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COLLABORATION VS. CO-OPERATION

By Gilbert Halcrow, Island School Hong Kong

At a recent creative arts transition day, I asked P6 students from our feeder primary schools if they could tell me the difference between co-operation and collaboration. The students were confounded, as many of them considered the two words mean the same. Finally I gave them my current definition. "Co-operation is positive, but passive. Collaboration is when you actively add value to working in a group".

Collaboration is proclaimed as a vital 21st century learning skill, yet how many of our students can articulate their current ability as collaborators? How many of our students still think the quality of their work is determined by the luck of who they have in their group? Do any of our students see collaboration as a set of social and creative strategies that can be developed over time?

In Theatre and Drama education the failure of collaboration is a common frustration, particularly within a curriculum based around group-devised performance. As Drama teachers we often mediate; part attorney, part UN peace-keeper and on occasion World Cup referee ready to 'red card' for foul play.

Teachers develop and collect various strategies to expedite these negotiations, but aspects of my work converged to make me realise a systematic approach towards the teaching of collaboration within Theatre and Drama education was necessary. An approach most importantly that facilitated learners' ownership of their development.

Island School Hong Kong

Island School is one of a number of secondary, primary and through-schools that make up the English School's Foundation in Hong Kong. The schools attract a comprehensive intake and English is the medium of instruction.

Island School Theatre Drama Department delivers GCSE Drama, BTEC Performing Arts and IB Theatre. All students study Drama discretely in Years 7 to 9 and the curriculum introduces learners to the context of theatre in contemporary culture and the power of drama as a medium of inquiry, challenge and change.

I arrived at Island School in August 2008 into a department with a rich tradition of both theatre skill delivery and the use of process drama as a medium of social education. As a new department we set about establishing our educational values and top of our list was 'Ensemble'. It was an absolute non-negotiable for the department that a collective and collaborative culture is at the heart of all we develop.

If 'Ensemble' is central to our work and a collaborative culture essential, then we could no longer simply deal with 'group work' in the reactive manner. We needed a proactive and systematic model to develop the skills we valued as educators.

Converging on this, Island School was developing whole school AFL practice and on-line formative assessment. This demanded clarity around all assessment criteria so learners and teachers could easily dialogue to establish attainment and targets for future progress.

In response to whole school demands and reflecting the values the department had established we agreed on 4 areas of assessment: Collaboration, Dramatic Literacy, Dramatic Synthesis and Reflection. These are used in Year 7 to Year 9 assessment as well as alongside the curriculum assessment criteria of GCSE, IB Theatre and BTEC Performing Arts.

Dramatic Literacy refers to the acquisition of performance skills and understanding of performance genres. Dramatic Synthesis focuses on the reoccurring interplay between audience, form, and content and a 5 staged 'meta-approach' (similar to the 'Design Cycle') to creation of dramatic material. Reflection assesses the critical thinking necessary to analyse and evaluate learners' dramatic work (process and outcome), the work of others, and the learner's long-term progress as theatre practitioners.

Development of Collaborative Dispositions

Like many teachers over the years we had been involved in team building exercises and had built up highly creative and functional cohorts of learners. Quality communication and trust lay at the heart of all successful groups, but these qualities are outcomes.

What needed to be established were the actions and attitudes that created this functional environment during collaboration. In addition it needed to be a taxonomy that was transferable from group to group and that a learner could use over time to target and develop their collaborative skills.

I had used De Bono's techniques often and had found lateral thinking strategies excellent in brainstorming and developing ideas into practical action plans. I had also seen wonderful ideas lost or underdeveloped as learners got up on their feet to actualise their performance.

The dynamics of ensembles as they

develop dramatic material, create unique social and task management challenges. The model for teaching Collaborative skills therefore had to be durable across all the Phases of Dramatic Synthesis; from concept to performance.

It was at this point a department colleague produced a wonderful book on devising entitled *Improvisation Learning through Theatre, D W Booth/C J Lundy, 1985*. It contained a number of relevant ideas and strategies for drama education, but its most powerful insight came in the form of an exhaustive list of 20 personalities necessary for the successful development of dramatic material.

A significant aspect of this model was that the 'personalities' were divided equally between those that focused on task management and others concerned with the productive social dynamics. This division between task and group persists through to our final model.

A 'personality/role' driven model appealed to us and we agreed upon the term 'Disposition'. Teachers often speak in terms of learners being predisposed to behaviours and abilities. The word 'Disposition' therefore, offers recognition that learners have a preferred, but not fixed way of approaching collaboration.

There was some overlap between Booth & Lundy's list of 20 personalities and we had set about to reduce these when a chance encounter with an old friend and mentor, introduced me to the ideas of Meredith Belbin *(Personalities of Collaboration; Various; Dr Meredith Belbin 78 – 82)*. Belbin's work focused on the effective collaboration of adult teams in the private sector, but still revolved around the idea of different types of personalities or roles that were necessary for success.

After some weeks of reflection we established two sets of 7 Dispositions; one set focused on group dynamics and the other on task management.

Each Disposition has a very tight set of behaviours that are engaged in during

collaboration. From the group-focused set the *Harmonizer, Translator* and *Relation Manager* might all seem to overlap but each focus on very specific aspects of group dynamics.

The *Harmonizer* focuses only on the general well being of the group; noting energy levels, output and suggesting brakes or shifts in approach. The *Translator* focuses specifically on communication and when there is misunderstanding they seek a solution through language not the relationship behind the words. Finally the *Relations Manager* is focused on the familiar role of conflict resolution.

Group Focused	Task focused
*Translator	Polisher
Harmonizer	Reality Tester
Energizer	Out-of-the-boxer
Active Listener	Chair
Total Observer	Evaluator
Relations Manager	Shaper
Excellence Controller	Specialist

To help us, and our students remember, the first letter of each disposition spells Theatre Process.

I am sure that there could be more or less Dispositions but for our department the 14 divisions offer the right amount of demarcation of responsibility to be an effective model. Over the last 2 years, the Dispositions have satisfactorily diagnosed the symptoms of group failure, facilitated self and peer assessment and most importantly given students ownership as they target and develop their collaborative skills.

Working with the Dispositions

In term 1 learners undertake traditional ensemble building, are introduced to role, narrative structures and the Phases of Synthesis. In term 2 we specifically teach the Dispositions of Collaboration and how to apply them as learners develop dramatic material. These are some of the exercises we have developed to introduce them to the key Dispositions.

Directing Shapes is a simple but effective exercise introducing students to the Disposition of the *Chair* and the *Active Listener*. In groups of 4/5, 1 student must direct peers to create a square or equilateral triangle. The students represent the corners of the shape and they must be directed to be equal distance apart. If you have a tiled floor this will be easy for you and eventually students work it out. I have however found that a measuring tape can really get the competition going.

A variation on this is that only the *Chair* speaks and you can ask peers to listen to see if the *Chair's* tone is passive, aggressive or assertive. You can have 1 or all peers speak, but allow only 'affirming comments or clarifying questions' to introduce learners to active listening. Another variation is that with each change of the *Chair* reduce the time to complete the task, focusing on the time management aspect of the *Chair's* role.

Active Whisper has many variations and while not whispered, information is past between learners via an *Active Listener*. Variation is based on how long the chain of

participant is and how many other Dispositions you include between *Active Listeners*. We use it to introduce learners to the important Dispositions of *Out-of-the-boxer* and *Shaper*.

An *Out-of-the boxer* is given 1 minute to 'suspend their judgment' and come up with as many performance ideas about a particular theme, narrative or issue. The *Active Listener* affirms whilst they listen and is then given 1 minute to ask questions that seek detail and clarity and/or prompt the *Out-of-the-boxer* into more spontaneous creativity. The *Active Listener* and the *Out-of-the-boxer* then moves to another group where the listeners reiterate the ideas expressed without developing any content. The *Out-of-the-boxer* then assesses the quality of the *Active Listener's* recount.

This can then be passed to a *Shaper* and the process can be repeated. The role of *Shaper* is to recognize promising patterns and develop upon them. The use of *Active Listener* in this exercise makes learners consider what it is they are actually doing when they generate ideas. This strict sequencing makes learners really consider the very different behaviours of spontaneous thought, listening and developing ideas that often seem indivisible in the usual dynamics of collaboration.

Dispositions and the Phases of Dramatic Synthesis

While the Dispositions are introduced initially by developing unrelated material, we quickly move to develop material relevant to the focus of the term's scheme. We then reintroduce the Phases of Dramatic Synthesis from the previous term.

As part of other research and development we established a 5-stage approach to the Phases of Dramatic Synthesis. These phases are:

• Establish Performance Context
• Define Success Criteria
• Divergent Phase
• Convergent Phase and
• Rehearsal.

Experience over the last 2 years has taught us, particularly with devised material, that the first 2 are brief (1 lesson for an eight week process or 1 to 2 minutes for in lesson presentations) and the final 3 roughly represent a third of the process each.

It is clear that during certain Phases of Dramatic Synthesis some Dispositions are more relevant than others. The table below outlines the Disposition we have found more effective than others at certain phases of the generation of dramatic material.

creative process and are necessary to maximise success.

Synthesis in 20 minutes is an exercise where we prepare an in-lesson presentation strictly going through the phases in set times. Give 5 minutes to the first 2 phases and 5 minutes respectively to the final 3 stages. Each 5 minutes is punctuated with a clear description to learners of what should be achieved, in terms of process and what Dispositions dominate during each phase.

Dispositions and Reflection

The exercises above allow students to consider the process of collective creativity, as opposed to the dramatic content. Isolating the productive behaviours of Collaboration reinforces the connection between performance outcomes and the quality of development. Importantly, younger learners stop seeing the final performance as the measure of success, but view it as evidence of a successful process. This is enriched when The Dispositions of Collaboration are used as a Reflective framework.

CSI Dispositions is a great audit exercise during or after groups have worked on generating dramatic material. Ask learners to put their hand up if they think they were a particular Disposition and/or ask learners to point to the peer who matches a Disposition. Then discuss the inconsistencies of opinions or the absence of key Dispositions. Such Reflection is particularly powerful if the dominance or absence of a Disposition can

Phases of Synthesis	Context	Success	Divergent	Convergent	Rehearse
Dispositions of Collaboration	Chair	Chair	Out-of-the-boxer	Reality Tester	Polisher
	Evaluator	Translator	Shaper	Shaper	Chair
	Reality Tester	Total Observer	Reality Tester	Evaluator	Reality Tester
	Harmoniser	Evaluator	Translator	Polisher	Harmonizer
	Relations Manager	Shaper	Harmoniser	Out-of-the-boxer	Total Observer

While this is by no means absolute it allows learners to consider that particular behaviours dominate at certain stages of the

be related to the performance outcomes. The absence of a *Polisher* and/or *Total Observer* is almost a universal absence with lower

years. The *Total Observer* is a meta-role where learners consider what knowledge they have gained from the process that they would repeat or avoid in future Collaboration.

Be the Total Observer is an exercise in observation where peers observe (live or video) a group of learners collaborating and evaluate the strength and weaknesses of the group or individuals. **Disposition Coach** is a dynamic variant on this where peers are invited to coach a specific learner who has been assigned a particular Disposition. This exercise works well in conjunction with Boal forum theatre techniques.

Dispositions and the Future

The graphic representation below of the Dispositions was developed to give some sense of the significance of the 'ways of being' to the process of generating dramatic material.

side the *Translator* and *Relation Manager* are ready to be deployed if necessary. Opposite is *Specialist* who will be brought in if particular knowledge or skills are absent in the cohort. Finally the *Total Observer* resides over all advising how the group or individual might improve next time they collaborate.

The model we have developed has improved the way our learners collaborate. The clarity the Dispositions provide has also given new perspective on other perennial issues within theatre and drama education that we will be exploring further.

The Disposition of *Translator* is interesting as it attempts to bridge misunderstandings between individuals in the group. Often this Disposition mediates language around social conflict, but also includes translating when creative concepts are not understood. Many socially functional groups do not reach their

you challenge learners to try to 'bend reality' to meet the demands of the ideas generated rather than mitigating the ideas to fit reality.

The Disposition of the *Specialist* transitioning from teacher to learner is also worthy of greater exploration. In the early years of secondary Drama the teacher provided most specialist knowledge, but as students progress they can be provided with opportunities to research and develop their own specialist knowledge to share with peers as they create Theatre.

Conclusion

As learners progress through the Collaboration assessment criteria we have developed, they move from a functional member of a group with an awareness of their preferred Disposition, to a rich understanding of how to apply all the Dispositions, to a final level of meta-recognition in which learners know what Disposition is needed and they have the intellectual and social adaptability to achieve it.

These may sound grand claims, even for adult collaborators, but the explicit instruction and isolation of particular behaviours provide learners with a framework that transforms the ephemeral and inconsistent into the observable and systematic.

The most rewarding aspect of the last 2 years is the enthusiasm with which students have embraced the Dispositions of Collaboration. It is as if the model provides clarity and assurance to an aspect of Drama and Theatre that learners considered out of their control. To quote a Year 10 student:

"The Dispositions give me a way to think about something I didn't think you could think about!"

Dispositions in Positions

At the centre of the model are the *Energiser* and *Active Listener*; essential in any collective creative endeavour. They are surrounded by the cyclical interplay between *Out-of-the-boxer, Shaper, Reality Tester, Polisher* and *Evaluator*. These Dispositions assume many orders depending on the group and the Phase of Dramatic Synthesis.

Above this cycle the *Chair, Harmoniser* and *Excellence Controller* optimising both task and social dynamics so they are productive. To the

potential simply because individuals do not speak the same 'creative language'. This Disposition emphasises successful communication of artistic concepts, role and narrative; an area worthy of further investigation.

The Disposition of the *Reality Tester* is also provocative if you consider it as a creative role. It would be too easy to draw a comparison with De Bono's Black Hat and encourage an 'it'll never work' attitude. This Disposition becomes very exciting however, if

Gilbert has been Head of the Theatre Drama Department at Island School, Hong Kong, since August 2008. He has work within the ESF schools Hong Kong for the last 12 years teaching Theatre, Film, Media and Music. Before teaching in Hong Kong, Gilbert worked as an actor, musician and stand-up comedian in the UK and Australia.

DEVELOPMENT

ISTA recently passed its 30th birthday. Amidst all the reminiscing, happy memories and celebrations, the trustees also took time to reflect on what ISTA should be doing for the next 30 years. ISTA is an extraordinary organisation that provides unique and deeply valuable experiences in theatre for students, artists and teachers across the world. We are going to keep on doing that and we are going to keep on working to ensure that we provide the very best in international theatre education for our community. The question facing us as we met in France this summer was 'Where does ISTA go now?' Do we rest on our laurels or do we see what more we can do? It was an intense and challenging meeting. We invited former ISTA presidents Mike Pasternak and Ted Miltenberger to join the discussion and by the end we had formulated an idea.

That idea was that the time has come for ISTA to go beyond its boundaries. This simple statement hides a major ambition to widen our community, to reach out to those who do not naturally or easily

fit into our international ensemble. We have already started doing this in small, and somewhat 'adhoc' but also immensely successful ways. Our idea, however, is to now begin broadening access to all aspects of our work in a systematic and sustainable way.

This direction is inspired by the idea that at an ISTA event the participants create a 'World through Theatre'. It must surely enrich that World if its citizens are from a truly diverse cultural and socio economic background. We already have some very exciting plans in place and the work has already begun. Over the next few months we will be telling you more about our plans and how this idea will be put into practice.

ISTA has spent 30 years becoming a leader in international theatre education. The next 30 years will be about taking our work beyond our existing borders and inviting those outside our current community to become part of our future.

David Lightbody
ISTA President