

Drama Patterns: Seeing the Patterns from Within

Focus Group Report

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ABSTRACT

This report summarizes a focus group on drama patterns we organized at EuroPLOP 2019. Apart from the organizers, the focus group attracted eight participants, who together built a short drama play entitled *The Real Red Riding Hood* (created by Aleksandra Vranić). The play went through three settings with the final setting involving three drama patterns and one fundamental property (as defined by Alexander): *Thoughts Reflecting Environment*, *Reversed Advantage*, *Disbelieved Identity*, and *Echoes*. In addition, the participants tried out a name learning game based on the *Thoughts Reflecting Environment* pattern. The final setting was performed at the conference banquet without any further rehearsals (the focus group took only 75 minutes), followed by numerous informal discussions and reflections on how drama patterns could be beneficial for achieving a better understanding of the concept of a pattern, pattern composition, and pattern language, and for education in general. The focus group once more confirmed the effectiveness and efficiency of drama patterns that has been observed so far.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Software and its engineering** → **Patterns**.

KEYWORDS

drama, patterns, organizational patterns, pattern language, pattern composition

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1 INTRODUCTION

Within the focus group on drama patterns organized at EuroPLOP 2019 by the authors of this report, the participants were guided to build a short drama play as a composition of drama patterns, particular intriguing dramatic situations that tend to recur in different contexts and give a clue how to resolve them [5].

Through their generative nature, drama patterns literally pull out the best of actors' performance in a given situation. This requires no formal acting education and has been successfully applied with hundreds of children. In many cases, interesting dramatic performances have been created literally within minutes. The whole process of applying drama patterns is amusing, engaging, and inclusive. It encourages creativity and exploration. Once a pattern is established, each participant can try different roles, which adds even more to inclusiveness.

Actors are a part of drama patterns, and this enables them to see patterns from within. The actors feel the contradicting forces and how patterns put them into a balance. This is a reveling experience with a great potential for teaching patterns. In particular, this can help software practitioners establish a better understanding of all kinds of software patterns.

The rest of this report presents the setting and objectives of the focus group (Section 2), the performance within and outside the focus group (Section 3), and reflections on what has been achieved (Section 3), ending with some conclusions (Section 5).

2 SETTING AND OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this focus group were to make the participants experience patterns by literally becoming part of them and to demonstrate how drama patterns are effective and efficient in drama building. The plan was to gradually build a play starting from the minimum setting end extending it at both ends. This had to fit into 75 minutes reserved for the focus group.

Given that we didn't know the number nor structure of the participants in advance, the scenario had to be very flexible and adaptable. We selected a play called *The Real Red Riding Hood* (created by Aleksandra Vranić) we already had a good experience with. The play was performed numerous times by children of various age and also by adults [4].

The story goes like this. Red Riding Hood appears on the scene. Soon afterwards, yet another Red Riding Hood appears. The first

one is surprised and asks the other one: “You? And who are you?” The other one answers: “Well, *the* Red Riding Hood. Don’t you see?” While they argue, a third one arrives. The situation repeats and the argument intensifies. The same happens with each further Red Riding Hood. At the peak of the argument, there comes a wolf (or wolves) asking: “Which one among you is Red Riding Hood?” Acclaimed Red Riding Hoods start making excuses leaving the scene one by one. The wolf remains on the scene alone and confused, and then leaves as well.

The essence of this play is in the *Reversed Advantage* pattern, which is formed by the following contradicting forces (all the drama patterns mentioned in this report were first introduced in our paper on drama patterns [5]):

Advantage claimers want to benefit from the acknowledgment of their advantage by others,
But it occurs that their advantage endangers them when advantage usurpers appear.

Alleged Red Riding Hoods are advantage claimers, and the wolves are advantage usurpers.

To protect themselves, advantage claimers (publicly) reverse their claims, yet not yielding their advantage internally (keeping it to themselves). This resolves the conflict of forces.

The *Reversed Advantage* pattern is elaborated further by the *Disbelieved Identity* pattern, which is formed by the following contradicting forces:

The identity exhibitor exhibits his or her identity,
But the identity disprover doesn’t accept this.

The identity exhibitor remains sure of his or her identity continuing to exhibit it, while the identity disprover doesn’t get convinced of it. Both roles can be represented by groups instead of individuals. The Real Red Riding Hood actually features a special case of this pattern in which the identity disprover is also a carrier of the same identity, turning the identity exhibitor into another identity disprover. Also, there are multiple instances of this pattern there: one pattern instance per each Red Riding Hood’s arrival. Furthermore, all but the first pattern instance involve multiple identity exhibitors (all the Red Riding Hoods that were on the scene before a new one came).

This was the minimal setting we started with (we will refer to it as setting 1) with a plan to extend it at both ends:

- By adding the *Echoes* fundamental property (explained in Section 3) at the end of the play, making the Red Riding Hoods starting to argue again, which, in turn, brings the wolves back (setting 2)
- By adding the *Thoughts Reflecting Environment* pattern (explained in Section 3) at the beginning of the play, showing how the first Red Riding Hood came to the glade where the rest of the play takes place, with her thoughts reflected by the birds in the woods, making a sort of a prequel to the initial play (setting 3)

The plan also included performing the play at the conference banquet if the participants agree to do so.

The intention was to get the participants to experience patterns through acting without unnecessary delays caused by lengthy explanations, and only then provide them with a conceptual explanation

of what they have done immediately answering their questions and making further reflections. For this, only the basic story of The Real Red Riding Hood play was to be presented to the participants at the beginning along with concise, dedicated instructions on what is their role, leaving the details to them to make them up. In other words, the participants were to be told *what they are* and what are their intentions rather than *what they should do* with exact words they should say or moves they should make. The latter should have been pulled out from the context (the story) by pattern forces.

3 PERFORMANCE

Apart from the organizers:

- Aleksandra Vranić (Sandra), a drama and creative writing teacher at a private elementary art school
- Branislava Vranić, a high school student
- Valentino Vranić, an associate professor at the Slovak University of Technology

the focus group attracted eight participants:

- Přemysl Brada (Přemek), an associate professor at the University of West Bohemia
- Finja Huckfeldt, a research assistant at the University of Applied Sciences Emden/Leer
- Monika Maidl, a senior key expert at Siemens
- Christian Kohls (Chris), the president of Hillside Europe, a professor at TH Köln
- Michael Krisper (Mike), a PhD student at the Graz University of Technology
- Kohki Ogawa, a student at Keio University
- Tiago Boldt Sousa, the EuroPLOP 2019 general chair, an associate professor at the University of Porto
- Apostolos Zarras, an associate professor at the University of Ioannina

Although the participants had no previous acting experience (apart from Sandra and Branislava), after being acquainted with the basic story by Sandra, who acted as a director, and Valentino and Branislava, who acted as assistant directors, they accepted to take part in acting without any hesitation. We quickly came to a viable cast (Tiago joined us later):

- Red Riding Hoods: Branislava, Finja, Mike, and Monika
- Wolves: Apostolos, Chris, Koki, Přemek (only in setting 1), and Valentino

Přemek was very kind to take some professional quality photographs when he wasn’t acting.

As you can see, Mike played a Red Riding Hood, which added an additional humorous aspect to the play not just because Mike is a man, but because he is a proud owner a full-grown beard.

The participants immediately started getting into their roles, which could be observed in that some of them, in a lack of costumes, felt an urge to make their own costumes out of the available material, such as making red caps out of the red oval papers for sticky notes. Mike didn’t hesitate to change his red t-shirt for the conference t-shirt making a quite realistic red hood out of his original, red t-shirt (see Figure 1). This is something that Sandra observes in her work with children on daily basis. It is important to note that no one told the participants to make their costumes.



Figure 1: Red Riding Hoods made their own costumes and requisites out of their own initiative.

Without a further delay, we realized setting 1 as described in the previous section. It is worth mentioning how the participants were creative in augmenting the story by their own elements. For example, Mike claimed he was taking mushrooms to his grandmother, while Monika objected the grandmother doesn't like mushrooms, but the cake and wine she carried in her bag. Both of them found some bags to enhance the impression to the audience. Mike even used small balls to represent mushrooms (see Figure 1 again). Already on a second try, a usable performance was achieved (see Figures 2 and ??). Afterwards, the participants received a brief explanation on what patterns they played and on the underlying forces.



Figure 2: Disbelieved Identity.

Then we continued to setting 2, which involved adding the Echoes fundamental property [1] at the end to echo the structure set by the Reversed Advantage pattern, i.e., the argument the Red Riding Hoods had and how they were made to go away by the wolves. The Red Riding Hoods were told to get back to the scene and bow as Sandra and wolves are applauding them and that one of them (Branislava) has then to say that she's the real one anyway starting another round of argument on who's the Real Red Riding Hood. On the contrary, the wolves were not instructed how to act, but they were led to chase the Red Riding Hoods by Valentino, who was aware of this extended version of the story. In spite of this, the wolves acted very good and, what's more important, they had an



Figure 3: The advantage reverses.

opportunity to feel how the forces from the Reversed Advantage remained present, so that any disbalance could make them exhibit again. The participants were asked to observe this.

The last extension (prequel) to the play was made in setting 3. Branislava took the role of the Red Riding Hood who came first to the glade where the rest of the play takes place. On her way to the glade, she passes through some dark woods, where she gets frightened by being unable to find her way out. Her thoughts are reflected by the birds in the woods, played by all the other participants. At first, the birds' twitter sounds as usual, but then it starts to embrace human speech reflecting Red Riding Hood's thoughts, such as "I'm lost. Where's the way? I'm afraid..." As the Red Riding Hood starts to see the way out, the words in the twitter change: "Here's the way..."

The participants were then informed that we actually added another drama pattern to our pattern composition: Thoughts Reflecting Environment. The Red Riding Hood acts as a hero passing through the forest with birds that represents an environment. The environment reflects the hero's thoughts providing them to the audience. It is based on the following forces:

There is a need to express the hero's thoughts,
But without having the hero directly express them.

The environment reflects the hero's thoughts by modulating the sounds or visual expressions it already makes.

At that time, Tiago joined the focus group, so he was invited to see our dress rehearsal or, maybe better to say, preview since it was played in front of the audience (of one). Of course, Tiago applauded when the Red Riding Hoods bowed and was quite surprised the play continued. He proposed us to have a performance at the banquet, which was in accordance with our plan.

As a bonus, we quickly organized to demonstrate how the Thoughts Reflecting Environment pattern could be used as yet another name learning game, which are traditionally used at EuroPLOP conferences to help participants memorize each others' names. All the participants except Tiago became birds once more. As Tiago was passing through the imaginary woods, the twitter changed into his name. Then Monika took the role of a hero, while Tiago joined the birds. Monika was followed by Kohki and so we could continue with others the same way. The point is that there will always be someone who knows the current hero's name, and others will catch it getting accustomed to it.

For the performance at the banquet, Tiago suggested to start at our tables (with the “birds”), and then continue in front of the stage. There was no time for further rehearsals, so we had our performance in front of more than fifty people after only 75 minutes of work including discussion. The performance received a warm reception by the audience (see Figure 4).



Figure 4: The Real Red Riding Hood performed at the conference banquet: the wolves are coming back (Echoes).

4 REFLECTIONS

The performance at the banquet was followed by numerous informal discussions and reflections on how drama patterns could be beneficial for achieving a better understanding of the concept of a pattern, pattern composition, and pattern language, and for education in general. This was discussed in particular with Takashi Iba, who is known for his work on using pattern based approach to education, creativity, and well-being [3]. Christian Kohls and Michael Krisper expressed their hopes that this initiative would continue in the next EuroPLoP.

Drama patterns confirm once more what is known about patterns in general: that pattern realization depends on the context and is always different. This is in accordance with Alexander’s observation that the solution offered by a pattern can be used “a million times over, without ever doing the same thing twice” [2]. However, once drama patterns are established, the performance tends to become stable. The participants were very consistent in the elements by which they augmented the story, e.g., Mike claiming to carry mushrooms to the grandmother, and Monika claiming to carry a cake and wine (as has been mentioned in Section 3).

Effectiveness and efficiency of drama patterns, as regularly observed with children in Aleksandra Vranić’s work and as observed also with adults [4], was confirmed once more in the focus group. A usable performance was achieved in just 75 minutes, which included a discussion.

Drama patterns could be easily introduced as animating games, which are an inherent part of EuroPLoP conferences. Pattern based games would bring an additional value as they would make the participants become a part of patterns and see the patterns from within, opening the privilege the participants of our focus group had to all the participants. For this, scalable patterns should be used. And indeed, there are drama patterns instantly applicable with a large number of people without any kind of preparation required, such as *Thoughts Reflecting Environment*, which—as has

been mentioned in Section 3—could be used as a name learning game.

Deaf Witch with *Echoes* could be used to create a small sketch where one or several participants are captured by a group of deaf witches (or any other kind of captors) talk about something and in any moment one of the deaf witches mispronounces the word she heard, another one “corrects” her with a different mispronunciation, and so on. This could be also adapted into another name learning game, given that the witches play not with just any word, but with the name of the participant they are keeping in captivity.

Frozen Scene with role switching could be used to create another small sketch where a group of participants walks through a park full of statues (all other participants), and then they suddenly freeze, while the statues get alive trying to wake up the frozen participants, subsequently freezing again as the frozen participants awake (switching between a dream and reality). If waking up would be accompanied by calling the participant names, this could be also used as yet another name learning game.

5 CONCLUSIONS

A focus group on drama patterns we organized at EuroPLoP 2019 attracted eight participants (apart from the organizers), who together built a short drama play entitled *The Real Red Riding Hood* (created by Aleksandra Vranić).

The play went through three settings with the final setting involving three drama patterns and one fundamental property (as defined by Alexander [1]): *Thoughts Reflecting Environment*, *Reversed Advantage*, *Disbelieved Identity*, and *Echoes*. In addition, the participants tried a name learning game based on the *Thoughts Reflecting Environment* pattern.

The final setting was performed at the conference banquet without any further rehearsals (the focus group took only 75 minutes), followed by numerous informal discussions and reflections on how drama patterns could be beneficial for achieving a better understanding of the concept of a pattern, pattern composition, and pattern language, and for education in general. The focus group once more confirmed the effectiveness and efficiency of drama patterns that has been observed so far [4].

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