ARTICLE NO.9

WRITING EFFECTIVE CHARACTERIZATION TO FACILITATE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERFORMANCE AND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF WIDER SOCIAL ISSUES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO *THE LANDING*

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Abstract

This article offers the personal views and an account of practice of a playwright creating scripts for young people in the context of a larger project — *The Landing*, a large-scale Drama for Citizenship venture set up by a University College Drama department (BGUC). It focuses on three aspects of the work:

- how a scriptwriter responded to a specific multi-layered Citizenship brief, in an educational context;
- how the author approached the creation of effective characterisation, intended to deliver optimum engagement and learning opportunities for young people;
- how the author's scriptwriting for young people responds to the current debate regarding empathy and role.

Abrégé

Cet article présente les vues personnelles et un compte-rendu de répétitions par un auteur dramatique qui crée des scénarios pour des jeunes dans le contexte d'un projet plus important — 'The Landing', une pièce de théâtre importante pour un projet de citoyenneté établi par un département d'art dramatique d'une université (BGUC). Il se concentre sur trois aspects du travail :

- comment un auteur dramatique a répondu à un projet spécifique de citoyenneté à plusieurs couches, dans un contexte éducatif;
- comment l'auteur a approché la création d'une caractérisation efficace, destinée à donner un engagement et des opportunités d'apprentissages optimales pour de jeunes gens;
- comment l'écriture de scénarios par l'auteur dramatique pour des jeunes répond au débat actuel portant sur l'empathie et le rôle.

Sumario

Este articulo ofrece los puntos de vista personales y un recuento de la practica de un autor de teatro que crea guiones o textos para los jóvenes en el contexto de un proyecto teatral más vasto — 'The Landing', una obra teatral de gran escala de aventura ciudadana instaurado por el Departamento del Colegio Universitario (*University College, BGUC).* El proyecto se enfoca hacia tres aspectos de la obra:

- Como un autor de los textos o guiones se desenvolvió en una situación de tareas múltiples y especificas de Ciudadanía en un contexto educativo.

- Como se aproximó este autor a la creación de caracterizaciones efectivas con la intención de proporcionar una interacción optima y a la vez proporcionar oportunidades para el aprendizaje por parte de los jóvenes.

- Como el autor, en su trabajo de guionista para los jóvenes, responde al debate actual con relación a la empatía y al rol en la actuación.

Author's biography

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WRITING EFFECTIVE CHARACTERIZATION TO FACILITATE YOUNG PEOPLE'S PERFORMANCE AND THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF WIDER SOCIAL ISSUES, WITH PARTICULAR REFERENCE TO *THE LANDING*

This article is submitted as an account and consideration of my practice within a wider project, *The Landing* — a large-scale Drama for Citizenship venture set up by a University College Drama Department (BGUC, or Bishops Grosseteste University College, Lincoln, which specialises in drama in the community and drama in education). *The Landing* Project took place over three years and involved pupils from sixteen schools and 70 undergraduates. The focus of the project was on the use of peer and interactive learning through drama to facilitate the exploration of citizenship issues. My role was to create a script that young people could use both in performance and in workshops to maximise their understanding and increase their performance skills. This piece of writing has emerged from my evaluation of the process. As such, it is a demonstration of my own thinking on writing effectively for young people placed within a wider perspective. It focuses on three aspects of the work:

- how a scriptwriter can respond to a specific multi-layered citizenship brief in an educational context;
- how to write effective characterisation, which delivers optimum engagement and learning opportunities for young people; and
- how my scriptwriting for young people responds to the current debate regarding empathy and role.

Critical analysis of *The Landing* Project itself, how it operated in school settings, its process and reception and the context of its effectiveness is now underway and should, in time, throw more light on the effectiveness of the play itself.

More and more recognised scriptwriters in Britain, such as Alan Aykbourn, Mark Ravenhill, Philip Ridley and Edward Bond, are writing plays for young people. Some are writing plays to be performed in the theatre, while others — particularly Bond — are writing works to be performed by young people and used in an educational context. Because recognised names are focusing more on a young audience, this has attracted academic interest in the structure of writing for young people. Furthermore, one of the current debates in applied drama centres on the issue of whether students learn more when they take on roles similar to themselves or those dissimilar to themselves — that is, roles of empathy (this is who I am) or aspiration (this is what I'd like to be). Consequently, I now find my work connected to two current debates, which has led me to consider more closely how and why I write for young people.

I am sometimes commissioned to write plays which are the catalyst for educational projects dealing with challenging curriculum matters. The most recent projects have focused on citizenship, at present a problematic part of English educational curriculum. In order to demonstrate my thinking, I'll draw on one particular scheme, *The Landing* Project, which is still current in secondary (ages 11–18) schools.

The starting point

My starting point when writing for young people is to facilitate students' reasoning through stimulating their imagination and creativity. As Edward Bond states:

> Imagination is needed to ask why. Imagination and not reason makes us human … The ability to reason does not make us rational. It is our imagination that reasons. (Bond 2000: 113)

This is particularly pertinent when creating characters. If the characters are too didactic, the students may understand the content but not engage with it. However, if the characterisation relies too much on the manipulation of feeling, then what might be learnt can be variable or even opposite to the educator's intention. My main focus when writing a play for young people is finding a balance between reason and feeling in the creation of the characters, because when reason and feeling are stimulated in *equal* measures, optimum learning takes place. A play text of this sort should be socially responsive, but it also should be a versatile learning tool for the target audience — which means it has to be theatrically challenging beyond the content level. It must expressly manipulate language and theatre form,

challenging but also extending the students' control and understanding of the medium. I concentrate on creating large-cast productions with characters that can be played by students. I write the plays so they can be workshopped in a variety of ways but can also be performed as a whole. From this starting point, I then approach the writing brief — in this instance, *The Landing* Project, which was multi-layered in its aims with the over-arching theme of citizenship.

The citizenship perspective

The Landing Project's primary learning focus was tied in to the current English citizenship curriculum for secondary schools. A fairly recent product of the Labour government of Tony Blair, the citizenship curriculum is underpinned by the aims of the Crick Report, which was commissioned by the UK government. The aims of citizenship education are described as follows:

> To make secure and increase the knowledge, skills and values relevant to the nature and practices of participative democracy; also to enhance the awareness of rights and duties, and the sense of responsibilities needed for the development of pupils into active citizens; and in so doing to establish the value to individuals, schools and society of involvement in the local and wider community. (DfEE/QCA, 1998, Para 6.6) (Lawton et al. 2000: 55)

The nature of the citizenship national curriculum is quite loose. Crick is quoted as saying:

> While the Citizenship order also uniquely puts a great weight on 'oracy' the 'informed discussion' of 'issues problems and events', it makes no attempt to specify what these should be. Nothing is ruled in, but then nothing is ruled out. (Lawton et al. 2000: 7)

Whilst this gives a sense of space and freedom for exploration, it can also mean that in too many schools citizenship has been tackled defensively and unimaginatively. It may well be that schools are not so much ill-equipped to deal with the subject as uncomfortable, with the suspicion that there is a hidden political agenda and that if they are too proactive they might find themselves outside the boundaries — particularly when governments change. Although the citizenship curriculum is open to different interpretations and emphasis — a fact that has been presented as a strength — some individual schools may promote an ethos which is more prescriptive.

On the whole though schools tend not to be the most democratic institutions and everyone is aware of the 'Sit down! Shut up!! We're going to talk about Human Rights' approach. (Braverman 2002: 1) This could leave drama specialists who are asked to deliver citizenship in a difficult position. Openness of interpretation, which is one of the citizenship curriculum's potential strengths, leaves schools, teachers and practitioners with a sense of vulnerability and/or scepticism.

The drama and theatre perspective

Exploring sensitive social, ethical and political issues in drama and theatre is the norm. It is a very tempting prospect to jump straight into delivering citizenship, used as drama practitioners are to folding ourselves into other subjects — an issue which is not peculiarly British, as John O'Toole comments:

> it is symptomatic, I think, of a problem that drama (and other arts) educators face throughout Australia. We are nobody's core business. Certainly not in Education. (O'Toole 2002: 114)

O'Toole refers to the process of hijacking other subjects as **'**cannibalistic piracy'. Added to the cannibalistic temptation to work within citizenship is our confidence that we are ideally placed to deliver it. This is a significant part of what we do in educational drama. Because of the relative newness of the citizenship curriculum and the uncertainty surrounding it, *The Landing* Project was seen as a welcome opportunity for all the schools we approached.

***The Landing* Project brief**

The brief for the play was quite specific in its demands. What was wanted in script terms was a full-length piece of theatre that would:

- last between an hour and an hour-and-a-half;
- be suitable for twelve- to fifteen-year-olds;
- include four major citizenship issues which could stand alone as mini-plays;

- utilise a variety of performance styles; and
- be suitable for young people and undergraduates to perform.

This is a complex project with a number of strands, including peer teaching, and learning and mentoring. The overall intention of the project was to create and generate links between young people from diverse contexts and explore subjects such as identity, loyalty and social cohesion within a specified but varied regional context. In its initial stages, it involved sixteen Lincolnshire secondary schools and students drawn from all three years of two different undergraduate drama courses.

Major considerations when setting up the project were to:

- respond to a perceived need within the wider educational community to create opportunities for students to share social and educational experiences with particular reference to citizenship issues;
- provide opportunities for young people to work with aspirational peers to effect relevant learning and to raise aspirations; and
- provide students with the opportunity to examine their own social assumptions through exploration of a fictional context (Kerridge 2005).

My response to the brief

For me, the tension for the writer of educational drama is to provide sufficient developments in the play script — both in character and plot — to allow the target audience multiple opportunities to explore life issues, both in performance and in the workshop mode, and yet still create a piece of work which remains an aesthetic whole, and which can be performed as a satisfying piece of theatre. I would also contend that the script has to be as helpful as possible to both the intended young performers — recognising a probable insecurity in their performance skills — and the teacher who may also feel vulnerable at certain points in the production process. I would argue that all writers of educational drama should have such a focus. However, the danger of insisting on such a multi-faceted focus as a writer is that you could end up with a script that is only useful to that specific project or, worse, is incredibly unruly and an aesthetic mess. This can be further complicated by a complex commission, as in this case — where the client base ranged from age twelve to undergraduate level with a difference in learning aims. However, if you are successful, you have a vibrant large-cast script which is useful on a variety of levels across different age ranges.

The writing of the play *The Landing*

I'll now explain how I attempted to solve some of the problems of fulfilling the multi-faceted brief when creating the script both in structural and character terms.

The synopsis

The story I came up with was as follows:

> *The Landing* is set on the landing of a block of rundown flats/apartments. The people who live on the landing do not communicate. There is a sense of unease, and people keep to themselves. Their lives are disrupted by the arrival of two property developers, Smart and Bird, ruthless characters set on getting rid of the occupants — some of whom are home owners, some not. The occupants slowly start to communicate with each other, and by the end of the play there is the germ of a community which may (though by no means inevitably) be able to affect its own future. All the while, their actions are scrutinised by two aware attitudinal teenage narrators.

The structure

To respond to the need for four mini-sections which could stand independently of the rest of the script, the main issues of the play are presented in or around four flats:

- Flat One — a single parent and her sixteen year old daughter – issues touched upon are teenage sex, drugs, and loyalty;

- Flat Two — a family of asylum seekers waiting to hear whether their application for residency has been successful whilst dealing with adjustment issues and social and moral perception;

- Flat Three — an elderly couple struggling with mental and physical health issues; and

- Flat Four — a malfunctioning family dealing with issues of domestic violence, employment and drug abuse.

The scenes in the flats are linked by scenes between the characters meeting on the landing: scenes between Smart and Bird the property developers and their interaction with the families and scenes between the two teenage narrators who pass comment on events using direct address to the audience.

Arch plot or mini-plot?

For most scriptwriters, the first question they ask themselves is, *whose story is it and how can I tell this story well?* When that is decided, it becomes the 'top story', or arch plot. An arch plot is usually:

> A story built around an active protagonist who struggles against primarily external forces of antagonism to pursue his or her desire, through continuous time, within a consistent and causally connected fictional reality, to a closed ending of absolute, irreversible change. (McKee 1998: 45)

There are often other stories going on and other characters involved, but their stories do not have the same importance as the arch plot. However, in the brief for *The Landing* Project, there were to be at least four stories, each of equal importance, as they had to be able to stand on their own as mini-plays. The danger of multiple stories and multiple protagonists is that they can soften the telling of the stories. The challenge to the writer of what McKee terms the mini-plot is that the writer:

> begins with the elements of classical design but then reduces them — shrinking or compressing, trimming or truncating the prominent features of arch plot striving for simplicity and economy while retaining enough of the classical … that will satisfy an audience. (1998: 46)

All four stories in *The Landing* had to be complex enough to provide the students with a variety of issues to explore. The tension structures demanded careful consideration because I wanted all four stories to be cohesive in a dramatic whole, in a complete script.

Following the maxim that scriptwriting is about principles, not rules, and eternal, universal forms, not formulae, I combined elements of the mini-plot and arch plot, which were connected and driven by the characterisation.

Characterisation and arch plot

Instead of a single, active protagonist connected to the arch plot, I used two, Smart and Bird. They are stylised protagonists rather than naturalistic, with blatant but layered desires. They establish the main storyline and demonstrate their importance in relation to it. However, when challenged, their emotional development is limited: they learn little, and their individual story ending is semi-closed rather than closed. This manipulation of the characters connected to the arch plot allows room for the audience to engage with other characters in the play, and their storylines, reducing the dominance of the arch plot.

The tower block is to be redeveloped and turned into luxury flats, with no place for the current residents. We follow the developers, Smart and Bird, as they visit each flat on the landing, putting pressure on the inhabitants to move. This allows the physical context — the tower block and landing — to take on more emotional importance in the story. At first the landing is seen as an unpleasant, frightening place to be, but as Bird and Smart invade the flats, it becomes a refuge and source of hope for the inhabitants.

One reason that the arch plot is so popular as a dramatic device is because it leaves the audience with a sense of resolution as there has been 'irreversible change' in a characters' circumstances or emotional makeup, but this doesn't encourage further contemplation of the topics touched upon. In order to create the feeling of satisfaction associated with the use of the arch plot whilst also encouraging debate about the issues involved, I combined elements of arch plot and mini-plot structures. Consequently, the issues touched on in the mini-plots are left unresolved, encouraging a reasoning response in the audience allowing for further debate and discussion, but because the residents end up collectively rejecting the offers from Smart and Bird for the flats, the audience feels that it has been told a story involving irreversible change. The audience is left with a feeling of resolution but is aware that there are still problems which need to be addressed.

Connecting arch plot and mini-plots

To combine elements of different plot structures, it is important to have a strong, cohesive theme which will drive all the tension structures in the play, both in mini-plot and arch plot structures. In *The Landing*, the main theme I used was fear. In the arch plot, it was explicit — fear of eviction for the residents, and fear of failure for Smart and Bird. In the mini-plots, it was more implicit — fear of change, either personally or physically, for both the property developers and the inhabitants. The fear of all the characters is alluded to explicitly and implicitly by the fearless narrator characters.

Characterisation and mini-plot

Each of the mini-plots had to deal with a different citizenship topic of similar length, and offer equality of learning opportunity. The characters shared fear. The fear of change had to be demonstrated coherently overall, but differently in each mini-plot. In order to make this happen, I gave all the characters the same emotional starting point. Initially, fear caused all the characters to hide from the truth. As Sartre states: 'Avoiding the difficult responsibilities of life, we tend to act in bad faith, hiding the truth from ourselves rather than seeking it out.' (in Fortier 1997: 43) Each character in the flats hid from the truth differently, for different reasons, thus tension in the mini-plots manifests itself differently, but the linking tension — whether the characters would eventually face up to the truth or not — helps keep the mini-plots connected. Individual fears were apparent in the mini-plots before the characters met with the developers. For example, the elderly couple's fear of change was, for one character, the change in their physical health, while for the other it was their mental health — neither of which they could control. Ultimately, however, each was afraid that the other might discover their secret. When the developers arrive, they highlight the problems facing the elderly couple by threatening their home, but because the previous fears have been established empathetically, the audience reflects back on the mini-plot themes rather than the themes in the arch plot. This focuses the audience on the more complex issues in the mini-plots.

Binary characterisation and plot

Mini-plots, by their minimalist nature, demand rapid audience engagement with the characters. The quickest way to engage an audience is to make the character empathetic, vulnerable and familiar. Use of naturalistic characterisation is ideal for immediate audience engagement, but it is not necessarily the best way to provoke debate. The use of more stylised characters, such as Smart and Bird, can aid debate but reduces the audience's emotional engagement with the characters. The use of both stylised and naturalistic characters can set up a binary response in the audience. As the stylised characters of the property developers invade the space of the naturalistic characters, the response provoked in the audience is likely to become an either/or debate. They would either see the property developers as bad and the residents as good, or they would favour the behaviour of the property developers as they appeared powerful and the residents weak.

In *The Landing*, I wanted the mini-plots to encourage rapid emotional engagement where the students would get an immediate understanding of personal dilemmas, so I used naturalistic characterisation for the people in each of the four flats. I used stylised characters for the property developers, as I thought that they were the best vehicle for demonstrating corporate and personal bullying. Then, in order to move the conflict and debate away from the binary and make it more complex, further characters were needed. I introduced two characters called narrators — though in fact that is not a fair description of their role. They are better described as *raisonneurs*. These two characters were the most complex in the play. In order to enable maximum exploration of themes, they had to:

- appeal to the target audience more than any other characters;
- engage the audience on both a feeling and reasoning level;
- make thematic links between mini-plots and the arch plot;
- control the tension curve of the whole play; and
- highlight complexity in the characterisations, both in others and eventually in themselves.

The raisonneur *versus chorus and agent provocateur*

A *raisonneur* is:

Another character who knows more than the other characters … although participating continuously in the action, the *raisonneur* ordinarily has little direct effect on it, thus traditionally furnishing this character with objectivity and credibility. The *raisonneur* is often a sceptic, wishing to offer sound advice or to convince through reason. (Thomas 1999: 110)

The most common character devices used to provoke debate and encourage reflection in applied drama practice are chorus and *agent provocateur.* However, I believe these do not necessarily elicit the most complex debate possible, because the response to such theatrical dramatic devices is not equitable on a feeling and reasoning level. I would argue the device of *agent provocateur* often produces a predominantly 'feeling' response in a young audience. They either love them or hate them. The use of a chorus often provides the opposite: a predominantly 'reasoning' response. I would contend that the use of the *raisonneur* can provide both a feeling and reasoning response in equal measures if handled effectively. The device of chorus engages the audience on a socially responsible level. The chorus establishes the ethical framework within the play and reacts as the playwright hopes the audience will react. The chorus comments on the action but is not usually involved in it. On the other hand, the *agent provocateur* has a specific agenda to disrupt a group's activity from within the drama, and it is debatable whether the deception they use is more harmful to the social order than the behaviour they are trying to undermine. The *raisonneur* has characteristics of both chorus and *agent provocateur*, but more dramatic flexibility. In *The Landing*, I take full advantage of that flexibility. The *raisonneurs* in the play are occasionally involved in the action with other characters, but they also bookend each of the scenes to provide perspective and allow for anticipation and reflection. They have a confrontational attitude, but it is directed mainly at the audience rather than the other characters. They appear to have no subjective agenda, and demonstrate a lack of compassionate interest in the characters, yet they know all about the characters and their situations. But what allows for most flexibility in dramatic terms is that the *raisonneur* is a 'sceptic … wishing to convince through reason'. This tussle between cynicism and rationality allows for an intricacy in the characterisation which the other devices do not.

The narrators [raisonneurs] *in practice*

The attitude of the narrators is immediately established. They don't set out to be liked by the audience and they make this clear by direct address in the first few lines:

> *NARRATOR 2: We won't be mates. NARRATOR 1: Exchange text messages?*

> *NARRATOR 2: I don't think so.*

> *NARRATOR 1: Christmas cards?*

> *NARRATOR 2: I don't think so. In fact — the more you see us the less you'll like us.*

> *NARRATOR 1: But the more you see us — the more you'll want to be like us.*

This is a challenge to the audience not to like them, which immediately provokes an emotional response in the audience — a determination to prove them wrong by liking them.

The narrators have a sense of knowingness about them: they comment before each scene on the characters, their situation and what is about to happen, which is a familiar theatrical device for distancing debate and providing a social context — for example, before the mini-plot depicting the elderly couple.

> *NARRATOR 1: Because the compensation for getting old is what? To end up waiting like these two.*

But their commentary is not necessarily sound advice or reasonable. For the majority of the play, it is very sceptical:

> *NARRATOR 2: So we say, thank you for alcohol.*
>
> *Thank you for drugs.*
>
> *Thank you for the simple but lethal cigarette. Thank you for fast foods oozing in*
>
> *fat.*
> *NARRATOR 1: Thank you for additives.*
>
> *Thank you for pesticides.*
> *NARRATOR 2: Thank you for social short-sightedness.*

> *Thank you for political ignorance.*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *Thank you for the concentration on the self.*
>
> *And thank you for the all-consuming arrogance of youth.*
>
> NARRATOR 2: *Thank you for all those things which mean we won't have to deal with the dread of being old and forgotten and forgetting.*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *We thank you.*

The narrators are shadowy figures whose perspective is presented as contrary, ornery, conflicting and even random at times. Yet they reason coherently and fairly about why the characters are in the situation they are in. This behaviour is very attractive to the target audience. It appears knowing, and yet subversive and fearless. I would argue that all students have a sneaking desire to be rebellious, even if it is an aspiration that is never realised, but it is the aspiration which initially attracts them to the narrators. Yet, in order for the narrators to work in relation to the delivery of the learning context, they have to demonstrate further complexity. Without it, their purpose would be limited or possibly misinterpreted.

Complexity in the characterisation of the narrators

How much a character understands about their situation is what intrigues the audience:

Their awareness or lack of it is what connects them with the play and determines their importance in the overall scheme … it is governed by what the characters respond to and how they respond — from ignorant, apathetic, compliant to perceptive, intense and fully aware. (Thomas 1999: 97)

The narrators are very aware of what is going on in the play, drawing attention to it and reflecting on it poetically, rhythmically, metaphorically and attitudinally, allowing themes to be explored and debated.

> NARRATOR 1: *The people here don't want to be here.*
>
> *But the people here …*
>
> NARRATOR 2: *Well they're here aren't they — should tell you something.*

Near the end of the play, the narrators start to take a curious interest in the people in the flats who have begun to confront their fears and find a collective strength.

> NARRATOR 1: *But one moment, on a landing,*
>
> *not a detached mock Tudor in Chorley Wood West, not a picturesque pile with a*
>
> *paddock in the peaks, for a moment on this landing*
>
> *[indicating Dave]*
>
> *with this blot on the landscape, they saw exactly where they were at, that's guts.*
>
> NARRATOR 2: *We'll see.*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *See if they work from where they're at, with no cheap cynicism.*
>
> NARRATOR 2 *No cheap …?*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *Cynicism.*
>
> NARRATOR 2: *That's tough.*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *Easier to sneer than cheer.*
>
> NARRATOR 2: *You've changed your tune.*
>
> NARRATOR 1: *I haven't, they have.*

The narrators give the audience some empathetic distance on the naturalistic characters but their attitude — and it is all attitude — disturbs the audience's either/or response to the mini-plots and arch plot. Their eventual awareness that change — although difficult — is possible and that others are willing to change,

and consequently they ought to as well, provides a complexity which encourages debate.

Linguistic manipulation of narrators

Manipulation of the linguistic devices used by the characters provides the narrators with an attractive strangeness, and highlights their difference both from the other characters and, most importantly, the audience. When creating characters for young people to play, I concentrate as much on linguistic development as I do on narrative or physical gesture. I am particularly interested in the reception of linguistic devices (Dickenson 2006: 100–101).

When creating characters for young people I make sure that linguistic devices are not used uniformly by all characters, but are used differently by different characters for diverse purposes. The linguistic devices used specifically by the narrators show the connectedness of their relationship with each other, and their rejection of a connectedness with other characters and the audience. For example they use *broken repetition*, which the other characters don't. This is the repetition of the first few words of a sentence or of key words when referring to areas of concern
— for example, violence, love, trust or fear. The narrators don't use common language structures, which the other characters do. For example, they don't use *ellipses*, *modal expressions* or *vague language*, which are all devices to make the listener feel there is a shared understanding, or which function as softening devices to lessen the impact of what is being said. The linguistic manipulation of the characters makes the narrators attractive to the target audience, as it makes them sound different and clever.

Narrators in practice

I can honestly say that at first the narrator characters didn't work at all. I had made them so convoluted that nobody understood what on earth they were saying or doing. I initially over- complicated the linguistic structures of the narrators. The students playing them had a real sense of *liking* them, as did the students watching, but they had no sense of why. The characters had engaged them on a *feeling* level but not on a *reasoning* level. I realised I'd have to rewrite. They took more rewriting than all the other characters because their purpose was multi-fold. However, once I started to get them to work, when I got the feeling and reasoning balance right, they drove the play.

Characterisation and the current the debate in applied drama

One of the current debates in applied drama is whether students get most from roles and characterisation which are similar to themselves or those that demonstrate an aspirational difference. I would contend that there has to be a cultural connective quality and an aspirational quality to the roles with which you most want the students to connect, and consequently gain something. This is borne out by the audience's response to characters in *The Landing*. There are naturalistic characters in the play, Simone and Kyle, who are around the target audience's age range and on the whole deal bravely with very difficult circumstances. The audience was very sympathetic to these characters, but didn't want to be them.

When it came to the audience participating in the workshops, and in some cases producing scriptwriting out of the workshops, the characters they most wanted to engage with were the narrators. It was the narrators' tag lines — their sayings — that we heard resonating in the breaks, and it was their language and character structures the students wanted to draw on when they created further dramas of their own. Emotionally, they were attracted to the narrators because they were attitudinal and showed no fear, but they were also the characters from which the students learnt most because of the complexity inherent in their construction and the way that reflected on the central thematic debate of fear. The characters' complexity allowed the students to recognise that the narrators were bold and clever, but had serious character flaws which had to be addressed. It was these qualities in the narrators with which the students connected — a connection which helped deepen the debates connected to the issues explored in the play.

The Landing Project has so far been very well received, and is currently in its third year involving more schools and more students.

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