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Drama-in-English: the significance of role

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Drama-in-English: the significance of role

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Abstract

This article explores how Dorothy Heathcote's approach to role can inform learning in English. It is founded on a conception of drama and role-play that is closely aligned with Heathcote's understanding of the possibilities of careful attention to sign and to the nuances of an assumption or suggestion of role that maybe realised in a variety of forms, appropriate to classroom constraints. It references a small-scale case study that drew on the stimulus of Heathcote's role conventions to teach literary texts in English classrooms and considers the possibilities of media production in underlining the generative trajectory of the sign through live embodiment to recorded dramatic interaction.

Keywords: case study, drama conventions, media production, role, sign

Introduction

This article explores how Dorothy Heathcote's approach to role can inform learning in English. It is founded on a conception of drama and role-play that is closely aligned with Heathcote's understanding of the possibilities of careful attention to sign and to the nuances of what may be a relatively brief or low key assumption or creation of role, appropriate to the constraints of most English classrooms. The cultural theorist and Professor of Drama, Raymond Williams (1975, p.15) regards dramatisation as an everyday aspect of our 'active living relationships... our ways of seeing and knowing.' There are what Gavin Bolton (1998, p.250) calls 'acting behaviours' associated with immersion in forms of fiction that can happen very briefly and at different stages of a lesson, initiated by an invitation to wonder or imagine, or a shift into a storytelling mode. Heathcote (2015c, p.74) recognises that both *doing* and *seeing* or spectating are key to learning, giving 'power to the class'. In English classrooms, this approach can have powerful effects, from the simplest creation of a still image or examination of a significant object to the making of a short film. In our (Bryer, Pitfield and Coles, 2023) book we offer plenty of examples of drama-in-English or 'reading through drama' (Pitfield, 2020) that can happen without much fanfare, involving the evolution of a hinterland around a text or what Cecily O'Neill (1995, p.xvi) calls a 'web of meaning'; an implied past, present or future of the characters, for example. In planning for such activities, it can be helpful to think about events that are pertinent to the narrative but not elaborated on in a text: the incident in Weed from John Steinbeck's *Of Mice and Men*; the event that happens three years before the start of Malorie Blackman's *Noughts and Crosses*, when Callum's Mother refuses to provide an alibi for Sephy's Mother and loses her job; or a flash-forward to a meeting of the characters ten years after the events of Lorraine Hansbury's *A Raisin in the Sun*, for example. Canonical texts can be enlarged by thinking about events from the perspective or point of view of a silent or minor character who may have overheard or seen something, like the female domestic staff (the maid who witnesses the Carew murder, or Hyde's housekeeper) in Robert Louis Stevenson's male-dominated *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*.

Frame

Betty Jane Wagner (1976, pp.68-69) recognises that for Heathcote, establishing the attitude of those in role is a prerequisite for exploring a subject through drama. Allan Owens and Keith Barber (2001, p.11) refer to role as 'adopting an attitude'. Myra Barrs (1987, p.11), who worked alongside Heathcote, picks up on this in her recognition of the power of writing in role: 'Role is another way of focusing – of taking up an attitude to your material.'

Heathcote's understanding of role as frame developed from her interest in a sociological perspective relating to the work of Erving Goffman (1974) (O'Neill, 2015, p.39). She conceptualises degrees of role-taking or role-creation that incorporate what she refers to as a 'syntax of signal and response' (Heathcote, 2015a, p.89), recognising how different behaviours represent shifts in, 'The balance of power between the spectator of an event and the participant in an event' (1984a, p.135). Through the process she identifies graduations of role-taking behaviours that are not to do with character (those involved are not necessarily playing specific parts). Her focus is on what might be defined as a context or situation-specific form of role and on shifting points of view, with a distinction between those who

show and those who watch an event (1984a, p.135). This is clearly not drama centred around 'confrontations between individuals, lived at life-rate' (O'Neill, 2015, p.40), but Heathcote does not take performance out of the equation. She offers opportunities to slow dramatic interactions down, in order to explore their significance. The process offers participants different ways of interpreting what is happening, or has happened, opening up questions about the dramatic action that is being explored. The drama that Heathcote (1984a, pp.131-137) describes to exemplify this aspect of her theory involves a class of nine-year-old children finding out about Joseph Lister and his medical innovations and their significance for modern medicine. Heathcote's (1984a, p.132) aim is to move the class on from the 'hold and grip of a story' to 'getting the children deeply involved with the meaning and outcome of the material'. This motivation to educate the children through 'looking *with* Lister, not *at* Lister' (Heathcote, 2015a, p.90, her italics), underlines her proposition that assuming a role changes what the children visualise or how they interpret what they see.

John Carroll, a long-term collaborator of Heathcote's, particularly around the Dr Lister drama (Carroll, 1984), theorised aspects of the grammar of process drama, focusing on the ways that the dramatic action frames role-players and on the implications of the choices that teachers and students make, in terms of their distance from or closeness to the dramatic event (Carroll, 1986). From a teacherly perspective there is significant crafting involved in setting up this approach, relating to choices made about the frame or 'the perspective from which people are coming to enter the event.... the main agent in providing tension and meaning for the participants' (Heathcote, 1984b, p.163). Introducing some distance from an emotional or highly dramatic event means that those involved are better placed to evaluate what is happening; in role as archaeologists, rather than those who experienced the tragedy they are unearthing, for example (Wagner, 1976, p.115). In teaching literature, the drama can be angled to incorporate those who are marginalised or whom appear to have less status. The complex processes of distancing or examining a situation, event or issue are made more accessible for teachers through Heathcote's thirty-three role conventions (2015b, pp.79-87).

Research with student-teachers

In this article I explain the relevance of Heathcote's (2015b) conventions with reference to examples from English classrooms drawn from a small-scale case study (Yin, 2018) conducted with my student-teachers enrolled on University College London's Institute of Education *English with Drama Post-Graduate Certificate of Education* (PGCE) in 2022 and from my current students' experiences on the same PGCE course in the academic year 2023/2024. The focus of the research was how the student-teachers learnt about using drama-in-English and Heathcote's role conventions; how they responded to the practical activities that I initiated and how they were able to integrate such approaches in their English classrooms, while on school placement. The data I draw on emerged from a series of semi-structured interviews that were woven through the end of the PGCE year, that involved the student-teachers reflecting on their experiences of initiating drama-in-English. Ethical clearance was given (by UCL) for all of the research that I reference and I use culturally-specific pseudonyms for students' names here, unless they are directly quoted. I endeavoured to generate a collegial sense of the student-teachers and I, learning from each other, through the processes of reflecting on using Heathcote's role

conventions in the classroom. I was careful to make a distinction between my role as teacher-educator and as researcher through the process but also recognised the ways that both positions offered me productive insights (Gray, 2003; Willis, 2000). Gray (2003, p.22) describes this reflexive research process as entering into a range of dialogues: with the subjects of the research; with different theoretical frameworks; with the evidence itself; with colleagues and through its final presentation, in this form, in our book (Bryer, Pitfield and Coles, 2023) and as I continue sharing the outcomes with student-teachers and peers. Media production adds a significant dimension to Heathcote's approach that I touch on later, drawing on the case study that informed my doctoral thesis (Bryer, 2020) about the flexibility and affordances of role. This small-scale qualitative research project included multimodal analysis of video observation of practical work and of the short films that the students involved produced.

The relationship between reading and enactment

In Barrs' (1987) article, 'Voice and role in reading and writing', she draws on her experience of watching Heathcote and listening to the way that she theorised a drama about Shelley's *Ozymandias*, to propose an account of the reading process closely connected to the assumption of role or enactment (Rosenblatt, 1978). Barrs (1987, p.8) argues that becoming lost in a book, either reading aloud or silently, means that 'in some way we enact, or perform, the text.' She (1987, p.9) credits Heathcote for having alerted her to the possibilities of drama in action and on paper, through the ways that 'children taking part in her dramas were able to access linguistic registers that they might not normally be expected to be able to use.' We (Coles and Bryer, 2018) note the way that Barrs builds on Vygotsky's (1978) championing of make-believe play as key to children's developing imagination to argue that:

"reading, writing, play, drama and games should be regarded as closely related systems of representation embedded in social practice, all involving the creation of fictional worlds and the assumption of roles." (Coles and Bryer, 2018, p.56)

Barrs and Valerie Cork's (2001, p.209) research in primary classrooms demonstrated how drama offers an immediate route into a fictional situation. The authors draw on Wolfgang Iser's (1978) suggestion that literary texts inspire 'performances' of meaning – 'that is, their readers are led to create or reenact the text or to picture the text as they read' (Barrs and Cork, 2001, p.36). Their (2001, p.36) sense of the creation or co-construction of a performance of meaning through role-play is associated with Jerome Bruner's work (1986) and the notion of a 'virtual text' which is not the actual text 'but the text which the reader has constructed under its sway' that may go on to have another life in the form of drama or even film. John Yandell (2014, p.108) refers to these outcomes as 'embodied readings.'

In O'Neill and Rogers' (1994) seminal account of the relationship between drama and reading, the authors foreground the way that drama fulfils Roland Barthes' (1975) promise of becoming a producer rather than a consumer of text through the shaping of 'ideas, feelings and attitudes' in bodily form (O'Neill and Rogers, 1994, p.51). They (1994, p.51) explain how the process heightens the active role of the reader in the interpretive process, creating 'a bridge between the abstraction of the written word and the students' understandings.' Rogers, O'Neill and Jasinski (1995) offer more explicit suggestions and examples in a short article about a drama based on Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mocking Bird*. The

authors (1995, p.42) identify the possibilities for learning when students are offered the opportunity to 'create multiple worlds and possibilities of meaning not only through word, but also through gesture, visualization, and movement'. Reading the ways that their fellow students have interpreted the text with their bodies is a prompt to recognise the relationship between the physical and the metaphorical in the classroom.

Conceptualising Drama-in-English

Reflecting on the kind of drama that we (Bryer, Pitfield and Coles, 2023) propose for English classrooms takes me back to a seminar room in the second week of the *English with Drama* PGCE, in September 2023. We had been discussing Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*, having read Chapter 8 and compared some screen versions in a lecture that morning. David Allen was doing a workshop with the PGCE group and on his suggestion, Abena came forward and following other student-teachers' directions, assumed the role of Miss Havisham, in the form of a portrait as she appears to the protagonist, Pip, when he first encounters her. The task sent the student-teachers darting back to the text to check which aspects of her appearance were particularly salient or criterial (Kress, 2010) in that moment – her head leaning on her hand, or the white cardigan that someone placed 'dependent from her hair' (as Dickens puts it), that while Abena adjusted her posture to accommodate it, seemed appropriately transformative. We discussed what might happen next; whether someone might take her hand to bring her to life from the portrait so that she could speak to us. At that point, we considered what role we might assume in speaking back to her. If we had read further in the novel, perhaps it might be the collective role of Pip or Estella as their older selves seeking some pressing answers to their questions. Or it might be a servant in the future that dusts the portrait and wonders about Miss Havisham's bizarre attire, her ghostly aspect and mournful expression.

Creating a portrait like this or presenting the class with someone in 'role as portrait of a person' is number 5 of Heathcote's role conventions (2015b, p.80). These forms of role-creation or role-play are intended to encourage a class to focus on the interpretation of meaning; to attend to the nuances of the text in the form of the written word or as it might be embodied or implied in economical and significant ways. It was through these conventions that Heathcote developed practical ideas about how to distance or examine a character, situation or issue by 'encouraging a range of interpretations through re-framing, de-familiarising, and changing perspectives on the event' as O'Neill and Rogers (1994, p.50) put it. The Brechtian notion of 'making strange' is clearly relevant to the ways that this form of role creation can provide critical insights into a text (Eriksson, 2023).

Heathcote (2015b, p.83) is interested in the 'implications for learning' denoted by props or 'Objects to represent a person's interest' that a teacher might select, anticipating the potential for engagement with a narrative through the questions that they pose students whose role maybe signified by the frame of a police report that they are given to fill out, for example. My PGCE colleagues, Gillian Anderson, Martha Lord and Fiona Stockdale-Adams, refer to these as 'character bags' - bags of props suggestive of the identity of characters in a story or text that they offer as a stimulus for creative writing in different forms. These prompts to the imagination are intended to encourage students to develop a specific relationship

with a narrative or text and/or the characters within it; a critical dimension that is nurtured through the careful examination of material things, with a view to making meaning or reading the signs.

In many respects there are parallels between Heathcote's conventions and the drama strategies summarised by Jonothan Neelands and Tony Goode (2015) in their influential book, *Structuring Drama Work: 100 Key Conventions for Theatre and Drama*. In the first edition Neelands and Goode (1990, p.4) distinguish between different conventions on the basis of '*time, space and presence*' (their italics), comparing the life-rate of improvisation with the arresting of time in a still image, for example. They (ibid, p.6) distinguish further between four forms of dramatic action: context-building; narrative; poetic and reflective action. All of the conventions that come under these headings imply forms of role-play, whether they involve devising a scene, rehearsing a script, making a soundtrack or responding to 'Unfinished Materials' (ibid, p.16). Heathcote's role conventions (2015b) are suggestive of her interest in semiotics and design. Unlike Neelands and Goode (2015) she interrogates the possible implications of the form or medium in which a role might be implied. A letter presented to the class in different ways, some discarded clothing, objects, a coded message, or a secret sign are all suggestive of a role with whom they are associated (Heathcote, 2015b, pp.82-87). Neelands (2010, p.xviii) identifies Heathcote's approach as distinctive because her focus on role relates specifically to learning and reflection rather than a dramatic or performative response. Research related to my thesis (Bryer and Coles, 2021) alerted us to the potential for learning in relatively fleeting moments of role-play or expressions of role initiated by a storytelling tone or visual stimuli that hint at a context or events of a narrative, prompting students to put on their 'drama eyes', as Heathcote (1991) termed it. I am particularly interested in students' responses to assuming or creating a role and how this form of engagement might be expressed through embodied dramatic action, orally or in writing.

Hot seating

Heathcote (2015b, p.79) describes the first of her conventions as:

1. The role actually present, naturalistic yet significantly behaving, giving and accepting responses.

This approach might be described as 'hot seating' - something that many English teachers experiment with, presumably, because it appears to be relatively manageable. It tends to involve students questioning an individual who has assumed the role of a character. Several student-teachers in the 2022 research project reported using this approach in their English classrooms, sometimes without much success, in terms of student engagement and opportunities for learning. In reflecting on the limitations of the approach, we identified that there were issues when students were not clear about their responsibilities or were not able to respond in significant ways in role, perhaps because they did not have sufficient knowledge of the text or of their character's role within it. One of the student-teachers, Erin, found taking on a role herself gave her more control over a more deliberately staged encounter with the character of Fagin. This involved students doing homework to identify how Fagin is represented including an intriguing question about what they might want to ask the character, 'if they ever met him'. Before assuming the role, Erin asked the class how she might embody Fagin and then noticed how

hard students worked to recall the details of all that they had read, viewed and written about the character in directing her. This slow shift into role, managed in the considered way that Heathcote (2015c, p.75) suggests, provided time and space for the young students to ask questions about Fagin's motivations and his context that they found intriguing and even disturbing.

We considered the potential in offering the students a role to inform their dramatic engagement with a character, as Heathcote recommends. The roles of police inspectors or of the children who work for Fagin or even of 21st century literary critics, offer a range of perspectives and possibilities for further interrogation of the novel, its socio-economic context and the attitudes that the author expresses through his characterisation. This more nuanced dramatic interaction implies that the questioners assume more responsibility for exercising a degree of sensitivity in endeavouring to find out more about a character's motivations or inner life, or even how they are represented in a text.

Creating and sharing resources

Heathcote's (2015c, p.70) interest in the ways that signs or the visual dimension of a person in role, an image or object, accrue meaning in relation to a narrative, provided a prompt for some student-teachers to experiment around the creation of images. Lisa used the maps in J. R. Tolkien's *The Hobbit* and L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* as a stimulus for her class to create similar materials about places that they wanted to write about. Asha's class created First World War recruitment posters as part of their research about the context of Michael Morpurgo's *Private Peaceful*. Erin and Rachel's students create 'Wanted' posters for Fagin and Magwitch relating to Heathcote's (2015b, p.81) Convention 8, 'The role depicted in picture... This includes those made by the class'. Both student-teachers noted how the activity prompted their students to refer back to the text in framing the characters as criminals in their historical context.

There were some instances of experimentation in enrolling students. Heathcote (2015b, p.83) recognises the power of the detective role with 'a puzzle to solve' once a class are presented with particular evidence. Penny decorated her classroom with posters that included puzzling messages relating to *Romeo and Juliet* and suggested that as citizens of Verona, her students needed to work together to make sense of them. There are echoes in this of Heathcote's (2015b, p.87) interesting Convention 31 'The finding of a cryptic code message.' With reference to Heathcote's conventions 22-24 (2015b, p.85), relating to letters, Asha offered her students a copy of an authentic, handwritten draft of Wilfred Owen's (1918) poem *Mental Cases* and asked them to infer what the author's state of mind might have been, when he wrote it. She recognised the possibilities in enrolling the students as doctors at Craiglockhart Military Hospital, where Owen was staying, providing a more direct engagement with the evidence of shell shock that informs the poem.

The student-teachers discussed how doing drama meant that students had the opportunity to explore the nuances or narrative implications of incidents in a text. Penny reported that it was only when she asked her students to assume the collective role of Juliet that they recognised how desperate the character's situation was, following her parents' demand that she marry Paris (*Romeo and Juliet*, Act 3, Scene 5).

Sign making

The student-teachers experimented with some embodied interactions, recognising the potential of the body as a significant interpretive resource. Asha identified how useful it was to engage a student audience in working out which moments from the first stave of Dickens' *A Christmas Carol* that their peers were representing, through close analysis of the signs that they made in a series of still images. Noting the choices made by their peers provided a memorable recap of the plot and an opportunity to debate which aspects of the stave seemed most significant. There is another dimension to this kind of activity that a student-teacher in this year's cohort (2023/2024) was struck by. Emma involved her class of 11-12-year-olds in assuming roles to represent characters in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, as she narrated the complex plot. As she explains:

I knew that the physical embodiment of the characters helped make the plot more accessible and memorable because the next lesson students could not wait to relay the plot back to me, enthusiastically referencing certain classmates' performances, for example, one student exclaiming that they knew "Demetrius *definitely* did not love Helena back" because of the way another "literally aired her and turned away when she spoke."

In Emma's classroom the peopling of the text with their peers appeared to have generated a sense of ownership over the play. The characters' intentions and relationships were animated by the kinds of gestures and responses that pattern students' day-to-day interactions, in very compelling ways. The multimodalist Roberta Taylor's (2016) research identifies similar forms of engagement realised in gesture, posture, gaze and language that cohere around two students working to create a modernised version of a scene from *Macbeth*. Taylor (2016, p.83) focuses on the 'texture' of snatched moments of role-play and identifies how this playful approach informs the students' shared writing. Another of the student-teachers from that cohort, Sophie, engaged her 11-12-year-old students in enacting a battle, through still images and slow motion, as an aspect of their reading of Murpurgo's *Arthur, High King of Britain*. In talking with one of her students some time afterwards, she noticed how the affective dimension of enacting battle movements had stayed with him, so that he made swooshing sword motions as he recalled words like 'brutal' that he had encountered in his reading and discussion of the text. We (Bryer and Coles, 2021) identify this form of 'reanimation' or 'multimodal discourse around text' as a particularly generative aspect of drama-in-English.

Media production – further possibilities

Heathcote (2015c, p.71) understood that drama is a way of realising the potential in a 'meticulously selective and complete signing system as our means of communication'. In recognising the significance of the visual prompt she highlights the design work that can be an aspect of role creation. Determining which objects might be shared with a class to facilitate the exploration of implications involves both aesthetic and intellectual choices. Eriksson (2023) recognises Heathcote's priorities as a form of Brechtian poetics. In my own work, I regard this crafting as a key process in alerting students to the formal dimensions of the pre-text that informs the drama (O'Neill, 1995, p.15). The props that we (Bryer, Lindsay and Wilson, 2014) chose as a stimulus for drama and media production based on Edgar Allan Poe's *The Raven* were suggestive of the Gothic elements of the poem, for example. There is more

research to be done about how these aesthetic considerations facilitate the processes of transmediation that students engage in as they adapt the literature that they are studying.

Of Heathcote's (2015b, pp.79-86) thirty-three role conventions, those that involve the role as effigy, as portrait, and as picture come before those that involve verbal interaction - a conversation overheard, for example. She (2015b, p.80) is interested in what she called the 'movement into the symbolical' that the role as image initiates because, 'Students are not asked to interact with the *actual* person but with the *meaning* of the person' (ibid, p.81, her italics). In favouring approaches to role that, 'Unlike television with its fast moving action/image... function more like slides or stills, causing infinitesimal decisions to be made by the children' (1984b, p.168), she seems to hint at the power of the still image, or photograph, to encourage close visual analysis. In our experience, taking still photos as well as moving images or video, and editing them together to create an impression of animation, can facilitate this slowing down of time and the potential for a closer interrogation of dramatic interaction. We (e.g. Bryer, Lindsay and Wilson, 2014; Coles and Bryer, 2018; Bryer and Coles, 2021) have been experimenting with the adaptation, interpretation or reading through forms of media production for over a decade, recognising it as an aspect of drama-in-English that offers many possibilities for learning about texts and the author's craft – about genre, narrative tropes, language, mood and the perspectives of different characters, for example. We regard filmmaking as an extension of drama-in-English, offering opportunities to craft role-play or dramatic action that is mediated through lenses, screens and editing software. Media production tends to involve forms of intertextuality in productive ways, drawing on students' familiar cultural contexts and referencing the many texts that they are familiar with beyond the school curriculum. Using cameras to interpret literary texts offers students opportunities to insert themselves into narratives and to critique and subvert the representation of characters in salient ways, authoring their own readings that feature themselves, clearly visible, in role. The technology offers students the opportunity to direct the gaze of their audience and to draw out the potential symbolism in a close up on an eye, gesture or a prop, reminiscent of Heathcote's crafted approach.

In our experience Gothic texts like Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; Poe's *The Raven*; Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* offer possibilities for the adaptation of dramatic interactions that provide significant opportunities to consider the relationship between the genre of horror and the Gothic tradition. Working with students of different ages, we find that the invitation to make one-minute sequences in response to *The Raven* tends to direct filmmakers' attention to significant aspects of the poem's tone and language. We are specific in our request that students draw inspiration from the eerie end of the fourth stanza:

“And so faintly you came tapping, tapping at my chamber door,
That I scarce was sure I heard you” – here I opened wide the door; –

This encourages a slowing down of time and a build up of tension, that may involve uncanny images including shadows and strange arrangements of objects and figures that reference aspects of the poem's visual landscape and themes. The sailors coming back to life as zombies in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*; Dr Jekyll's transformation into Mr Hyde as witnessed by his friend at the window and the moment that Frankenstein's creature comes to life, offer similarly rich stimuli.

Using tablets to film and edit means that the students' improvisatory work is reflected back to them, offering them possibilities for revision and transformation that prompt criticality and reflexivity. Attention to the large tablet screen as they are filming, encourages this movement between enactment and direction. There are echoes in this pattern of filmmaking with the way that Heathcote paused to reflect on the drama in progress and to evaluate its direction (Wagner, 1976, pp.80-82). This conjunction of drama and film is productive because of the ways that the playful and spontaneous dramatic response becomes potent images, available to support communication and understanding and open to further manipulation. The motivated signs made by the body or bodies in live drama accrue further significance when framed on screen. In my research (Bryer, 2020) visual stimuli that were suggestive of different kinds of roles emerged as a kind of focal point or locus for students' emotional engagements, orientations and imaginations, expressed in their animated responses as they were viewing and editing.

As Heathcote (2015c) recognised, working in role sensitises learners to the bodily signs made by their peers, encouraging them to make meaning in relation to an over-arching narrative. Cameras and editing software can heighten this awareness of signs and of the representation of characters, opening up opportunities for critical analysis in accessible ways. These forms of embodiment and signing are rarely recognised as evidence of learning, despite their generative and reanimating potential. Heathcote (2015c, p.74) suggests that 'Role helps them [the students] do, and the teacher helps them to see' (her italics). The notion of a lens that role-play might bring to the interpretation of a moment from the text that is enacted, is metaphorical, but it is clear that these forms of live and recorded dramatic action are a powerful tool in the development of opinions that maybe expressed orally or in writing (Coles and Bryer, 2018). In inserting themselves into a narrative, students are able to generate interpretations that may contest and subvert conventional readings, supported by intertextual links that are brought into play through the creative process. Heathcote's role conventions lend themselves to exploration of aspects of a text, acting as pre-texts for drama or what O'Neill (1995, p.15) calls 'designs for action.' When making short films, although students maybe more likely to assume protagonist roles (Bryer 2020, p.90), the camera and editing software can act as distancing devices suggestive of the perspective of a witness or minor character, for example. The material frame of the tablet screen offers opportunities for the interrogation of still and moving images and the search for implications, in generative ways. This form of media production might be regarded as an additional drama or role convention, particularly in English classrooms.

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