

Exploring C-12: An Imagined Place with a History, a Future and Contemporary Challenges

[STIG A. ERIKSSON](#)

WESTERN NORWAY UNIVERSITY OF APPLIED SCIENCES,
BERGEN

ABSTRACT

The article reflects on a process drama workshop from the Dorothy Heathcote Now International Conference in Manchester, UK, 2025. The workshop was designed and devised to address the conference themes: "What sort of schools do we want? What sort of society do we want?" The article considers both the planning process—the conceptional design of the workshop – and how it was devised in practice to generate discovery and reflection on materials or scenes created during the work. It draws on strategies inspired by Heathcote's legacy, extended into a critical pedagogy framework, including teacher-in-role, text work, documents and drama conventions with an intention to question, analyze, and create ideas for exploring subject matter related to the conference themes.

The story developed in the workshop explores an imagined ideal society and its collapse. Framed as an investigation, it lets participants

deduce what may have happened and possibly apply insights to their own lives, contexts, or concerns that resonate with them.

POINT OF DEPARTURE

In a pre-conference note¹ referencing Dorothy Heathcote's work (Heathcote 1983), convenor David Allen challenged contributors to reflect on the fundamental purposes of schooling—what schools are for, and stewardship—what kind of community do we want, in education and beyond. I take these questions as my point of departure. Although indebted to Heathcote, I employ a critical-pedagogy perspective that extends beyond Socratic dialogue toward an emancipatory–dialectical orientation. By exploring the folding of an idealized society, the workshop aims to function as a “pedagogy of utopia,” prompting participants to engage in praxis—critically examining how education and culture can serve as resources for resistance and catalysts for transformative social change. The intention has been to create a space in which participants can explore these issues and develop their own responses, drawing on their experiences and perspectives.

RESEARCH FOCUS

Building on that starting point, this article asks: How can a process drama—inspired by Heathcote's drama-pedagogical legacy—be designed and facilitated to prompt participants to engage critically with questions of educational purpose, knowledge priorities, cultural heritage, and community stewardship? It describes and reflects on the workshop's structure and material selection, outlines the practical design, and explains the rationale. The aim is to invite personal reflection and collective inquiry without prescribing answers or targeting a specific age group. Central to the reflection are the workshop's conceptualization and development—in line with arts-pedagogic research (Nyrrnes & Lehmann, 2008) and reflective-practitioner inquiry in arts education (Taylor, 1996)—along

¹ email May 7th 2025.

with the creative process and the intentions informing the design choices.

PRE-TEXT

Regarding my choice of pre-text (O'Neill, 1995, pp. 19–27, 33–44, 136–137; Taylor, 1995)—the catalytic material used to invite participants to imagine, question, and construct a fictional world—I began with a city plan of an imagined place I called C-12: the City of Twelve Gates (inspired by Manguel and Guadalupi, 1980, pp. 271–272). The plan served as a springboard for participants to collaboratively improvise an urban culture with its own history and traditions, then subject it to crisis and explore responses. The original plan, taken from Manguel and Guadalupi, depicts a fictional, idealized city from the 17th-century utopian romance *Nova Solyma*.² In the plan's upper right corner I added several numbered locations labelled in Norwegian, intentionally leaving the final one blank; and I introduced a “silver” gecko pin (from the IDEA World Congress, Brisbane, 1995) as a supplementary pre-text artifact (fig. 1). Both the number twelve (the duodecade³) and the gecko⁴ carry symbolic associations; during planning and facilitation I drew on those meanings as needed. The pre-texts share an ability to create tension and ambiguity, spark curiosity, and leave room for co-creation. As O'Neill (1995) notes, a good pre-text is rich enough to ignite imagination yet open-ended enough for participants to fill gaps.

² *Nova Solyma* is a fictional, utopian city from a 17th-century work often attributed to Samuel Gott (or an anonymous author). I did not intend to use it as a direct reference in the workshop, nor was it used as such; however, the city plan's capacity to suggest number symbolism was employed by the facilitator in role as Yoshi.

³ Sometimes used in historical or astronomical contexts to describe a recurring twelve-year period, not just a single span of twelve years, as well as designating 12 months. Also used in theology, astrology, musicology, or numerological systems to mean a system divided into twelve units (e.g., twelve apostles, twelve star signs, twelve tones).

⁴ Geckos are rich in symbolism across cultures, often representing adaptability, protection, regeneration, and spiritual guidance. Their unique traits and nocturnal nature have made them powerful symbols in folklore, mythology, and art.

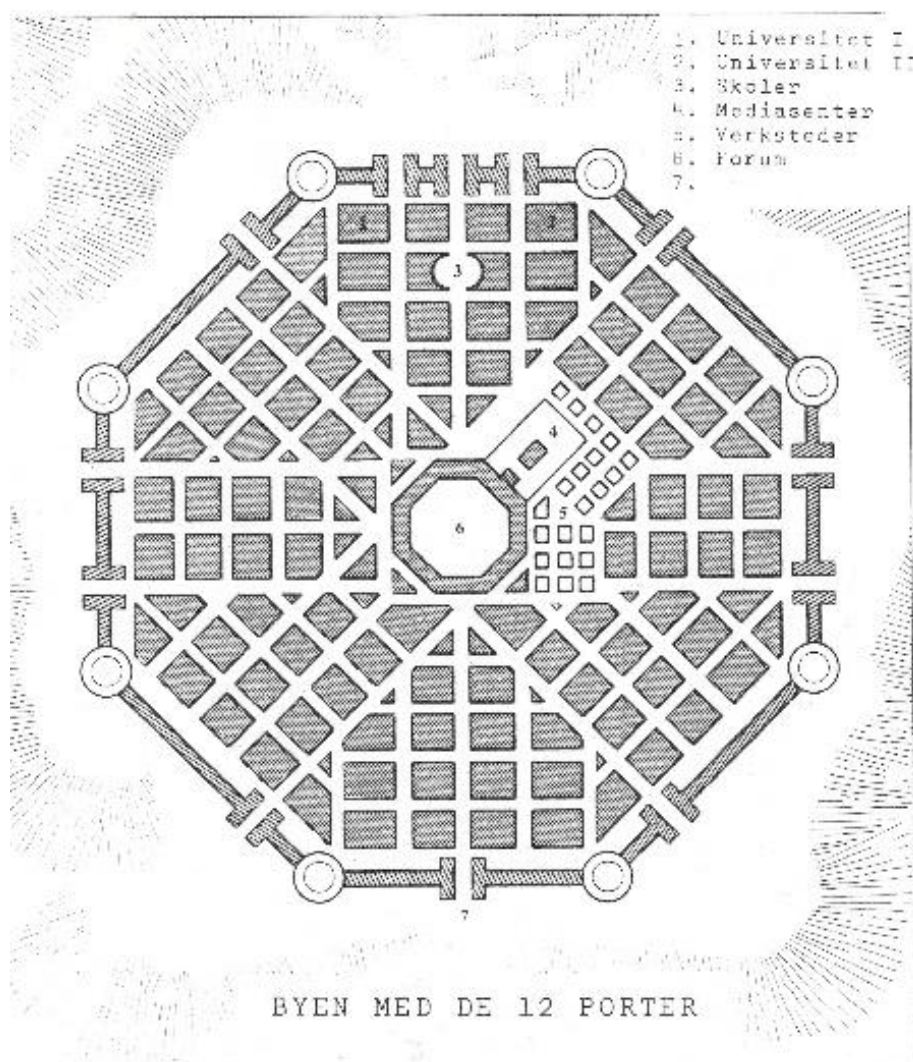


Figure 11: City plan of C-12.



Figure 12: “silver” gecko pin.

Having used this starting point before with Norwegian students, I believed that these stimuli possessed the potential to evoke a compelling dramatic world (O’Neill, 1995, p. 136). I purposely chose not to alter the Norwegian words on the city plan; instead, I incorporated them as a defining feature in shaping the emerging culture. Retaining the Norwegian words was intended to immerse participants in an unfamiliar linguistic landscape, fostering curiosity and encouraging them to negotiate meaning together. The plan was printed as a poster “for study purposes”, but I also produced it as the front of an “identity card”, featuring the gecko image on the back. The identity cards served as both a tangible entry point into the fictional world and a tool for participants to establish their roles during the first phase of the workshop. I prepared enough identity cards so that each participant would receive one at the outset, supporting engagement and providing a concrete anchor for their involvement in the process drama.

AN ISSUE-BASED APPROACH

In today’s world, many things have been turned upside down. What is truly essential now? How are concepts like truth and trust being practiced? Why is DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion)—a set of principles commonly promoted in workplaces, schools, and

organizations to foster fairness, respect, and inclusivity—seen as threatening in some places? What can we defend through education, and what role can the drama teacher play? It feels increasingly important to address current social issues through drama work.

I chose to facilitate an exploration of the past, present, and future of the City of Twelve Gates. Influenced by contemporary global events and aiming to give participants the chance to grapple with questions like these, I began planning the workshop as a framework for exploring themes such as history, tradition and culture, civic and community rights, and democracy. I drew inspiration from contemporary critical social thinkers, like Timothy Snyder, whose *On Tyranny* (2021) offers a concise exploration of warning signs and strategies for resisting authoritarian regimes; and Grace Blakeley, whose *Vulture Capitalism* (2024) argues that meaningful social change arises not from individual leaders but from grassroots, democratic collective movements built from the bottom up. Closer to the applied drama field, stimulus came from the concept of post-aesthetics, which marks a move away from traditional aesthetic concerns, placing greater emphasis on meaning, context, and social impact. By prioritizing participation, creativity, dialogue, and community engagement, post-aesthetics aligns closely with principles of process drama that I value: that aesthetics is an essential foundation of applied theatre and drama education, providing the ethical, imaginative, and meaning-making capacities that distinguish drama from mere social intervention (Haseman & Winston, 2010).

To support this, I incorporated a range of literary text excerpts:

- 1) statements from characters in selected children's books (Dahl, 2024; Ende, 2009; Lindgren, 2005, 2009, 2011)
- 2) aphoristic passages from the works of Brecht (1939, pp. 70, 74; 1971, p. 120; 2003, pp. 26, 34, 78)
- 3) a handwritten “declaration of independence” by inhabitants of C-12 (fig. 2)
- 4) twenty lessons for resisting tyranny, presented in poster format (Snyder, 2021).

These materials are discussed in more detail in the workshop section. I selected them with the expectation that they might stimulate critical thinking and, ideally, inspire subsequent action. One can never know in

advance whether the transformative potential of such texts will be realized, but the choice of material always carries an intention. I appreciate authors with a socially critical profile, as this type of literature is often regarded as well suited to fostering transformation and critical awareness (Gallagher and Booth, 2003; Nussbaum, 2010). The choice was informed by the view that literature provides a way of experiencing the world, and by recent research indicating that literature, like drama, can possess transformative power (Fialho, 2019; Gray and Pasco, 2027) and can serve as a resource for resistance.

LITERARY DOCUMENTS AS CULTURAL RESOURCES

The decision to incorporate literary fragments into this context stemmed from the belief that art and culture can act as bulwarks against oppression and the erosion of democracy. They offer tools with which communities may counter lies, propaganda, and misinformation—in short, they serve as sources of resilience. Even though this may sound overly idealistic, Western cultural history offers many examples showing that resistance to media-driven and more overtly political attempts at manipulation can have an effect, as seen, for instance, in the protest movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Morgan, 2010). The imprisonment of dissidents with backgrounds from literature and theatre was a widespread practice in Eastern Bloc countries during the Cold War. Yet such mechanisms are not confined to the past. Today's digital media environment reproduces and intensifies framing processes known from earlier historical contexts, and solid contemporary evidence confirms that cultural and artistic resources remain vital in resisting such manipulation and control (UNESCO, 2022).

A current example of underlining the importance of developing cultural awareness as a resilience measure, is the Norwegian Government's white paper on plans for national preparedness for crisis and war (2025). It contains concrete reference to the importance of education, arts and culture:

Voluntary activities, libraries, archives, cultural institutions and the independent arts and cultural scene in all artistic fields are components of the population's opportunity and ability to be enlightened and apply critically thinking, to find meaning and

insight in life, and to be open and search for solutions and opportunities. / Well-informed citizens, with good access to knowledge about and a firm grasp of their own cultural identity, will have greater opportunities to make good choices for themselves and their local community in a time of crisis (chapter 6.4.2).

The integration of literary and cultural artifacts in the workshop was shaped by these insights, which also clarify the ensuing workshop's focus on using "treasured archival documents," engaging in narrative exploration, and fostering interpretive resilience.

A DYSTOPIA/UTOPIA SET-UP

The use of a dystopia/utopia contrast is embedded in several drama education traditions. Perhaps most notably, Augusto Boal explored this through his concept of image theatre, where the image of transition (1992, p. 173) stands in direct opposition to the image of oppression. He further developed this idea in his approaches to forum theatre, viewing it as a rehearsal for future action (op.cit., pp. 224-247). More recently, Selina Busby has been referring to her applied theatre work as a pedagogy of utopia (2022). Busby argues that applied theatre is not merely a set of techniques for community engagement or social intervention. Instead, it is a pedagogical space where participants collectively imagine and enact utopian possibilities—not perfect worlds, but what could be otherwise. Much earlier, in Scandinavia, I found the work of Björn Magnér inspiring. Magnér's socioanalytical role play approach (1980) suggests that imagining utopian alternatives to an unsatisfactory reality can empower us to see potential for change. However, he warns against treating utopia as a mere escape or easy fix for harsh realities. Before moving towards improvement, we must first recognize and understand the forces that oppress us. Only then can we develop a vision of something better, with utopia serving as inspiration rather than solution. This process is not instantaneous, but rather a dialectical journey: insight (thesis) motivates and equips us, utopia (antithesis) sets our aspirations, and transformative action (synthesis) brings about change (Magnér, 1980, p. 68). Of course, Bertolt Brecht preceded these drama educators. While Brecht never formally used the term dystopia—he favored the concept of dialectical—his dramatic method often relied on contrasting dystopian

elements: portraying the world as it is to expose its brutality, absurdity, and preventability. This approach is especially evident in his *Lehrstücke* (learning plays) (Steinweg, 1995), some excerpts of which I am using in the workshop. In planning the work for this context, I have kept all these approaches in mind. But I have sought to apply them within the process drama genre (O'Neill, 1995; DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 203), which provides a space to explore, represent, and imagine various situations and possibilities. This genre unfolds collaboratively, as participants build a dramatic world together in an episodic, Brechtian style (Eriksson, 2009b). It is characterized by improvisation and inquiry, enabling participants to engage directly with situations, viewpoints, and dilemmas from within the drama itself.

HEATHCOTE, POLITICS WITH A SMALL 'p', AND DIALECTICS

Heathcote generally refrained from engaging directly with politics in her work. When considered alongside established teaching models (Eriksson, 2009a), her practice aligns more closely with the Socratic, dialogical tradition than with an emancipatory-dialectical standpoint. Alistair Muir (1996), in his master's thesis, described Heathcote as, at most, political 'with a lowercase "p."' This assessment resonates with my own analysis, in which I contrast Heathcote's theory and practice with those of Brecht (Eriksson, 2009b). While I am deeply indebted to Heathcote in the field of drama education and regard her as one of my most significant mentors, I have often wished for a more pronounced political dimension in her drama processes. Accordingly, the present workshop adopts a more 'political' stance than I believe Heathcote herself would have favored. Still, I believe a clear thread of Heathcote's thinking runs through my planning for this work, especially her principle, shared with me in a 2008 interview: "You always get nearer if you go first away." This idea, which I perceive as a distancing device—a means of making strange (Eriksson, 2009b)—has influenced how I structure the workshop. Additionally, my use of drama conventions—like collective writing, depictions, effigies—producing artifacts and documents, and facilitating through role, draws directly from Heathcote's methods (Heathcote, 1984). I aimed to employ these strategies to enable a dialectical exploration of the material, building up towards a dystopian/utopian context, and to generate tension. Tension is inherently dramatic, and throughout Heathcote's work, she

consistently frames learning around productive tensions (2015, pp. 55-61, 88, 134)—such as the gap between what is and what could be, or between the familiar and the unknown. These tensions are not hindrances but are the very drivers of meaning-making. In this way, they operate dialectically: learning happens through the meeting of opposites and in search of resolutions. Tension is a concept in Heathcote's philosophy that quite resembles dialectical thinking⁵—although she doesn't present it in Brechtian terms. If Brecht's dialectic reveals contradictions to spark critical awareness, Heathcote's tension pushes for critical reflection, but hers is focused on education rather than politics. A dialectical dynamic also appears in her approach to role categories.

ROLE CATEGORIES

During the workshop, three distinct teacher in role (TIR) approaches are employed. This widely recognized strategy in drama education enables engagement with participants through the adoption of three different figures. I intentionally use the term 'figure' rather than 'character' to prevent the common misconception that TIR involves impersonation. Rather, TIR is about embodying a persona with a particular stance and attitude—one that elicits response, encourages reflection, and prompts participants to reconsider their perspectives. If one were to reference theatre theory, this approach aligns more closely with Brecht's epic theatre, which foregrounds attitude and critical distance, rather than with Stanislavski's tradition of immersive character portrayal. For this workshop, I have drawn inspiration from Morgan and Saxton's categorization of role types, themselves adaptations of Heathcote's pioneering strategies:

1. Authority Outside the Action (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 47); *status*: high/middle; *stance*: enabler/facilitator; *appearance*: modest but assured. This first figure I named Yoshi, an elderly surviving member of the city state, C-12, now living in a home

⁵ Heathcote's co-worker for many years, Gavin Bolton, actually has used the term 'dialectic' in his drama practice. The editors of the first collection of Bolton's articles, David Davis and Chris Lawrence, present an interesting analysis of his dialectics in their Introduction to Section One of Bolton's *Selected Writings* (1986, p. 24-26).

- in the country where the drama is taking place.
2. Authority Opposed to the Group (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p.45): *status*: high; *stance*: manipulator; *appearance*: arrogant and bossy. This second figure I named Tork. He is a government official in the country that has occupied C-12.
 3. One of the Gang (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 43): *status*: low; *stance*: enabler; *appearance*: cautious and soft-spoken. The third figure, Thrane, is a university teacher in the country, with critical and oppositional attitudes to the present regime.

I developed the story and plot of the drama around the entry of these three figures at different points in the workshop.

THE PRACTICE

Building upon these theoretical reflections on pre-text, cultural resilience, critical inquiry and role categories in relation to the devising process, the article now moves from the conceptual framework to the practical workshop format. This section details how the C-12 process drama is operationalized through the structural lenses of story, plot, and other form conventions. The participants are invited to explore how culture, education, and democratic values can function as forms of resistance to authoritarian regimes.

The C12-Drama in Workshop Format

The format of the workshop was built around the concepts of Story (Fabula), Plot (Syuzhet), and Elements of Form (Forma). Although these terms are traditionally rooted in Russian Formalism from 1914/1915—an approach to literary analysis associated with Victor Shklovsky (2015), an inventor of estrangement as a poetic device—I have found these categories quite useful for structuring process drama. In my applied drama publications in recent years (see www.drama.no), devising and analyzing drama structures with literary theory tools—especially those inspired by Russian Formalism and Brecht's epic theatre—has become something of a mainstay. I find that this approach offers both clarity and practical utility. In this context, it might look like this:

Concept	Russian Formalism	The City of Twelve Gates (C-12)
STORY / Fabula	Basic (chronological) sequence of events. The raw material of a story. The 'what happened', before interpretation.	A city state with a distinctive, tradition bound yet technologically advanced culture, is occupied by the authorities of the larger surrounding society, and is subjected to attempts to render it invisible and strip it of its cultural and technological status.
PLOT / Syuzhet	The sequences as they appear in the narrative. Artistic arrangement of events. The 'how' the story unfolds through the most significant encounters.	A group of investigative journalism students meet privately with Mr. Yoshi, a survivor from the little-known city-state of C-12, to learn about its history and culture. After submitting their reports, they unexpectedly are deemed incompetent by Mr. Tork, a representative of the country's authorities, and threatened with losing their positions. While waiting to meet with their trusted teacher, Mr. Thrane, they encounter further evidence about life in C-12. Upon meeting Mr. Thrane, the students discover he has been dismissed from his post, but he encourages them to continue exploring this overlooked chapter of their country's history. To aid them in their pursuit of resilience, he shares valuable archival documents for them to interpret and potentially act upon.
Forma	Stylistic shaping. Aesthetic devices. The cultural and stylistic conventions used to mold and depict the story.	A key formal element is the use of three TIR categories, each of which functions as an episodic, epic style, dramaturgical driver in its own way. In addition, various drama conventions are employed (DICE Consortium, 2010, p. 201; Cziboly et al., 2021; Eriksson, 2024) both as aesthetic devices and as devices for reflection. In my thinking, all the formal elements I have used are examples of distancing. They belong to the same tradition and stylistic lineage as the defamiliarization strategies of Shklovsky and Brecht (Eriksson, 2009b).

Teaser and foreshadowing

Quotes (from children's literature by Lindgren, Dahl, Ende but authors' names not to be mentioned here). Each participant receives a line and begins to move around the room, reading it aloud—first to themselves. Gradually, as they find ways to understand and express it, they begin to address the line to other group members they encounter during their wandering.

- “When you are extra strong, you have a special obligation to be kind to others”.
- “There are things you have to do, even if they are dangerous. Otherwise you are not a human being, but just a bit of filth”.
- “I enjoy the birds singing. I enjoy the music of the silver poplars”.
- “I’m wondering what to read next”.
- “I only listen”.
- “I have never tried that before, so I think I should definitely be able to do that”.
- “That what’ll happen to him happens to all tyrants sooner or later... That he’ll be crushed like a louse and will be gone forever”.
- “I’m so afraid of getting a heart of stone, because I think it chafes in the chest and hurts”.
- “And don’t worry about the bits you can’t understand. Sit back and allow the words to wash around you, like music”.
- “You’re lying. You don’t love people. You only want to use them”.
- “No, bother all this learning. I can’t study anymore because I must climb the mast to see what kind of weather we’re going to have tomorrow”.
- “I don’t know what’s waiting in there in the dark, but I’m going in there now”.
- “I don’t believe the ground can ever forgive anyone who has killed the soft green grass that once grew there”.
- “Never do anything by halves. Go the whole hog”.
- “Cassiopeia always knows the way”.
- “I’m not afraid of you”.
- “The storm of liberation will come, and it will break the

- oppressors, as when a tree breaks and falls”.
- “It doesn’t matter which way we go, as long as we go together”.
- “Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it’s unbelievable”.
- “Sometimes you have to be a little bit naughty”.
- “A person who has good thoughts cannot ever be ugly”.
- “This evilness flows swiftly outside, killing all that is beautiful and alive and it withers away all the green leaves and flowers and soft grass”.
- “Even when your whole world is shaken up, you can stand up tall and strike back”.

The lines are all expressions from people in a given situation or context. But from a bird’s-eye view: What themes seem to be at play? What tensions are emerging? What do the statements appear to be concerned with? Participants write opinions on big brown sheet in the middle of the discussion circle.

Imagined headlines. 3 groups, each representing one of the following media types: a) Editorially controlled media, b) Commercial or advocacy media, c) Social media. If some of these issues found their way to media, what news items could plausibly appear in your category? (Your lines can be applied if you want to). Subtitles and/or illustrations/depictions encouraged. Sharing.

Meeting with a figure (I)

Equipment: A-4 sheets. Pencils. Felt pens. Big sheet of brown paper. Identity cards: C-12 plan with picture of a gecko at the back, and A-3 size copies of the C-12 drawing. Document tray.

Frame (facilitator introduction): You are going to be journalism students in your final year of education. You have been offered a place at a prestigious university in an unknown country. The exam is approaching and you have a deadline today for an interview-based media report. The report should briefly convey impressions and information from the interview. It should be written by hand—eligibly—and only fill about ½ A4 page. The report should be done as pair work. You are expected to have an investigative attitude, a critical eye and a flair for what is

important.

This country has a very unclear part of its history related to a period in recent times. For one reason or another, little material has been available. But many of you have “heard something” and are motivated to find out more.

Now you have received a tip from one of your teachers, Professor Thrane, that there is a man in a home near the university who may be able to shed more light on this unclear period. Thrane has encouraged you to interview this man and at the same time arranged the necessary agreement with him, as well as obtaining permission from the authorities for the entire group to enter the home. Several of you have noticed, however, that Professor Thrane seemed unusually cautious and discreet regarding this tip. The only advance material he has given you, and not openly from his own hand, is a card for each one of you in a document tray.

Professor Thrane expects the interviewers to form an opinion about the *time* and the *place* this man worked, the community he comes from; some knowledge about values of the population, level of societal development, culture traits, technology, education, etc.—and if possible why this part of the history is so unclear, and how the state you live in has positioned itself in relation to this community.

Preparation: Facilitator gives each participant an identity card with a drawing of C-12 on the front and a an image of a Gecko on the back. Study the card. Give yourself an imaginary name, to be shared with your partner. Then form pairs. The partners discuss impressions and associations from the card and formulate some interview questions for themselves.

Before meeting the person: All parties can ask for a moment of ‘time-out’ during the interview. This means that you can ask for a short break while playing to make any clarifications, adjustments, etc. (e.g. “is this important to know”?)

Space 1: The facilitator invites the participants to bring chairs for a couple of half-circles in one end of the room. The space for the interview. Prepares himself to be *the figure*.

Meeting: TIR as Yoshi, an elderly resident in a “home”. Name tag on

his white shirt and a needle of a gecko. Old-fashioned round specs. Role: Authority Outside the Action (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 47); *status*: high/middle; *stance*: enabler/facilitator; *appearance*: modest but assured.

After having acknowledged the students' presence with a nod, Yoshi invites them to start. Quite early in the interview he refers to C-12 as 'the City of Twelve Gates'. During the interview, he conveys an impression of a minority society founded on equality, democratic forms of organization, high quality education, advanced technology, and a deep appreciation for culture and artistic expression. Civic ideals: *knowledge, truth, justice*—KTJ. The *duodecade* as a normative framework for organizing the society, emphasis on long-term thinking, intergenerational responsibility, and cyclical planning.

Yoshi is at the service of the journalist group, and on their side, but lets the main initiatives and questions come from them. Opposes easy solutions and tries to invite response and commitment from many. The role gives advice and direction for further investigations rather than very definite answers—yet with some authoritative knowledge if asked about it.

The interview-based media report: The journalists, in pairs, have about 15 minutes to write their reports. The reports are placed in the document tray.

The plan of C-12

Facilitator invites the participants to take a more detailed look at the drawing of C-12 (A3 copies). He asks them to take a different perspective this time—that of an urban planner, i.e. to read the plan from this particular viewpoint yet with their previous knowledge in mind. The plan must be approached with scrutiny and curiosity, in search of clues to what kind of community The City of Twelve Gates may once have been. 3 (or 4) groups. The facilitator's role is undefined in strict terms, a shadow role in Heathcote's terms (Moore, 2013). He steers the process, yet belongs to the work of the groups; he is hoping that they can find some answers regarding:

- Buildings?
- Open Spaces?
- Lanes?

- Gates?
- Aesthetic layout of the city?
- Symbolisms?
- Which subjects, fields of study, projects, or professions are being pursued there?
- Which needs are being served?
- What are the goals of these institutions?
- Vision statements?
- What might be the gate numbered 7?

If asked about his role, the facilitator can say that he is Thrane's assistant, and that he "thought they knew". While the groups are working, the facilitator must find time to look at the media reports.

Plenary: Group presentations of how the city plan has been interpreted. Facilitator invites to hear ideas of what might be Gate No. 7? (Tries to reach a common understanding).

Collective sculpting of what can be placed in or in front of Gate 7. The portal is delineated by a large elastic band, held in tension by four figures—each integral to the total composition. The sculpting unfolds through silent negotiation.

Meeting with a figure (II)

Equipment: Teacher's desk. Document tray with the students' reports. A wastepaper basket.

Facilitator narration: Several days have passed since the meeting with Yoshi. However, the students have not yet had the opportunity to meet their lecturer/supervisor, Professor Thrane. Today, a substitute from the ministry is coming. His name is Tork.

Space 2: The facilitator invites the participants to set up their classroom. Rows of chairs. A teachers desk. Wastebasket beside it. Prepares himself to be *the figure*.

Meeting: TIR as representative of the present authorities. Name tag on his black shirt. Sun glasses. Role: Authority Opposed to the Group (Morgan & Saxton, 1987, p. 45): *status*: high; *stance*: manipulator;

appearance: arrogant and bossy. Challenges the group, puts pressure on them, applies sarcasm and irony (O'Neill, 2006, pp. 141-149). But the role's function is to inspire further investigation in the group—for later. Tork is the one who 'knows best'-type. Wants to know why (the interview), what (information), how (the interview took place), who (took the initiative)—and why this vigilant group of students could risk their careers by carrying out such a ridiculous exam project. In between his questioning, he reads aloud from the reports that he has brought with him, and flings them in the air. His final gesture is to drop the rest of the reports in the wastebasket.

The facilitator in role tries to conduct the encounter in such a way that participants learn more about what is going on in the country right now but also something about the past, for instance: The authorities' view of "them", why they are in opposition, their roots in the country's history and culture, educational policy, intelligence services, family structures, their obsession with the duodecade, etc. May well make claims that contradict what Yoshi has said.

Naturally, the reports serve as a valuable source of information for the facilitator, offering insight into the students' interpretations following their encounter with Yoshi. Furthermore, these reports provide the facilitator with concrete "evidence" that can be utilized in a dramatic context. In this article I have not analyzed the content of the reports in detail (even though they contain intriguing findings); instead, I simply employ them in the present context as props, adopting them with a sense of disdain in my portrayal of the bureaucrat, Mr Tork.

Plenary: Brief summary out of role about what has happened and what we currently "know". Long big sheet of brown paper on the floor (use the other side of the first). In the middle facilitator places two of the maps of C-12. Participants write what we presently know on the sheet on both sides of the drawing(s): a) What people like Tork think about "them" on one side, and b) what people like Yoshi think about "them" on the other.

Smear and gossip scenes

1. A (young student) interviews B (an elderly neighbor) with sincere curiosity about B's memories of "that time"—when B was young and living in "that community." B responds with warmth and a generous willingness to explain.

2. A (young student) interviews B (an elderly neighbor) with sincere curiosity about B's memories of "that time"—when B was young and living in "that community." B tells A something that might be damaging to both parties if it reached the authorities.
3. A (mature child) wants to know from B (parent) about "that community" and the people who lived there. A asks with curious persistence, while B responds with warmth and a generous willingness to explain.
4. A (mature child) wants to know from B (parent) about "that community" and the people who lived there. A asks with curious persistence, but here B responds coldly, revealing a prejudiced and biased attitude.
5. Three gossip women chat casually about rumors concerning "that community"—for example, where it's located, that they know someone who's been there, what kinds of people live there, how life is organised, what people do there, and so on.

More info to be added to the sheet? Participants write in both columns on the sheet.

Effigies

Everyone, still grouped around the sheet.

- a. Give each gate a name—perhaps one that reflects a central value of the city.
- b. Create statues—effigies (Heathcote, 1984, p. 166)—that embody the gate's name and meaning.
- c. Can the statues speak?

Circle of statues. Forbidden words

Participants stand in a circle, facing outwards. When the facilitator calls out a keyword, each participant spontaneously creates their own interpretation of the word, then turns to face inwards to display it. We should not shy away from using *clichés* in this activity. Even a cliché can hold a grain of truth.

ACTIVISM	ADVOCACY	BIAS
B.A.M.E.	DIVERSITY	EQUALITY
ETHNICITY	EQUITY	GENDER
INCLUSION	INEQUALITY	INEQUITY
MARGINALISED	MINORITY	PREJUDICE
PRIVILEGE	RACIAL	STATUS
SYSTEMIC	TRAUMA	UNDER-VALUED
UNDER-REPRESENTED	SOCIAL JUSTICE	SOCIO-CULTURAL
VICTIM		

Once the activity is complete, the facilitator explains that all of these words come from a list of banned concepts issued by the country's administration for use in media, academic writing, and education.⁶

Meeting with a figure (III)

Equipment: 'Treasured documents' shrouded in beautiful cloth.

Space 3: The facilitator invites the participants to bring chairs for a circle in the middle of the room. An enclosed space for collective work that ensures privacy for its users. Prepares himself to be *the figure*.

Meeting: TIR as the teacher Thrane. Name tag on his green shirt. No glasses. Role: One of the Gang (Morgan & Saxton 1987:43): *status*: low; *stance*: enabler; *appearance*: cautious and soft-spoken. Authority is not overtly in his hands but he can lead or assist the work by questions and suggestions. He does not know all the facts; the role's function is to let the class make some decisions and take some responsibility.

Thrane begins by acknowledging, with regret, the harassment he has heard his students have endured. He lets the moment linger—an opening—should anyone choose to speak. He has recently been laid off from his job as a teacher at the university; he is not supposed to meet anyone in capacity as teacher; but he has taken the risk to meet with them again. He seeks to inspire them to continue what he himself could not complete:

⁶ The words listed appear in US federal directives instructing agencies to avoid, remove, or flag specific terms in official documents, websites, and communications. These restrictions differ between agencies but follow a similar trend: reducing references to diversity, equity, inclusion, climate change, gender identity, and other topics of social or scientific importance.

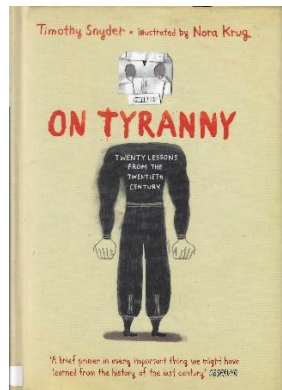
- a. To gain more knowledge about events in the history of the country, which has been kept hidden
- b. to share with them sources of inspiration that may strengthen resilience and offer strategies for resisting authoritarian rule.

Then he shows them something wrapped in fine black cloth. He unwraps it slowly, with reverence, and says: "This comes from C-12. I cannot share how it came into my possession. But I need your help to interpret it—to understand its meanings—and possible usefulness. I've trained you to look at things with fresh eyes and a critical mind. Now I trust *your* judgment."

The cloth contains documents from the C-12 archive. They are highly treasured:

1. A handwritten text in poster format—apparently a *memorandum* from C-12 citizens—dated 20.10.1966 ("from the past")
2. An adorned box containing six excerpts of *aphoristic writing* ("in the present")
3. 3. A *manual* for resisting tyranny ("for the future")

Thrane informs the students that he has managed to make some copies of all the documents, and a translation of the memorandum (which was not composed in English), so that the students can work with the materials in groups.

HISTORY & MANIFESTO	APHORISTIC WISDOM	STRATEGY
The City of the Twelve Gates, 20.10.1966. On behalf of our male community members aged 18-30, and in agreement with our female members, our community will collectively respond to the military drafts we have received. We will first be allowed to inform you about the ideals and rules of our	"He who says A need not necessarily say B. He may realise that A was wrong". [Brecht. <i>He Who Says No</i> (2003), p. 78] "A man who doesn't know the truth is just an idiot, but a man who knows the truth and calls it a lie is a crook". [Brecht. <i>Galileo</i> (1939), p. 70] "The aim of science is not to open a door to infinite	20 images of lessons from: 

community. Unlike you, we have no government or any form of governing authority. All important decisions are made collectively, where everyone living in the city has the right to vote. We therefore do not see you as our government. We are an independent community. Since we here in the city have taken a stand on conscription, we cannot in any way accept this order. All our citizens are pacifists and are convinced that this is right for us. Our pacifist philosophy is based on three pillars: Knowledge – Truth—Justice. Our scepticism is also based on your government's attempts to illegally penetrate the city gates. Our intention is to protect our citizens, our cultural ideals, and our society. Greetings from all in the city of twelve gates.	wisdom, but to set a limit to infinite error". [Brecht. <i>Galileo</i> (1939), p. 74] "Taught only by reality, can reality be changed". [Brecht. <i>The Measures Taken</i> (2003), p. 34] "Misfortune doesn't grow on the breast like leprosy; poverty doesn't fall like tiles from the roof; misfortune and poverty are the work of Man". [Brecht. <i>The Measures Taken</i> (2003), p. 26] "It may be a mistake to mix different wines, but old and new wisdom mix admirably". [Brecht. <i>The Caucasian Chalk Circle</i> (2003), p. 120]	+ gecko rune as front page: 
---	---	---

The treasured documents – 1) From the past, 2) In the present, 3) For the future

Task: Each group examines one of the three categories of treasured documents above. Each group is invited to interpret and embody selected essences/key elements within the materials, using forms such as dramatisation, movement, sound, choral speaking, visual depiction,

reflective commentary, dialogue, agit prop, and more. “Try stylization rather than social realism”.

Note to the reader: During the work, I never referenced the real sources of the documents. That was left for the closing of the workshop.

CLOSING REFLECTIONS

In the presentations of the final tasks, the participants showed strong commitment to the work. However, I was left feeling that there was an excess of material introduced, and we lacked enough time for a meaningful debrief of what we had accomplished within the four hours available. Looking back, I realize that the materials in this concluding sequence are so rich that each category could serve as the basis for a drama in its own right. Yet, they might not possess the same dramatic potential without the careful structuring and development of the C-12 drama, as discussed earlier.

Although participant reflections after the workshop were limited in number, what I received suggest that my aim to build a process drama from pre-texts removed from the present can, by analogy, become highly relevant. One participant noted: “For my part, I gradually realized through the practice that with C-12, we were not discovering a ‘future Utopia’ (or Dystopia) in the far distance, but actually speaking about our world. Eerily, the threats that had been posed to C-12, I realized, became the threats posed to our own civilization in the now, on the brink of getting lost. I particularly enjoyed how the non-verbal drama practice intersected and fed into the story unfolding, and the use of quotes (Brecht, Snyder) in the ‘presentation exercise’. Using archival material from our own civilization(s) rendered the experience of loss or threat particularly sinister and tangible.” Another participant reflects some of the political sentiments here, but also comments on the dramatic structuring: “For me, the most interesting part was the way you developed tension by not revealing too much too soon—it was difficult for participants to frame the ‘heroes’ and ‘villains’, which was nicely theatrical! I also enjoyed your use of the C-12 archive ‘smuggled out’—in fact straight afterwards I went out and bought a copy of Snyder’s book! I used to teach PGCE students on how the drama teacher operates (amongst other things) as a playwright in the

classroom, and the ‘smuggled archive’ , which framed us more clearly as ‘investigative’ journalists, was a good example of this. The document that needs to be ‘decoded’ is almost an archetype—present in lots of popular fiction/films, and I think one reason the participants found it so engaging is because it is reassuringly familiar—whilst actually being involved in the process of interpreting the materials was also exciting!”

This article has not sought to identify ‘findings’ or offer any other form of summarizing analysis—beyond each participant’s experience of the workshop (or each reader’s interpretation of it). My central research question concerned how to design and facilitate a process drama that might inspire critical questions about educational and societal issues, as well as how to share my own pedagogical and aesthetic reasoning behind its realization. I consider that ambition fulfilled.

Durable power of attorney

In drawing the article to a close, it is appealing to revisit the notion of utopia and link it to the concept of a durable power of attorney. This could provide the final chapter to our C-12 drama—one we lacked the time to explore fully—or it might offer a practical exercise for you, the reader, whether at your desk or in your own living room. Picture, as a fictional thought experiment, the idea of extending the principle of *a durable power of attorney*—typically applied to individuals unable to make decisions for themselves—to society as a whole.

In this scenario, society, while still capable of governing itself, formally sets out instructions or guidance for how it should be cared for and governed if it ever loses the ability to make responsible or rational choices. This idea, though imaginative, prompts a series of ethical and philosophical questions: Who determines when society is “incapacitated”? Who is granted authority to act on its behalf? As we consider these questions, it is worth noting that certain constitutions and treaties already operate in a similar way, aiming to prevent future abuses of power and ensure continuity and accountability.

For the purposes of this thought experiment, let us extend the idea further: What if we could grant an enduring power of attorney to future generations—those who are not yet able to vote or participate in decision-making? What might this look like in practice? Might it involve laws, institutions, resources, rights, enforcement mechanisms,

collective trust, education, culture, technological systems, and more?

To help bring this thought experiment to life, I invite you to take part in a creative exercise. While it is designed as a group activity, you are equally welcome to undertake it on your own.

1. Find a comfortable spot in the room and have a piece of paper ready. Close your eyes and reflect. Envision your ideal society. How would you wish it to be? What fundamental values would define its future? Feel free to include overarching educational aims for a new era, if you wish. Let your imagination roam freely, unconstrained by what seems realistic or logical. Listen to your aspirations and, whenever inspired, jot down notes or sketches.
2. Join a group of three and share elements of your vision. You decide how much to share; visions are dreams and should not be criticized, though clarifying or exploratory questions are welcome.
3. Ask each other: “What can you do to help society become the way you envision it?” (A asks B, B asks C, C asks A). Discuss possible actions and reflect on them as a group.
4. Use your answers as prompts to transform these actions and reflections into a creative artefact: a durable power of attorney for society. This might take the form of a manifesto, a speech, a poem, or another expressive format of your choosing.

Once your group has shaped its vision, present your creation to the wider group. In a final plenary discussion, consider how these ideas might inspire real action, foster resilience, and connect with the broader themes of the conference: “What education do we need? What society do we need?” Through this process, the concept of a durable power of attorney for society becomes not just a thought experiment, but a catalyst for imagining—and enacting—a more robust, accountable, and caring future.

Summing up

In the workshop, participants were challenged to interpret historical traces and the tension between utopia and dystopia in the fictional city community, C-12. They had to navigate the political within an educational setting, where the purposes of education and culture were

put into play, and where C 12 could be seen as an analogy to events in contemporary contexts. As a closing activity, I proposed a creative exercise in which participants drafted a societal ‘future mandate’ to secure the rights of coming generations. In this way, I hope that both the participants—and now the readers of the article—will make critical, reflective connections to their own positions.

SUGGESTED CITATION

Eriksson, S. (2026). Exploring C-12: An imagined place with a history, a future and contemporary challenges. *ArtsPraxis*, 13 (1), pp. 250-278.

REFERENCES

- Blakeley, G. (2024). *Vulture capitalism: How to survive in an age of corporate greed*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
- Boal, A. (1992). *Games for actors and non-actors*. Translated by A. Jackson. Routledge.
- Brecht, B. (1939). *Life of Galileo*. Socialist Stories.
- Brecht, B. (1971). *The Caucasian chalk circle*. Penguin Plays.
- Brecht, B. (2003). *The measures taken*. In *The Measures Taken and other Lehrstücke*. Methuen Drama.
- Brecht, B. (2003). *He who says no*. In *The Measures Taken and other Lehrstücke*. Methuen Drama.
- Busby, S. (2022). *Applied theatre: A pedagogy of utopia*. Methuen Drama.
- Dahl, R. (2024). *Matilda*. Penguin Books Ltd.
- Davis, D. & Lawrence, C. (eds.) (1986). Introduction. Section One. In *Gavin Bolton: Selected Writings on drama in education*. Longman.
- DICE Consortium (2010). *Making a world of difference. A DICE resource for practitioners on educational theatre and drama*. C. Cooper, editor, The DICE Consortium.
- Ende, M. (2009). *Momo*. Puffin Books.
- Eriksson, S.A. & Allern, T.-H. (2008). Interview with Dorothy Heathcote. Unpublished, Tromsø, 23.05.
- Eriksson, S. A. (2009a). Looking at the past for stepping into the future:

- Background reflections for drama in the curriculum of the 21st century. *Planting Trees of Drama with Global Vision in Local Knowledge*. Hong Kong: IDEA/TEFO, pp. 371-84.
- Eriksson, S. A. (2009b). *Distancing at close range: Investigating the significance of distancing in drama education*. Åbo Academy University.
- Fialho, O. (2019). What is literature for? The role of transformative reading. *Cogent Arts & Humanities*, 6 (1), pp. 1-16.
- Gallagher, K. and Booth, D. (eds.) (2003). *How theatre educates. Convergences and counterpoints*. University of Toronto Press.
- Gray, C. and Pasco, R. (anticipated 2027). *Theorising transformation in drama education*. Routledge (forthcoming).
- Haseman, B., & Winston, J. (2010). 'Why be interested?' Aesthetics, applied theatre and drama education. *Research in Drama Education: The Journal of Applied Theatre and Performance*, 15 (4), pp. 465-475.
- Heathcote, D. (1983). Learning, knowing and languaging in drama. *Language Arts*, 60 (6), pp. 695-701.
- Heathcote, D. (1984). Signs and portents. In *Collected writings on education and drama*, edited by C. O'Neill & L. Johnson, Hutchinson.
- Heathcote, D. (2008). Unpublished interview with Stig A. Eriksson and Tor-Helge Allern, Tromsø, Norway.
- Lindgren, A. (2005). *Pippi Longstocking*. Puffin Books.
- Lindgren, A. (2009). *Brothers lionheart*. Oxford Childrens.
- Lindgren, A. (2011). *Mio's kingdom*. Oxford University Press.
- Magnér, B. (1980). *Hur vet du det? Socioanalys i praktiken*. Göteborg: Esselte studium.
- Manguel, A. and Guadalupi, G. (1980). *The dictionary of imaginary places*. Granada.
- Moore, T. (2013). Revisiting Dorothy Heathcote's 'twilight role'. *NJ – Drama Australia*, 37 (1), pp. 14-24.
- Morgan, E. P. (2010). *What really happened to the 1960s: How mass media culture failed American democracy*. University Press of Kansas.
- Muir, A. (1996). New Beginnings: Knowledge and Form in the Drama of Bertolt Brecht and Dorothy Heathcote. Issues in Education Series No1. University of Central England/Trentham Books.
- Norwegian Government (2025). [White paper on total preparedness](#):

- [Prepared for crisis and war](#). Ministry of Justice and Public Security, Meld. St. 9 (2024–2025).
- Nussbaum, M. C. (2010). *Not for profit: Why democracy needs the humanities*. Princeton University Press.
- Nyrnes, A. and Lehmann, N. (Eds.) (2008). Ut frå det konkrete. Bidrag til ein retorisk kunstfagdidaktikk [*Out of the Concrete: Contributions to a Rhetorical Arts Education Didactics*], Universitetsforlaget.
- O'Neill, C. (1995). *Drama worlds: A framework for process drama*. Heinemann.
- O'Neill, C. (2006). Alienation and empowerment. In P. Taylor and C. D. Warner (Eds.), *Structure and spontaneity*. Trentham Books.
- O'Neill, C. (ed.) (2015). *Dorothy Heathcote on education and drama. Essential writings*. Routledge.
- Shklovsky, V. (2015). Art, as device. *Poetics Today*, 36 (3), pp. 151-174.
- Snyder, T. (2021). *On tyranny: Twenty lessons from the twentieth century*. Illustrated by Nora Krug, Bodley Head/Penguin.
- Steinweg, R. (1995). *Lehrstück und episches Theater. Brechts Theorie und die theaterpädagogische Praxis*. Brandes & Apsel.
- Taylor, P. (Ed.) (1995). Pre-text and storydrama: The artistry of Cecily O'Neill & David Booth. NADIE Research Monograph Series, No. 1.
- Taylor, P. (ed.) (1998). *Researching drama and arts education: Paradigms & possibilities*. Falmer Press.
- UNESCO. (2022). Re-shaping policies for creativity. UNESCO.

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY

Stig A. Eriksson is Professor Emeritus of Drama Education and Applied Theatre at the Institute of Arts, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Bergen, Norway. With an extensive career as a drama teacher, educator and researcher, his scholarly interests focus on drama and theatre education. He has a particular passion for the pioneering work of Dorothy Heathcote and Bertolt Brecht, and the aesthetic-pedagogical concepts of distancing (*Verfremdung/estrangement*) in process drama and applied theatre. He is the author of *Distancing at Close Range: Investigating the Significance of Distancing in Drama Education* (2009). Eriksson has engaged in major

collaborative research projects such as the EU-funded “DICE”: Drama Improves Lisbon Key Competencies in Education (2008-2010) and the national “Drama, Teater og Demokrati”, (2014-17) exploring how drama/theatre can support competencies, democracy and learning in diverse settings. His work is widely published in both national and international journals. He has been a presenter and workshop leader at all the Dorothy Heathcote Now-conferences (2021-2026).