THE COMMISSION MODEL OF TEACHING

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Abstract:

Dorothy Heathcote (1926-2011) is best known today for the "Mantle of the Expert" system of teaching, a drama method in which young people are asked to think of themselves as an "expert" team of some kind, who receive a fictional commission from an imaginary client. This "commission" forms the basis for a programme of teaching across the curriculum. In the "Commission Model," which she created in the early 2000s, there is a real commission, from a real client in the community. The aim, for Heathcote, was to break down barriers between schools and the outside world; to ensure that learning takes place in a context; and to empower children as active "citizens of the world". This article examines a Commission project which Heathcote led, to design a hospital garden; with particular reference to science elements in the project. It draws on original materials from the Dorothy Heathcote Archive.

Keywords:
Dorothy Heathcote; drama; design thinking; Ken Robinson; Fritjof Capra

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> I have a dream that has not yet been realized; I would like students, not to learn what their teachers teach them, but to be people who solve problems in the outside world that their teachers bring to them. ... This is actually a radical way of learning. I want students to be citizens of the world. The Commission Model brings Mantle of the Expert to the real world. (Dorothy Heathcote, qtd. Özen and Adıgüzel 2017, p.21[1].)

Dorothy Heathcote (1926-2011) earned an international reputation for her innovative use of drama methods in teaching. She is perhaps best known today for the "Mantle of the Expert" system, in which young people are asked to think of themselves as an "expert" team of some kind, who receive a fictional commission from an imaginary client.

One of Heathcote's concerns was to address the disempowerment of children as "a productive, positive influence in our society. It's the disenfranchisement of them as political beings and I mean political with a small 'p', of adding and bringing their energy to the culture" (Heathcote 1988, p.6). Schooling is insulated to a significant degree from the outside world; as a result, schoolwork may feel to children like a series of "dummy runs":

> Nearly always in our curriculum studies, we give children false reasons for learning, I believe. They either belong to "Do it because I know it's important" or "Do it because I had to do it and now I'm glad I did it"—even though secretly a lot of them you never did; or, "Do it because at some dim and distant future it will be important to you." Now as goal-setters I find these utterly idiotic in my life. (Heathcote 1984.)

In life, learning always takes place in a context: we learn things because we have a need for a particular skill, or knowledge. Schooling, however, takes knowledge out of context. Heathcote saw that a child may study a foreign language for several years in school, and yet may not be able to speak it fluently when they leave; "but if I work with company managers in Volkswagen, they can learn at least to speak the language in a month because they need it for their work. Because it's directly related to their career, and that's why it means a lot to them" (Heathcote 1984).

Drama, however, creates a "context" for learning. For example: when children in Mantle of the Expert are running a fictional "enterprise" such as a travel agency, or a museum, there is a need for knowledge and information in this context. There is no pretence the drama is real; and yet it is accepted by students as if it is real. It is a paradox that the "fiction" of drama creates the potential "for authenticity—for learning" (Heathcote 1984).

Heathcote created the Commission Model in the early 2000s. It seems, on the surface at least, to be a logical outgrowth of the Mantle system: instead of a fictional client and commission, there is a real commission, from a real client in the community. The commission then forms the basis for a programme of teaching. It was another way for Heathcote to break down barriers between schools and the outside world; to ensure that learning takes place in a context; and to empower children as active "citizens of the world" (Heathcote qtd. Özen and Adıgüzel 2017, p.21).

In 2001-2, Heathcote worked with a group of teachers and some 34 students (aged 13-14) at the Queen Elizabeth High School in Hexham, to fulfil a commission from a local hospital trust, to design a garden for the Hexham Hospital[2]. In Mantle of the Expert, the fictional context provides what Heathcote termed a "no penalty" zone, "where ideas and situations can be isolated, examined and acted upon, but where we are relieved of the burden of the future arising from our actions" (O'Neill 2015, p.88). In the Commission Model, however, the work has real-life consequences. At the same time, along with the responsibility, there may be a sense of empowerment; one of the young people who took part in the Hexham Garden commission said: "This is the first time something I have done in school has been important to anyone" (qtd. Heathcote 2003, p.20).

In a planning meeting with teachers at the school, Heathcote quoted an article by the physicist Fritjof Capra, called "The Language of Nature" (Heathcote 2001a). In the article, Capra argued that developments in neuroscience have "resulted in a new understanding of the process of learning", which recognizes "the importance of experiential learning; of diverse learning styles involving multiple intelligences; and of the emotional and social context in which learning takes place".

1 – All translations from Turkish are by the authors.

2 – The commission arose as part of the Northumbria Healthcare Trust's "Healing Arts" programme. The team of teachers and students met about once a month for two hours after school, between October 2001 and June 2002. The project was also allocated some "off-timetable time: a half day before Christmas, a full day in February and five full days in the week in June when the commissioners [students] prepared and shared their garden plans with a hospital committee" (Heathcote 2003, p.17).

> This understanding of the learning process suggests corresponding instructional strategies. In particular, it suggests designing an integrated curriculum, emphasizing contextual knowledge, in which the various subject areas are perceived as resources in service of a central focus. (Capra 1999, p.52.)

An ideal way to achieve such an integration, for Capra, "consists in facilitating learning experiences that engage students in complex, real world projects—for example, a school garden or a creek restoration—through which they develop and apply skills and knowledge" (Capra 1999, pp.52-3). The Hospital Garden commission provided just such a "complex, real world" project. The project team included teachers from different subject areas, which would function as "resources in service of a central focus" (Capra 1999, p.52).

In the meeting with Hexham staff, Heathcote introduced this chart of teaching models (2001a):

	PREDOMINANT TEACHER ROLES	PUPILS' ROLE IN COMMUNICATION	PREDOMINANT FORM OF COMMUNICATION
TRANSMISSION TEACHING	assess ("judging") >	presenting >	final draft
DRAMA FRAMEWORK	Participate ("contributing") >	co-operating >	Explanatory
ENQUIRY METHOD	Reply ("understanding") >	sharing >	Exploratory

The dominant paradigm of teaching in the "transmission" model, Heathcote argued, is the "child-as-vessel":

> The philosophical basis of schools ... is still in that area of "teach children about things and treat them as vessels to be filled"; and most courses for teachers are still about "fill them up", in that the teaching methods fill people up; and some people get filled "up to here" but they're never full. (1978, p.16.)

In this model, the task for the student is to present "the final draft for today—'the best I can do today'" (Heathcote 2001a). (Gavin Bolton has observed that, most of the time in our schools, the pupil is "demonstrating his/her knowledge or skill" to the teacher; and the teacher is the "source of knowledge", who "will 'correct' the child's knowledge" [1986, p.x].)

The "enquiry method", as Heathcote described it, may be related to the "discovery" model advocated by the educational psychologist Jerome Bruner, that gives the learner significant autonomy and agency over their own learning; it is based in "an expression of faith in the powerful effects that come from permitting the student together for himself [*sic passim*], to be his own discoverer" (Bruner 1961, p.22).

As we have seen, the "drama framework" creates a context for teaching. This releases the student from the conventional role (and mindset) of a "pupil" who has come to school to learn, and who sees the teacher as the one who is responsible for teaching ("It's up to them to keep us busy. It's up to them to plan the curriculum. It's up to them to not bore us" [Heathcote 2001a].) In drama, the students assume a different "frame" or point of view; and the teacher may also assume a role in the drama. This enables a shift in the usual power relationship between teacher and pupil (Bolton 1986), and makes possible a more collaborative way of working. Heathcote gave an example of a drama she led, in which students were in the frame of trainee doctors in 19th century Edinburgh, studying under Dr. Knox. She herself assumed different roles in the drama, including a porter in the medical school: "Now, at this point, you see, we can all participate, because I don't know any much more about Edinburgh doctors learning under Dr. Knox than they do" (Heathcote 2001a)[3].

Heathcote saw drama as a kind of "laboratory":

> In the drama framework, the teacher contributes and participates, the children co-operate with the participating teacher as well as they can, and they all end up *explaining* the world to one another. What you have then is, a classroom working as a laboratory. If, after exploring, we do not keep explaining to each other, we cannot really own our own knowledge. (1989, p.x; italics in original.)

This is in accord with what Heathcote termed the "crucible paradigm": the view of the child as a

3 – The "Dr. Knox" drama took place at King's Norton High School, Birmingham, in 1996, in collaboration with Claire Armstrong-Mills.

"crucible", rather than as a "vessel" to be filled with knowledge. The classroom itself becomes a "crucible": "We'll stir it all up together, and see what we get out of it" (Heathcote 2009).

The teacher in the Commission Model has to see themselves as an "enabler" of learning and accept "alternative ways of leading" (Heathcote 2001a). Heathcote saw the system operating in the same "exploratory / explanatory" mode as the "drama framework": the teacher presents the commission as a "colleague" (and so "enabler"); the student "accepts tasks and parameters set by client who commissions product"; and in the outcome, the "Achieved commission is presented by all to those who commissioned. There is always a product to be handed over" (Heathcote 2001b; emphasis in original).

The system needs to be distinguished, however, from the "Business Studies" model of project work, and from design thinking, which also seek to "connect students' learning to real problems in the world" (Quinn 2021, p.80). There are different models of design thinking in education, but the most relevant in this context is a model which has been termed "authentic forms of inquiry" (Scott and Bailey, 2021, pp.26-8). This emphasises "a world centered curriculum seeking to connect young people to the always emerging issues, problems, and topics in the world" (ibid. p.26). In their article "Reframing Inquiry in Education: Designing for a Living Curriculum", David Scott and Deidre Bailey contend that the "inquiry" process in design thinking becomes "authentic", not simply because it has an impact in the real world, but because the participants are framed within a particular discipline or "disciplinary mindset", such as historian, artist, or mathematician (ibid., p.34). The "authentic" project "emanates from a question, problem, issue or exploration that is significant to disciplines [and] builds connections beyond the school" (Galileo Educational Network 2016, qtd. Scott and Bailey, p.27). Scott and Bailey cite the work of David Perkins as an example. In his "seven principles of teaching", he proposes that students should be given opportunities to "play the whole game", involving "developmentally appropriate opportunities to participate in junior versions of how disciplinary skills and process are used in the real world" (ibid., p.27). We should note, however, that this is still a "dummy run": a preparation for life in the "real world." The terms that Perkins uses are revealing: for example, he speaks of "playing a game", and doing a "junior" version of the "real" thing. One example he offers of a "whole game" for students to play is a MUVE (multi-user virtual environment) called "River City", in which participants

> face a problem. Diseases of various sorts are sweeping through the virtual population. What are the causes? Exploring River City, the students can observe at various sites, test the water, and in other ways test the possible sources of the epidemics. In doing so, they learn some science content, and they also engage in the process of scientific inquiry itself. (Perkins 2009, pp.28-9.)

Whatever the educational merits of this game, it is clear that it remains a simulation exercise. What is on offer is not, in fact, an "authentic" inquiry; the "authenticity" is only simulated. The game has been engineered to deliver the curriculum, while giving students the feeling of something that connects with the "real world." It does not make students into "citizens of the world"; rather, it continues to convey the message: this is what the real world might be like, when you are ready to join it.

The design thinking model of education which has been developed by, for example, the Stanford "d.school," is derived to a significant extent from the application of design thinking in business brand development. This is purportedly human-centred: it

> encourages organizations to focus on the people they're creating for, which leads to better products, services, and internal processes. When you sit down to create a solution for a business need, the first question should always be what's the human need behind it? (IDEO n.d.)

The focus, then, is on identifying a problem, and then designing a solution to it through some new or improved product or service. The people who are the target market are often described as the "end-users." For an approach which is supposedly "humanistic," the term appears inhuman. It highlights the emphasis on functionality and use; the system is not people-centred, as is claimed, but user-centred. Empathy is a component in the design process; it is used in order to understand the difficulties that people (the end-users) might experience in certain situations. Ultimately, however, the focus is not on human value, but on "use value." (Jon Kolko states: "empathy is the key to building meaningful products" [2014, p.6].)

When design thinking is applied in schools, there is often a similar emphasis on identifying a problem, and creating a solution. In *Design Thinking in the Classroom* (2018), for example, David Lee offers the following examples of educational projects:

> "City Plan": children are tasked with the challenge: "How will you as urban planners design a city plan to improve the local community?" (Lee 2018, p.73).
> "Family Activity Tool": "How will you design a tool that will help your classmate in their family activity?" (ibid., p.76).
> "Toy Lab": "How will you as Toy Lab inventors design a nature-inspired toy for kindergarten students?" (through drawing, for example, on knowledge of seed dispersal and pollination) (ibid., p.87-88).

These projects place young people in the "disciplinary mindset" (Scott and Bailey 2021, p.34) of quasi-professional teams: urban planners, engineers, toy designers, and so on. This is akin to the "Business Studies" model of project-based work, often used in higher education, where students who are training to work as marketing consultants, engineers, etc., are asked to work as a team, to design a new product or service (such as a marketing campaign). In other words: the exercise is designed to have a "real-world" outcome—the products or services are intended to be used; but it is still a "dummy run," a preparation for life as a professional in the "real world."

The Australian drama teacher John Carroll had a close relationship with Heathcote over many years. He corresponded with her about the Commission Model; but it is evident that he misunderstood it, conceiving it in terms of the "Business Studies" or "design thinking" model. He wrote, for example:

> Essentially the Commission Model is about engaging students with a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). These communities, existing in the wider world of work, are where much real learning in our society occurs. A community of practice is a specific group with a local culture, what James Gee describes as a way of "...seeing, valuing and being in the world" (2005, para 5). (Carroll et al, p.14.)

These communities "constitute the body of knowledge of professional practice in an area of expertise" (ibid., p.15)—in other words, a "disciplinary mindset". In the case of the Hexham Garden commission, for example, Carroll (and his co-authors) presumed (wrongly) that the project "allowed the students to assume the role status of garden designers" and "enter the world of professional practice of architect and landscape gardener and adopt the epistemic frame of such specialists within the virtual world developed through the drama" (ibid., p.13). In other words, it was as if it was as a kind of simulation exercise, a preparation for the "real world" of professional practice; a "dummy run." In Hexham, however, the students were not inducted into the skill-set or "epistemic frame" of architects or landscape designers. They did not, in fact, produce an actual design for the hospital garden (which would be a task beyond their skills); this task was undertaken by a professional garden designer. Rather, the project team presented a report to the Hospital Trust, which included a series of issues which they felt had to be considered before the garden could reach the design stage, such as water supply and sunlight, and questions such as: "*What should form the memorial element? A growing tree or an abstract form? How constructed and recorded upon?*"; and "*Should there be an area dedicated to children's interests? If so, what form might it take?*" (Heathcote 2003, p.20; italics in original). The outcome was the presentation itself, rather than some product or design. This was not, then, an exercise in "design thinking." Neither was it a dummy run, a "junior version" of a "real life" enterprise.

This is how Heathcote described the Garden commission (in notes preserved in the Heathcote Archive):

> On the face of it, this commission from the hospital involves the interested staff and students from the school in planning a garden—a pretty plot of land to be visited by those involved in contact with the hospital either as workers, patients, visitors or healers.
> I see it as much more than that.
> I see it as a very real and rich opportunity for the central garden idea to generate an enormous range of ideas and inventive work around the many facets of a public garden in a special place. It will involve a great range of study and expertise, and the final publication and presentation to real people who must finance it.
> There are obvious areas to be studied—social science, climate, plants, the surrounding buildings, the seasons;
> How it shall be maintained so that it develops and flourishes.
> But there are many other developments to be considered:
> What are gardens for? What purposes shall be served? Who will use and benefit from it?...
> So I see it is generating an enormous ammount [*sic*] of work related with all the aspects of

> gardens in healing surroundings. And above all an opportunity to cross curriculum boundaries and integrate knowledge. (Heathcote 2001c.)

In other words: the project in effect took a step back from the design process as such, to consider wider questions about "What are gardens for" (etc.), with specific reference to the place of gardens "in healing surroundings".

A comparison may be drawn between the Garden commission, and a drama project which Heathcote led in 1984, called "The Gardeners of Grantley". In this case, there was a fictional "commission": the children (a group of 12–13 year-olds) were in the frame of students at an Agricultural College, who were invited to submit a design for an Italian garden. (There was no attempt to induct the "epistemic framework" of landscape designers, however.) Lance Edynbry, who worked on the project with Heathcote, observed: "It was decided that the project's aim—or centre—should be that the children gain some deeper awareness of the nature of the garden and all its inherent paradoxes, e.g. permanence / change; cohesion / diversity; Intimacy / isolation etc."; in other words, "the Garden as a Paradigm of Life" (Edynbry 1984, p.1).

Heathcote discussed the "Gardeners of Grantley" project at a training event for teachers in 1992. She observed that her aim had been to preserve a "central coherence" through the different tasks. As she said this, she made a gesture as if drawing a vertical line downwards in the air; indicating that the process was not linear and horizontal, but rather, that it descended vertically, taking the children into ever "deeper questioning" (Heathcote 1992). We may conceive the process, in fact, as a spiral around a central thread: in this case, around the theme, "the Garden as a Paradigm of Life". Similarly in Hexham, as we will see, the work proceeded, not in a straight line (like a railway line), but rather, in a spiral around the key question: "What are gardens for?" This can also be seen in terms of the "crucible" paradigm: there was a "stirring" of knowledge around a central line or thread. It is significant that the centre was not a problem to be solved (as in design thinking); rather, it was an open question, without a final answer or solution. It was not a question that the teacher knew the answer to; rather, teacher and students could "stir it all up together" (Heathcote 2009).

Heathcote stated that curriculum learning is "paramount" in the Commission Model. At the same time, she wrote: "There is no curriculum map. It begins in our heads as we contemplate what we need to know, to research, to define" (Heathcote 2003, p.18). To some extent at least, then, the commission drives the teaching, and the curriculum is dictated by it. The staff in the Garden project came from different subject areas—psychology, drama, English, biology, classics, geography and physical education/dance; but they were obliged to set aside the usual subject boundaries, for the sake of the "central focus" (Capra 1999, p.52)—to serve the commission, and the team.

Heathcote stressed the importance of what she termed "dimension" in teaching. She defined this as the affective side of the brain that "expands the cognitive aspects, and makes the academic study of things in the world mean something" (Heathcote 1993b). In part, this was a question of "concern", which can "light up the information" (Heathcote 1993a). As she stressed to the teachers in Hexham, this meant imbuing the work "all the time with the present human aspect" (Heathcote 2001a)—i.e., with "concern" for the "Other" (in this case, the Hospital Trust as the "client," but also, the people who would use the garden in the future). In other words, "dimension" was a way of humanizing the curriculum.

Heathcote saw the Commission Model as a drama method, even though the commission is real rather than fictional, and the students are not in a fictional frame (as they are in Mantle work) (2002d). As we will see, in the Garden commission, drama methods such as role work were used in some of the sessions. Arguably, however, the drama element also manifested itself in the different ways that students were positioned or "framed." Heathcote referred to the team members throughout as "commissioners." This was analogous to the "expert" frame in Mantle of the Expert: it implied a shift away from the role of "pupil," to adopting an expert or "professional" point-of-view. The teachers were similarly referred to as "commissioners" (or sometimes as the "senior commissioners"); and so, there was also a shift in "frame" for them, along with a shift in language (from "teacher" to "colleague" and "enabler")[4].

Heathcote took the concept of "framing" from the sociologist Erving Goffman. She saw "frame" as the position taken in relationship to an event; and defined nine types, from being a participant in an event,

4 – In her personal notes on the project, one of the teachers, Kathy White-Webster, noted some of the different "frames" which teachers may adopt: guide, lecturer, colleague, enquirer, etc. (2002).

through guide, agent, authority, recorder, journalist, researcher, critic, and artist. These "frames" are not simply relevant to drama work; rather, they reflect the way that people's positions may shift in life, depending on the context. Notably, however, Goffman himself used theatrical terms in his analysis of "frames," such as role, performance, audience, stage–arrangement, and so on (Goffman 1959, p. 4).

Each shift in frame, Heathcote argued, demands a different language and a different way of thinking and knowing (Heathcote 2007); it "changes how they [the students] learn" (Heathcote 2001a). In 1980, she worked for five days with a class on a drama based on the story of Dr. Lister, and his development of antiseptic surgery. The class teacher wanted the children to understand the demands of scientific inquiry: "I want the language of observation; the keen eye; the language of inquiry; the language of experiment; the language of the imagination, so they can see beyond the experiment, to where it might take this, you see" (Heathcote 1984).

The work had a central focus: it invited students to consider the gap between Lister's time, and ours, and the way that Lister's work is still affecting our world (Heathcote 2007). The children's overall "frame" was as trainee doctors. Within this, there were different "frames" in different episodes (such as "researchers," "guides," etc.). In the first session, for example, the children examined a mock-up of Lister's desk, including medical instruments he is known to have used, documents etc.; and they speculated on what these objects meant. In this episode, then, the "frame" was "researchers." Heathcote observed:

> the whole of that morning was the language of knowing by hypothesising; so you heard children saying things like, "I think it's something to do with germs..." They didn't know he was called Lister, they didn't know anything about him. (ibid.)

In another episode, they created frozen images, to demonstrate to Lister (represented by a teacher-in-role [John Carroll]) the health hazards for working people in his day. This was the language of explanation, and the "frame" was as "agents" who re-enact the event. On the final day, they told Lister about the contribution he had made to medicine, and presented lectures on medical developments since his time, such as dialysis. In this case, they were "guides" (ibid.).

Each episode in the drama, then, introduced a different "frame" (or "frames"), providing a different perspective, and demanding a different language. Moreover, each episode revolved around the central theme: the gap between Lister's time, and ours. Each "frame" was a different way of knowing and thinking about the "gap."

In explaining how "frame" might work in the Garden commission, Heathcote gave the following examples:

> ... supposing you bring somebody in [such as a parent, or someone in role] who says, "I hear you're doing a garden. What—how far have you got?" ... They then [i.e. the students] become "guides." Their language changes. ... But their thinking is selectively thought as "guides." They must help *you* understand.

Other examples included:

- the frame of "recorder"—for example, "when we say in any session, 'Now look, before we go any further, let's be quite sure that we've got this really clear, before we send this interim report to the hospital'."
- the frame of "authority"—if, for example, a group undertook some research into plant biology, and then made a presentation to the other students ("We know this is right. We now know containers have to be like this" [etc.]). (Heathcote 2001a.)

In a 1984 talk on the arts in education, Ken Robinson argued that the school curriculum is

> still based on "bodies of knowledge" existing "objectively" outside children, which teachers initiate them into. This is based on the notion that real knowledge is obtained by impersonal, logical understanding; but there are other ways of understanding (things that we know but don't know how we know them). It is more consistent to talk not of "bodies of knowledge," but of "ways of knowing." It is wrong to divide the sciences and the arts; creativity also resides in science... . (Robinson 1984.)

Heathcote's emphasis on "frame" may be seen, in this sense, as a shift, from "bodies of knowledge", to "ways of knowing". The shift changes the students' relationship to knowledge, and gives them greater ownership over it.

Each of the "frames" implies an act of interpretation or analysis—as guide, authority, critic, researcher, etc. It is also notable that all of the "frames" (apart from "participant") include an awareness of audience

(whether or not that audience is present at the time, or expected at some point in the future). In the example of students undertaking research into plant biology, there would be, to some extent, an induction into the "epistemic framework" of the biologist. However, this would take place within an overall frame of "commissioner," and within the context of working on the Hospital Garden. Moreover, there would be a sense of an audience for the work, whether preparing a presentation for other students, or for the Hospital Trust. This would demand the selective use of language, to articulate ideas for that audience; and a level of reflexive self-awareness, "to shape a selection of tools and style of construction to achieve [a] desired purpose" (Matusiak-Varley 2016, p.112)[5]. In this case, the language of the "epistemic framework" could be adopted as a tool, as part of the "language of explanation" for the audience.

Heathcote recognised that the act of explaining to an audience itself reinforces the knowledge that students have acquired ("if they teach it to somebody, if they make a demonstration of it, they own it" [1991].) The sense of an audience also removes the idea of a "dummy run": there is an immediate sense of purpose, because the knowledge is needed (to explain it to others). In the case of the Garden commission, Heathcote noted, "the commissioners were constantly assessing, evaluating and developing their ideas for their clients [and audiences] in immediate time" (2003, p.21).

In Mantle of the Expert, there is always a "client in the head"—the imagined "client" for whom the work is being done. This generates an awareness of both the needs of the "client," and the responsibility of the undertaking. Heathcote stated that, throughout work in the Commission Model, we also "carry our 'client' in our heads": "the future audience to whom we must communicate and demonstrate clearly, and face their questions". In her diary, Heathcote wrote:

> Who is all this doing for? Teachers who understand this notion of "the other" create for themselves a richer palette of tasks and behaviour than those who set tasks merely for the completing. Every task the commissioners undertook first had a powerful "other"—the garden for a hospital—to drive it. But each task also had its individual "otherness" because it was organised to be reflective. (Heathcote 2003 p.21.)

Arguably, the "client" in the Commission Model is never simply the organisation or individual which directly commissions the work. In the case of the Garden commission, Heathcote stated: "We were commissioners fulfilling an accepted commission for the citizens of Hexham": "'Our' garden would serve so long as the new hospital existed. We were aware that we might be patients in the hospital. Our babies may be born there and our relations might be visited during times of illness" (Heathcote 2003). These were the imagined or projected "clients in the head". This dimension of the work again makes the Commission Model very different from, say, forms of business training, where the commercial needs of the client are primary. The emphasis is on these imagined "clients," less as "end-users," but rather, as the "future audience" for the work; an "Other" that invokes, not only empathy, but "concern". Each task in the Garden commission had "its individual 'otherness'": it was "framed" in relation to an "Other," and the question: "Who is all this doing for?" We may say, indeed, that the work was situated in the "gap" between self and Other.

* "Voices"

Each episode and task in the project may be seen as a step or turn in the movement around the central line or question: "What are gardens for?" Heathcote acknowledged that the approach might seem, to an outsider, to be circuitous and indirect—avoiding in the early stages, for example, any direct questions about "design," or even curriculum learning (about plants etc.)[6]. In the first session, the team was invited to reflect on different types of garden, and the implications of names such as Zen, Bog, Memorial Garden etc. They were asked to "discuss details to be found in gardens like this, and to make sketches" (Heathcote 2001d). For the following session, the "senior" commissioners (i.e. the teachers) prepared poetical texts, as if in the "voice" of one of the garden types—for example:

> The Remembrance Garden
> I used to feel awkward, unworthy even, when

5 – Heathcote herself referred to this reflexive self-awareness as the "self-spectator." See O'Neill (2015), p.88.

6 – The final presentation of the Garden project to the Hospital Trust was introduced by Heathcote herself. She gave an overview of the project, but she did it "in role." She asked the Trust representatives to imagine that she was someone who had been appointed by them to attend meetings and keep an eye on the project as it unfolded. In this role, she appeared somewhat bemused, but intrigued, by some of the things she had seen. She observed: "And of course, my expectations were, that I would turn up the first meeting, and I would find people designing gardens" (Heathcote 2002b). She went on to explain, however, she did not witness any actual planning in any of the early project sessions.

> people visited me. It's awkward, you know when you don't know what people want from you. As time passed however, I began to get a feel for my role. The people who visit me are not unhappy. I am not a place to grieve. I provide support and encouragement; I help people to regain perspective, to regain control over their lives. People need my silence; they need my tranquilly. (Heathcote 2002a; emphasis in original[7].)

The students listened to each text in turn, and noted down any thoughts or impressions. Heathcote herself, in her diary, noted: "I ponder on what this task has to do with planning an actual hospital garden" (2003, p.22). In her planning for the session, she recorded that she wanted the students to listen to the statements and "visualise or note any emergent sense of mood of place". The aim was: "To 'lift' concepts of gardens out of information / factual level and provide mood and language 'dimension'"; and: "To see whether students can reach into dimension and mood elements. And capture any of this in their writing" (Heathcote 2001d).

It seems, then, that the aim was to create a "shift in the head" towards "the affective area" of experience (Heathcote 1978, p.16). Following the readings, groups of students gathered around the senior commissioners, and discussed how the particular "voice" affected "detail, images and clarity" (Heathcote 2001d) of the garden type. In the next session, they worked in small groups, with the teachers now as "scribes," to create a group "voice" of a garden genre of their own choosing. In this way, a collective body of words was created, a kind of "mind map" of different types. It is notable that this was not the language of "design," or factual knowledge; rather, it was poetic/evocative; legitimising the "poetic" as a way of knowing. The commissioners were working, in these initial phases, primarily in the frame of "artists"; the task placed a pressure on language, on finding the words to convey images and moods.

The texts anthropomorphised the different garden types. It was as if the students were being asked to see things from the point-of-view of the garden itself. There was an evocation of "concern" for the people who will use the garden; for example: "People need my silence; they need my tranquillity." Some lines evoked a sense of the rhythms of life in the garden: this is a line, for example, from a text entitled "I am a water garden": "... the cycle of water is constant and, come what may, will always be there" (Heathcote 2002a). Humanizing the "garden" as a "voice" was a way of emphasising the human meaning and value of the "garden," and how it might resonate with or affect the people who visit it. The garden was also positioned, interestingly, not as an object to be designed and then consumed, but as if it was itself a living entity, an "Other"; with the team placed in a position of "concern" and responsibility for this "Other."

* Imagined or Projected "Clients"

In her diary, Heathcote described a drama episode from the third session of the project. Members of the teaching team were seated. Each of them was holding a picture of someone, cut from a magazine: a bricklayer, a man planting seeds, a woman in a suit, etc. Below each picture there was a sign: "a visitor", "ward manager", "porter", and so on. These, then, were people who might be found in the garden. At first, students stood in groups around the different "roles" (who sat frozen as if in effigy), discussing how best they could approach talking to them about their plans for the garden (Heathcote 2003 p.23). In Heathcote's planning, she noted that the task required the students

> To empathise with [the] picture, consider "sign" details of picture, dress, age, attitude, physical position, facial features and stance. Use their empathetic observations to guide their discourse and projected language. (2001d.)

After a time, the signs were turned over, to reveal some writing on the other side. These were "attitude statements" for the different roles; and they were

> ambiguous to say the least—of the surgeon, "Hands are marvellous"; of the friend, "It's hard living in a new place—I'm glad we moved"; of the ward manager, "It's lovely to have a quiet moment"; of the cleaner, "Sorry Mary is leaving, we'll miss her"... (Heathcote 2003, p.23.)

The students now had to interpret the statements, and take them into consideration, as they continued to discuss how to talk to the person.

These, then, were imagined "clients" or future users of the garden. They were not presented, however, in

7 – There are no page numbers in the project booklet that was produced for the Hospital Trust.

terms of a problem or need that requires a solution. Rather, the elliptical comments on the signs ("Sorry Mary is leaving" etc.) invited the students to project themselves into the mind of the person. Arguably, this was less an exercise in empathy than in emotional intelligence in relationship with the "Other." There was a question implied in the very obliqueness of the statements: how do you engage with, and understand, the inner life of an "Other"?

The task placed the group in the frame of "guides," and it was so structured by Heathcote to ensure that there was an awareness of the need for selectivity in language for this "audience." She herself observed that a task such as this "takes us to the people using the garden, and our ideas about that. It doesn't take us to the garden made for the people [i.e. the actual design]. … We mustn't think we're any nearer the garden. But we're very near to the people" (Heathcote 2001a). These tasks were more turns in the "spiral," that continued the process of reflection on what is a garden for, and who; and understanding the place that the garden might have in people's lives.

* Interviews

A decision was made to undertake a survey in the community, to find out people's views about the new garden. In one of the sessions in the school, there was a kind of rehearsal for this task. Some of Dorothy's former students, including her colleague (and later biographer) Gavin Bolton, represented different people in the community, such as "various 'elderly' people with shopping bags and walking sticks, dressed warmly for a March day in Hexham" (Heathcote 2003, p.22). Each of the "roles" was given their own detailed personal "story" and biography. The students had to try to approach them and interview them. The frame in this case was "researcher." The session was not simply a form of practice or dummy run for the actual survey, however. At certain points, Heathcote called "Stop Time!"; the activity was paused, and the various "shoppers" were invited to give feedback on their experiences: "Were people courteously treated? Were explanations clear? Were the questionnaires easy to read and complete?" (and so on) (Heathcote 2003, p.22). Again, then, this was also an exercise in awakening an awareness of self in relation to "Other" (what Heathcote termed the "self-spectator"). Moreover, it seems that the aim was to encourage the commissioners to engage in real conversations with people, to avoid the danger of them feeling "interrogated." Kathy White-Webster, a teacher on the project, observes that the session "helped the students to see the different concerns garden users might have and to engage the heart in relation to different human contexts" (2020). Arguably, this session was as important, in building a sense of concern for imagined future "clients," as the actual survey in the community.

* The "Problem"

At a certain point in the project, a key problem was introduced: a model of the proposed garden location was brought in, and it was immediately clear that the height of the walls around it (8-9m) would limit the amount of light that could enter it. This shifted the "central line" to some extent, to the problem; but the focus was still not primarily on the design, but rather, on knowledge—on understanding the nature of the problem. This led, ultimately, to considering certain design elements, in the context of the need to bring colour and light into the garden (through, for example, light-coloured bricks in the paths, or the use of glass). The structure had moved from understanding "the people using the garden" to "the garden made for the people" (Heathcote 2001a). This also brought in curriculum work in different domains, e.g. in geography (such as the study of ecosystems) and biology (plant growth) (Palmer et al, 2001). In a booklet produced for the Hospital Trust, there was a chart in Heathcote's handwriting, which outlined the different strands in the work, pictured as the branches of a tree. The chart included the following notes:

> The final form of the garden requires information related to the service of people.
>
> Engineering and art must find a working arrangement to fulfil nature and art in use for purposes.
>
> The final garden form relies upon knowledge on these two fronts. "Fitness for purpose." (Heathcote 2002a.)

The commissioners divided into smaller teams. Each team had a specific focus: sunlight; plants; paving; water features; seating; glass; and levels. Heathcote also produced a chart (in the form of a step pyramid), to guide the work of the teams, defining the areas (or "steps") which all groups should consider.

Mood meaning:	The central concept has emerged as "atmosphere"
Memorial element:	Memorial is embedded in the original garden name [i.e. "Snowdrop Garden"]
Hospital. Regeneration:	Snowdrop is symbolic. After winter solstice / spring.
Scope of the domain features:	This is the detail focus. Each group has one domain
Design of fabrications / purpose/s / uses	Features intended. Suggestions well developed.
Suggestions for materials. Craftsmanship	Explanations detailed. "Illumination" for "audience"
Maintenance throughout seasons and future years	safety, preservation, security
Developments as garden is established—events, sales, uses	Seasons? Celebrations. Snowdrop days?
Keeping the garden "owned" by users—suggestions for organic des[ign]	"Friends" of the garden? Spinoffs.

(Heathcote 2002c.)

Each "step," Heathcote wrote, "widens and develops the domain while preserving the central elements of mood, atmosphere, memory/memorial, snowdrop motif and symbol" (ibid.)[8].

One group looked at the best plants for the garden, given the light conditions. (In the "tree" chart in the project booklet, Heathcote noted: "Plants: essential that wise informed choices are made; the site; the seasons; the symbolic; the development through time" [2002a].). The teacher working with this group, Les Palmer, produced a "mind map" of potential learning areas, with a key question at the centre: "What plants will grow?"; and arrows pointing to different aspects of the topic, with suggestions for practical activities, such as:

> Which plants will survive?
> Look at photosynthesis
> + what light intensities are best for p/s
> e.g. which plants prefer shade and which prefer bright light?
>
> Practical work
> - starch testing of different leaves
> - chromatography of " "
> - how light intensity influences the rate of p/s
> (Palmer 2001; emphasis in original.)

Other topics included: "How can we keep the plants alive?"; "Can we grow plants from seed?" and "How can we attract other species?" Palmer noted on the chart: "Essentially I wanted a series of lab based, practical exercises that would be done easily by a small group of students with minimal input from me, as a teacher" (Palmer 2001).

The "plants" team shared some of their findings with their "colleagues"—moving from "researcher" to "authority". Photographs in the Dorothy Heathcote Archive show them in the school lab, dressed in lab coats, demonstrating experiments to other students. The group also made a presentation to the Hospital Trust. The act of sharing became an exercise in the selective use of language—in this case, the language of plant growth, photosynthesis etc. The knowledge was acquired for an immediate purpose, and with an ever-present sense of audience / "clients."

The project culminated in group presentations to the Hospital Trust. What was evident in the presentations was the combination of "Engineering and art" [booklet]; and the concern to create "a garden made for people" (Heathcote 2001a). One group had researched the movement of the sun through the year, and the amount of light that would penetrate the garden in different seasons. They began their presentation by saying: "One of the concepts we thought about, is that light represents healing, and as it's a hospital garden, it will need a balance of light and dark in it" (Heathcote 2002b). Other groups showed an awareness of the need to use elements such as colour, water and glass, to lighten the atmosphere in the garden, and create "Mood meaning" (Heathcote 2002c).

One group prepared a presentation on ideas for memorial features. They proposed that the focal point of the garden should be a "Tree of Life", representing "birth, life and death". They suggested it should be made from metal; they had researched different materials such as copper and aluminium, and how they would age over time. The leaves, they suggested, should have inscriptions on them, with "celebrations like recoveries and births, thanks, dedications, thoughts about the life in a garden, and memory"; as well as quotations from local poets such as Wilfred Gibson and Linda France (e.g., "A birth is a song. Each note is a new colour, and glowing"; "From our

8 – The project booklet included notes on the symbolism of the snowdrop; for example: "The plant snowdrop—in the language of flowers it means HOPE, so I'm starting to realise why the original garden was given this name. It seems very appropriate for a garden in a hospital. (Heathcote 2002a; emphasis in original.)

soil, memorials will rise") (Heathcote 2002b)[9]. The group's presentation showed them working through different language forms and "frames"—as "artist," "authority," "researcher," and "guide."

* Outcome: "Publication"

> ... out of the old garden, a growing future ... begun in Queen Elizabeth High School, Hexham, to serve all who may use it ... (Heathcote 2002a.)

For the Hospital Trust, the Garden commission was, in effect, a form of community participation—a process that gave ownership to the community itself, to present their findings, make proposals, and play a role in "co-designing" the garden[10]. The landscape architect for the garden, John Goodfellow, stated that his design concept drew heavily on the children's work. It is evident that he was particularly influenced by their more "artistic" or "impressionistic" writings. He observed:

> This work sought to bring together the feelings likely to be experienced by the future users of the garden, and interestingly, of the garden itself. To these thoughts were added the practical results of a survey of local people into what they would hope to find in a new garden.
>
> In seeking to convert these thoughts into a practical yet imaginative design, which would meet the requirements of a wide range of users, I was struck by the poignancy of some of the verses produced by the pupils.
>
> From these sentiments I have the feeling that the garden should not be brash and modern, but appear worn, smooth, quiet and comforting. Above all, it should seem familiar . . . my concept is to create the feeling that the new building has been "lowered into place" over garden, which has been on the site for many years[.] (qtd. in Heathcote 2003, p.17.)

Heathcote stated that Commission Model projects should end in a form of "publication" or public sharing, and a major event to mark the occasion (Özen and Adıgüzel 2017, p.22). As she observed: "Realising now what we have learned, can understand, and put to use in our lives, that previously we had not recognised. Publishing careful organised results provides the necessary casting off point of realisation" (2002d). This "outcome" for the Garden commission, then, was not simply the design of a "product," but the public presentation to an audience, and with it, the "realisation" of learning. She stressed to the teachers in Hexham:

> ... this is a teaching enterprise. It's not just providing a garden. It's realising what we know because we provided a garden. So learning how to learn is one of the most important features ... because we're not just using the children. We're teaching, because that's what we are for. (Heathcote 2001a.)

Knowledge, in the Commission Model, becomes something to be worked on, used, applied in context. Learning "how to learn" may imply an awareness of "ways of knowing": an ability to apply different ways of thinking ("frames") to knowledge. "Realisation" may mean, then, not simply a recognition of the "things that we know", but "how we know them" (Robinson 1984). In this way, the Commission Model is not simply dedicated to breaking down the walls between schools and society at large; but to creating a paradigm shift in the "philosophical basis" of education; and with it, to change "the world of the school" (Heathcote 1978, p.16).

9 – We have not been able to trace the source of the quotations from the work of local poets.

10 – The term "co-designing" appears in the "Co-Production Ladder", a chart produced by the New Economics Foundation which attempts to categorise different forms of community participation in projects—distinguishing between forms of "doing with" such as co-producing and co-designing, and "doing for" (engaging, consulting, informing). For more details, see: https://www.businesslab.co.nz/insights/consultation-versus-engagement. Design thinking generally remains on the level of "doing for"—however much the design team seeks to "empathise" with "users."

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