistry emerge from this passage. First, through my improvised non-verbal behaviour (shaking), I introduce something suspicious about the tickets, an element of tension that would be explored later in the drama. Second, the obsessive counting, and the participants’ reassurance, lowers the editor’s status, re-negotiating the apprentices’ status as higher. Moreover, as I get them helping me count the tickets over and over, an attitude towards collaborative improvisation emerges. A plethora of other examples of this kind of intra-episode reflection-in-action can be drawn from the data collection. This example will suffice to argue that, in an intra-episode situation, my reflection-in-action appeared to be collaborative in nature. However, the analysis revealed that, when put under pressure, I felt ‘safer’ in clinging to my own narrative, rather than a collaborative approach, especially when re-structuring episodes.
Micro inter-episode reflection in action

By micro ‘inter-episode’ reflection-in-action I refer to the flexible decision-making that occurs when improvising across episodes, that is, thinking on my feet to create new episodes for the drama.

During the third workshop of CS1, I was confronted with an unexpected challenge that forced me to re-structure the drama. Because of an exam, half the class arrived late, and we lagged behind with the drama structure. During that session I was supposed to introduce the constraint of the drama: the journalists getting arrested on their way to the interview because of the fraudulent train tickets. I realised that I would have had to rush an important moment, and I decided to postpone the arrest to the following workshop. The question then arose: what would I do in the second half of the workshop? Because of the uniqueness of the research context, I had the possibility to consult with three observing teacher-participants. By speaking out my reflection-in-action process, I was able to make sense of the situation:

The dilemma now is: if we keep going with today’s plan, we will reach the episode when they get arrested at the very end of the workshop. This episode will elicit high tension, and needs to be harnessed at its maximum potential; but if they have to go home, all the tension will be lost... It’s wiser to postpone this episode at the beginning of the next session, so we can channel that tension.

This disclosure is insightful, as I was exposing my internal reflection-in-action process, illuminating some attitudes that might have otherwise have remained covert. By unpacking my reflexivity-in-practice (Neelands 2006), it emerges that the arrest was taken for granted (‘we will reach the episode when they get arrested’). The arrest was to occur; it was just a matter of time. Indeed, several data sets reveal that I had pre-determined that the journalists would be arrested.

On the contrary, unexpectedly, the participants firmly refused to get arrested. This incident triggered a major finding in the research: at the beginning of Case Study One, when confronted with unexpected challenges posed by the participants’ reactions to the drama, I was not able to maintain a ‘structure-based’ approach, clinging instead to a ‘plot-bound’ narrative. As O’Neill and Lambert point out, when working with process drama, it is important not to let the linear development of the storyline take over, highlighting that structure should override plot (1990: 47). As I reflected-on-action at the end of Case Study One, I unveiled a deep-seated attitude of clinging to my pre-determined plot. This prompted me to work towards a new goal in my practice, for Case Study Two and Three: learning to allow points of tension to arise from the group, rather than to cling to a pre-set plot.

Aristotle defines plot as ‘the arrangement of the incidents’; not the story itself, but the way the incidents are presented to the audience. In his conception, the plot must be a whole, with a beginning, middle, and end. It also has to be complete, having ‘unity of action’; it must be structurally self-contained, with the incidents bound together by ‘internal necessity’, each action leading to the next (330bc/1992: 12). In Reading for the Plot, Brooks (1984) challenges the Aristotelian conception of plot as
the arrangement of the incidents. Instead, he focuses on plot and its relationship to meaning. In a Freudian aesthetics perspective, Brooks considers plot in terms of impulse, drives and desire. Drawing on Barthes (1966), he defines the ‘narrative impulse’ (*la passion du sense*) as both ‘the passion for meaning’, and ‘the passion of meaning’. While he frames this concept from the reader’s point of view, I endorsed it from the writer’s perspective, as I analysed my creative writing process. Significantly, in my reflective journal, I wrote:

I have realised that what I really love is engaging with the creative process, especially writing the process drama. This is what I absolutely love… that motivates me and commits me to the work. This is my ultimate truth.

Here I connected ‘my ultimate truth’ to writing the drama. My narrative impulse was deeply rooted in my identity as a creative writer. Indeed, long before discovering process drama, I was a writer of poetry, short stories, screenplays and children’s narrative. In order to design the drama interventions, as for every drama I ever designed, I naturally drew from my creative writer’s identity to devise narratives suitable for the educational experience. I assimilated the written genre of process drama (i.e., the drama structure) and thrived on the creative process. My identity as a creative writer had been twofold: in a way, it helped me to generate numerous process dramas; in another sense, it bound me to tacitly submit to the traditional Aristotelian plot. Discussing Brooks’ narrative theory, Stewart frames it as an interpretation of our modern ‘addiction to plot’ (1986: 107).

In my data analysis, I defined my tacit attitude as being ‘addicted to plot’; my narrative impulse was dictating my expectations of the drama, overriding participants’ meaning-making. In the drama, when I set up an episode where the journalists would be arrested, the participants rejected this possibility and orchestrated a conspiracy theory instead. My response was stubborn, as I insisted on my version of the drama, ignored their conspiracy theory. I eventually cut the drama and proceeded with a narration to impose my version of the story. By the end of Case Study One, I was able to acknowledge this behaviour as problematic; through Case Study Two and Three, I embarked on a painful process of re-visiting my beliefs. I eventually traced the root of this plot-bound tendency to the way I framed the *focus question* of the drama, which was narrative-based, rather than meaning-based. This journey from an ‘addiction to plot’ to feeling ‘trapped by the plot’ and finally ‘letting go of the plot’, constitutes a major finding of the research. In my reflective analysis I mapped this gradual progression, examining my responses in the drama, in the interviews and logbook (in Italian) and in my reflective journal, memos and analysis (in English). By analysing my bilingual reflection-in-action, I was able to access my spontaneous stream of consciousness (in Italian), and my detached reflections (in English), unveiling a clash of attitudes and beliefs.

This reflective analysis process has been documented elsewhere. Instead, in this paper I focus on the Heathcotian notion of authenticity in teacher artistry and engagement. Under this perspective, it can be argued that the recognition of my plot-bound attitude, and my attempt to overcome it, functioned as a guiding
principle, ‘a personal something’ – as Heathcote calls it – ‘a philosophy, a belief, a creed, whatever you call it, to stand for, from within yourself’, one of the ‘authentic climate’ strategies, discussed above (1984: 175). As the drama progressed, I was able to honour and gradually embrace this guiding principle.

**Authenticity, Teacher Artistry and Engagement**

In this research, I was interested to explore how a L2 teacher, relatively new to teaching drama, could develop and harness teacher artistry to facilitate engagement. I have found that my artistry developed through my growing ability to reflect-in-action, both at macro, intra and inter-episode level. This enhanced my capacity to spontaneously manage the elements of drama – to create experiences for participants that were more engaging. In parallel, findings on the nature of learner engagement suggested that the levels of participants’ agency considerably increased across the case studies. Specifically, engagement manifested as a cycle of perception-in-action, culminating in different forms of agency, which seemed to become *more diverse* and *intensify* through the case studies (see Piazzoli, 2014).

By considering the two sets of findings together (artistry and engagement), my growing ability to reflect-in-action seemed to influence the learners’ agency. The increase in agency across the case studies might be interpreted as the result of my changing attitudes, which culminated in relinquishing control. Interestingly, both agency and relinquishing control are two strategies that underpin Heathcote’s authenticity as process-orientation, as discussed in Table 1.

Through the analysis, I discovered that I needed to revisit the aesthetic and pedagogical principles that guided my praxis, so that I could let the points of tension emerge from the group, rather than from a pre-determined plot. This allowed me to realise some other features of what Heathcote describes as ‘authentic climates’, like ‘seeing students as they really are demonstrating themselves to be’, and ‘being interested in students as they represent themselves to be’. This was made possible through an open attitude, what Heathcote describes as ‘open-ness to others’ ideas, ways of working, possibilities for improvement, change, re-orientation and preparedness therefore to take *considered risks*’ (1984: 175).

**Reflective practice as authenticity-in-process**

Heathcote identifies a range of strategies that contribute to authentic teaching. To orchestrate these, it is essential for teachers to draw on their pedagogical understanding. As Shulman argues, pedagogical understanding is based on layered understandings: exhaustive ‘content knowledge’ of a subject to be taught is not enough and neither is advanced ‘pedagogical knowledge’ of teaching processes. A competent educator needs ‘pedagogical content knowledge’, that is, knowledge of teaching strategies, the most powerful forms that make the subject comprehensible to others (2004: 203). In the case of drama-based pedagogies for second language learning, these forms of knowledge expand to cover dramatic strategies, language
teaching strategies, the target language itself and its multifaceted cultural shades. Dunn and Stinson refer to the integrated knowledge required by the L2 drama educators as ‘dual pedagogical content knowledge’ (2011: 630, my emphasis).

As I began the Case Study One, I had worked as a teacher of Italian (AL) for ten years. I felt my content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge of Italian to be validated. At the same time, I had a background in arts education and improvisation techniques. However, I had been familiar with facilitating process drama for only three years. I felt fairly confident with my content knowledge, and my pedagogical knowledge of drama; yet, I felt I was still developing my pedagogical content knowledge. In truth, the final goal of attaining a dual pedagogical content knowledge seemed, at the time of commencing my PhD, still a long way away. I felt that there was something missing in my drama practice, something I could not identify precisely. It was something related to the aesthetic dimension; something related to reflection and managing the elements of drama. That ‘something missing’ was what inspired me to embark on the PhD research.

Through the research, I attempted to unpack some aspects of my dual pedagogical content knowledge which I felt were still underdeveloped. I tried to make sense of them through an analysis of my responses to the research context, and the dramatic context, at a macro level and micro level of reflection-in-action. In hindsight, while during the data collection I was under the illusion of having to strive towards authenticity, reflective practice was my own way of being authentic. Rather than being on a journey towards authenticity, what I was researching was my own authenticity-in-process. Indeed, if, as Heathcote states, authenticity is practice informing theory, then reflective practice itself can be viewed as a form of authenticity.

The challenge remains as to how, in a socio-political context increasingly endorsing what Heathcote calls ‘antiseptic teaching’ (1984: 198), reflective practitioners can find ways to continue establishing authentic climates in and through their practice, context and learning environment.
References


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