



Shakespeare's dramaturgy: a question of pedagogy and its relevance in Cameroon secondary schools

Mbeh Adolf Tanyi

Faculty of Educational Sciences, University of Yaounde 1, Cameroon

Abstract: Schooling being the sustained effort to advance the frontiers of knowledge, behaviourists were documenting human susceptibility to conditioning and encouraged approaches which attempted to facilitate better learning through manipulating behavioural responses; constructivists were exploring how context affects learning and recognising that teaching should support students to synthesise new knowledge with old. The intention of this paper is a holistic approach of what Guy Claxton call 'epistemic apprenticeship', where 'school is a protracted training in particular ways of thinking, learning and knowing' rather than merely accumulating knowledge. This is equally known as transformative education. This has built on proposals by Bruner, among others, for a broader, culturally conscious approach to education which acknowledges that 'knowing is a process, not a product. The curriculum for England reflects this more holistic approach with a requirement for improving the 'spiritual, moral, social and cultural development' of pupils. The paper posits that Shakespeare seems to hint to the fact that, the child is the father of a man, according to William Wordsworth. In this dispensation, however, our educational system pays more attention on results of examinations which largely test students 'retention of received knowledge which is relatively easy to test. Other aspects of "an epistemic apprenticeship" are more difficult to assess, leaving us with an accountability paradox: how can we know education is successful without a system of tests, but how can we test everything that is successful?

Keywords: accountability paradox, epistemic apprenticeship, transformative education, pedagogical.

I. INTRODUCTION

A man's reach should exceed his grasp, or what's a heaven for? (Browning, 1855)

This paper contextualises the current debate that surrounds the quintessence of Shakespeare in the education systems by reviewing the growth of English literature as a subject for study and how Shakespeare found his place in our school syllabus. His plays explore the universality value, how current policy seems to have conflated those 'universal' values with 'British' values.

If the development of human culture is built on our linguistic ability to share experiences that build our knowledge and understanding and pass it on, a perennial debate for education is which aspects of culture should be acknowledged and to what extent those aspects are questioned in the process of passing them on. Employability has been the core of our education with basic standards of literacy and numeracy constantly revised and decried. The National Curriculum for English requires the study of two Shakespeare plays in KS3, Shakespeare is the only compulsory author. The instructions to teachers on how they use Shakespeare are that students will be able to: 'taught to [...] develop an appreciation and love of reading' and the will also be able to: 'taught to [...] read and appreciate the depth and power of the English literary

heritage'. So, to appreciate Shakespeare as the only mandatory literary icon on the curriculum can suggest a right way to respond to reading the right kind of literature. The purpose of study for English for students corroborates a further statement about the educative purpose of literature:

«Through reading in particular, pupils have a chance to develop culturally, emotionally, intellectually, socially and spiritually. Literature, especially, plays a key role in such development. Reading also enables pupils both to acquire knowledge and to build on what they already know» (DFE, 2014b, p3).

II. THE INEVITABILITY OF BRICOLAGE

What we call our data are really our own constructions of other people's constructions of what they and their compatriots are up to (Geertz, 1973, p.9).

Robert Stake (1995, p.97) defines a researcher in any discipline as someone who 'has recognised a problem, a puzzlement, and studies it, hoping to connect it better with known things. My puzzlement is around the process of 'physically' in Shakespeare's texts; how actors generate embodied meaning from the complexity of a text, and how the practice of actors can support young learners in connecting both denotatively and connotatively in a given literary text. This puzzlement demands the following research question:

***How do young people learn better?**

This question resulted in a path of my thought is that: The point of education is to develop our skills of manipulating knowledge. What knowledge? The selected cultural inheritance we receive from previous generations. How do we manipulate it? Through critical thinking and it seems that the first responsibility of schools in modern age should be to help students acquire the ability to construct meaning. How then do we interact with knowledge? Through dialogue and art. Why dialogue? Dialogue allows us to share and develop meaning in order to question and challenge, as well as acquire and understand our inherited culture. Why art? Art, in its widest sense, is how we express

meaning, using analogies resulting from our sensory experiences of the world. How is Shakespeare useful for this? The quality of Shakespeare's language provides a comprehensive artistic resource and a site of received knowledge with which to interact critically and creatively in order to share and develop meaning. What is the best way to interact critically and creatively with Shakespeare? Using theatre-based practice which works with the plays as living performance texts, embodying the complex metaphorical layers of the language to support development of complex active communication skills. My interest in Shakespeare's value of education is in the organic processes of how meaning develops for individuals; the network of influences from past and present cultures that add up to each individual student's unique construction of the world and how that is shared, expressed and shaped through language.

Silverman's (2013) sound advice for the researcher is for simplicity and while I appreciate that this is eminently sensible, I felt bricolage, described as being 'grounded on an epistemology of complexity' (Kincheloe, 2006 p.2), better suited for this paper.

III. PEDAGOGIC IMPLICATION OF SHAKESPEAREAN PERFORMANCE

Although theatre-based approaches are not new, neither are they commonplace enough to be established tools of an English teacher's craft. Shakespeare's literary text leaved much to be desired because of their iconic and paradigm shift in both communicative and linguistic importance. His performances offer the young learners structured opportunities for a critical and creative interaction with their cultural inheritance; what Dewey posits 'Everything depends on the quality of the experience'. So, through theatre-based practice, students can learn the skills of analysis integrated with, rather than separated from, embodied experience. Theatre rehearsal room invites in a wide range of knowledge: experts in particular fields like warfare, law, or medicine for example, as well as Shakespearean academics from various areas of study. Critical and creative approaches can then provide not just motivation but also a deeper, because more personal,

interaction with the substance of that knowledge to form meaning.

IV. DEMOCRATIC IMPORTANCE OF DRAMA TEXTS

The emancipatory principle of theatre is rooted in the practice of ensemble. Ensemble was Boyd's watchword for the RSC during his time as Artistic Director. He was clear that ensemble means a whole greater than the sum of its parts, but where each of those parts is also instrumental to the whole.

Boyd's considers the importance of Shakespeare's plays as a kind of pedagogic and didactic tool for both "living together" and the culture of tolerance of one another. We can equally say that Shakespeare is a peace crusader. From this backdrop, Boyd (2009) developed 'a set of values and behaviours' or conditions for ensemble working:

- Cooperation: the intense unobstructed traffic between artists at play ; the surrender of self to a connection with others even while making demands on ourselves.
- Altruism: the moral imagination and the social perception to realise that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. The stronger helps the weaker, rather than choreographing the weak to make the strong look good.
- Trust: the ability to be appallingly honest, and to experiment without fear.
- Empathy: caring for others with a forensic curiosity that constantly seeks new ways of being together and creating together.
- Imagination: keeping ideas in the mind long enough to allow them to emerge from the alchemy of the imagination and not the factory of the will.
- Compassion: engaging with the world and each other, knowing there may be mutual pain in doing so.
- Tolerance: accommodating differences and allowing mistakes.
- Forgiveness: allowing recovering from big and potentially damaging mistakes
- Humility: the expert who has nothing to learn has no need for creativity because the answer is already known
- Magnanimity: the courage to give way ideas and love, with no thought of transaction or an exchange in return.
- Rapport: the magic language between individuals in tune with each other.
- Patience: this is only really possible over years. Art can be forced like rhubarb, but it tends to bend in the wind.
- Rigour: dancers and musicians take life-long daily training for granted, and theatre could do with catching up.

The above discussion may seem too idealistic, but it is equally very practical as a way not just to exist together but to flourish and achieve together.

Boyd's extension of the of humility is that it contains a paradoxical arrogance, 'a collective arrogance that you can actually aspire to something that sublime, as opposed to just getting away with it and getting nice reviews'(2009, p.6); or in an education context, aspiring too far more than a stamp of approval from Ofsted.

In his social perception, Greenblatt (1985, p33), posits that theatre is a social event, influenced both by the time of its production and its reception because 'artistic form itself is the expression of social evaluations and practices'. In the same vein, Seidel (2013,p.7) comments on how literary study can be solipsistic, looking back to the author's intentions rather than forward to how the book is received. By contrast, he posits, the learning of drama in schools is more inclined to be outward looking, focusing as it does on the ability to make connections with the plurality of people around you and what's going on in the world. Berry describes the importance of teaching and learning Shakespearean's plays as:

« to provoke us and make us want to talk, to discuss, to think-to communicate through language. It can make us question not only our

beliefs and the way we live, it can make us question ourselves. And surely this primal need to exchange ideas and desires is basic to our sense of community» (2008, p.13).

Also, Brook (1998, pp.140-141) describes how a living theatre must be alive and political but it the opposite of politics: while politicians are required to smooth away nuance and defend big ideas, good theatre ‘must show that political absolutes are painfully, relative and many commitment dangerously naïve’. Unlike the superficial sureties of politics, the illusions of theatre provide a space to explore possibilities:

«In life the heat of conflict makes it almost impossible to enter into the logic of one’s adversary, but a great dramatist can without judgement launch opposing characters against one another, so an audience can be at one and the same time inside and outside them both, successively for, against and neutral {...} For a few hours it is possible to go very far; social experiments can take place that are far more radical than any that a national leader can propose. Utopian experiences that we will never see in our live time can become real within the time span of a performance, and underworlds from which one returns can be visited in safety. Together with the audience we can make models to remind ourselves of the possibilities that we constantly ignore».

Brook describes how, through an engagement with alternative sympathies and attitudes illustrated on a stage, ‘spectators can be given a moment of perception beyond their normal vision’. Brook’s position contradicts when William James said the world of the infant is a ‘booming, buzzing confusion’. He was making a plausible guess from an adult point of view, but thousands of researches have since shown him to be completely wrong. From day one, children are selective in what they attend to. What changes as they mature is the basis for selection. This also recalls Vygotsky’s observations that a child becomes a head taller

through imaginative play. An imaginative engagement with the plurality of perspectives of others’ lives can expand our social, emotional and cognitive understanding as we search for the quality of democracy rather than becoming numbed by political wrangling over the rights of different interest groups.

Theatre-based pedagogy are purposefully based in the performance and rehearsal techniques of the theatre world; allowing that this sets up an analogy where the similarities and differences of practice between directors and actors, and teachers and students are benefactors of these approaches. Practice in terms of drama includes key attitudes, behaviours and knowledge alongside the techniques and strategies which can form a tool-kit of ‘approaches’. Teachers’ ownership of pedagogy becomes absorbed into their practice through reflection that adapts approaches to suit the social and curriculum context in which they are working. Personal adaptation is the difference between drama practice: a reflective, constantly shifting process, relying on tacit knowledge; and theatre-based approaches: a set of tools to use. Theatre-based practices are in a way celebrating and acknowledging the incompleteness of our knowledge by exploring cases of dramatic situations as hypotheses about the human condition. In this way, it works with negative capability, not in a passive acceptance but in an active and restless search for a quality of truth through finding rather than forcing analogies. It could be seen as restoring a balance in education between valuing how our left and right hemispheres work to construct our worlds.

V. EPISTEMOLOGICAL PERCEPTION OF SHAKESPEARE’S DRAMA

The late twentieth century saw a zeitgeist of development of ‘active approaches’ for school study of Shakespeare. Drama pedagogies were becoming more established in schools, influencing the practice of English classrooms, alongside which Rex Gibson in Cambridge, Peggy O’Brien in Washington, DC, and Cecily Berry in Stratford were devising strategies for working on Shakespeare with young

people which would become highly influential. Gibson's influence on Shakespeare's creativity in both epistemology and ontology of knowledge is worth quoting his definition of active methods in full:

.xiii) Active methods comprise a wide range of expressive, creative and physical activities. They recognise that Shakespeare wrote his plays for performances, and that his scripts are completely by enactment of some kind. The dramatic context demands classroom practices that are the antithesis of methods in which students sit passively, without intellectual or emotional engagement.

Shakespeare is not a museum exhibit with a large 'DO Not Touch' label, but a living force inviting active, imaginative creation. Active methods release students' imagination and involve them in speaking and acting. Such action gives force and substance to the discussion, writing and design work that students undertake. It makes them to make Shakespeare their own, as they inhabit the imaginative worlds of the plays through action. Direct experience of Shakespeare's language allows students to feel its distinctive forms and rhythms, and to respond with a real sense of personal engagement. Active methods dissolve the traditional oppositions of analysis and imagination, intellect and emotion. They encourage informed personal responses which are both critical and appreciative. In active work, students combine critical thought with empathy, confidence with a willingness to suspend judgement. Interpretations do not have to be of the narrowing 'either...or' type but can be the more expansive and imaginative 'both...and' variety. (1998, pp)

The key aspect of what 'active' means emerging from this definition is relativism. The words 'imagination' or imaginative are used no less than five times in this short passage alongside active verbs: enact, involve, make their own, inhabit, experience, feel, respond, and engage. Gibson is clear that through these methods, young people are encouraged to bring their own ideas and values to bear on shared experience of understanding the text. He is also clear that intellectual and emotional responses should go hand in

hand, and as such, ideas can be wide ranging and organic, rather than narrowly taxonomic.

VI. SHAKESPEARE AS PRESENTISM

In Shakespeare's studies and a development in cultural materialist criticism, 'Presentism' usefully contributes to a cultural vocabulary for a co-constructivist approach to teaching Shakespeare, acknowledging as it does contingency of meaning and plurality of values. In considering presentism as a theoretical lens for Shakespeare criticism, Huge Grady and Terence Hawkes (2007,p.3) assert that facts and texts don't speak for themselves but only communicate as:

Part of specific discourses which impose on them their own shaping requirements and agendas. We choose the facts. We choose the texts. We do the inserting. We order the priorities which govern everything. Facts and texts, that is to say, don't simply speak, don't merely mean. We speak, we mean, by them (*italics original*).

From Brook's perspective,(1968, p.43), 'for the play to be heard, then you must conjure its sound from it', and seems to echo pedagogical understanding of the value of analogy, relevance and interpretation in how we understand our cultural inheritance. Again, Grady and Hawkes (2007) present presentism as the next and more honest development in its acknowledgement of how we can only read the past from our experiences in the present: 'The truth is that none of us can step beyond time. The present can't be drained out of our experience. As a result, the critic's own situatedness does not-cannot-contaminate the past. In effect, it constitutes the only means by which it's possible to see and perhaps comprehend it' (2007,p.3)

Dewey posits that making ourselves familiar with our history predicates on our understanding of the present, which could be read as a presentist pedagogy, making a progressive aim out of using cultural inheritance to learn more about ourselves as well as our similarities and differences with our ancestors. The situatedness in advocating theatre-based practice is in arguing for the interplay between individuals' unique contemporary sum of

experiences and the knowledge they can share about the past. Also, the comparativist work of cognitive linguist has concluded that people in all cultures probably use many of the same image schemas and basic level categories to structure their languages' which suggests that as a species we share common mental processes across space and time **McConachie** (2006, p.7).

VII. PEDAGOGIC PERCEPTION OF SHAKESPEAREAN THEATRE PRACTICE

The comparison of a rehearsal room and the classroom calls for some investigation. The relationship between a professional director and an actor is generally between adults and can assume a level of talent and motivation. By contrast, the relationship between a teacher and a student entails inequality of age and experience and can include a wide spectrum of ability and motivation. The model of theatre-based practice is in reducing these differences through a dialogic, inclusive exploration to build meaning, which values plurality of experiences in the room. Even though a director in a play may have a lesser responsibility than the teacher in a classroom, however, the impact of relationships requires careful management in both cases and can be key to successful practice. It should be borne in mind that the complication of the analogy that a classroom is not just being compared to a rehearsal room and the process of making theatre, but also to the space where the product of those explorations is shared and evaluated. But the teacher's role in the classroom can at different moments be compared to a director working in a constructivist and epistemological way with actors, or an actor, using 'director instruction and responding to an audience who each bring their own private worlds to bear on the experience. Blending these roles perhaps comes closer to **Hattie**'s definition of an 'expert' teacher, where an 'expert' teacher shares with 'expert' directors and actors the ability to respond adaptively and flexibly in the moment as a result of high levels of preparation and motivation.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The discussions above aimed to show that setting received knowledge and creative interaction, Shakespeare as literary

heritage and living artist, as binary positions in teaching Shakespeare is unhelpful when considering the usable value of Shakespeare in today's classroom. When we read his plays, are emerged into other worlds and points of view but still we interpret them from our own perspective. Discussion can help us appreciate others' perspectives about what we have read but theatre helps us understand those other points of view in a multi-sensory, embodied way. Actors have to take all the metaphors in the text and synthesise them with their own experiences, making sense of why they are spoken by an emotional human being that communicates with other emotional human beings. As **Ranciere** (2009, p. 3) describes 'Drama: 'Drama means action'.

The success of the human species is now widely regarded as depending on two skills: our ability to cooperate, and our creativity with tools. Language is regarded as our greatest tool, not least because it has so strongly aided our ability to cooperate. Shakespeare is widely acclaimed as the greatest word-smith. He was able to craft language as an expression of 'meaning' found and understood through the organic, emotive whole of 'sense' within an individual's mind and body. Berry (2008, p.3) reminds us that 'speaking is in itself a positive, if not aggressive, act, for simply by making sound we are asserting our presence'. The purpose of language then might be described as allowing us both to share connections and distinguish difference. Dewey (1934, p.110) asserts: 'Language exists only when it is listened to as well as spoken. The hearer is an indispensable partner'. Even when we talk to ourselves, we are in conversation with others, attempting to define our understanding of the present against what we have heard and experienced in the past. A Shakespearean soliloquy is a heightened example of this but is the poetic extreme of a spectrum that makes us ask aloud why we have walked into a room when no-one else is there.

Our analysis also posits that Shakespeare language, like all other languages, works through what Bellos does-using metaphor to short circuit meanings as he assumes the cultural knowledge of his reader will include the story of Bebel. Therefore, Shakespeare's texts, mediated through

performance, can provide our best resource for understanding how language works because of their strong track record of meaning in many help us understand who we are. ways to many different people. This makes his work a good resource for continually seeking the connections that

REFERENCES

- [1] Bellos, D. (2011). *Is that a fish in your ear? Translation and the meaning of everything*. London: Particular Books.
- [2] Berry, C. (1990). *Your Voice and How to Use it Successfully*. London: Virgin Books.
- [3] Berry, C. (2004). *Working Shakespeare. The Cicely Berry Workshops. The Working Arts Library*.
- [4] Boyd, M. (2009). *The RSC's Next Big Risk, draft article. The Stage*.
- [5] Brook, P. (1968). *The Empty Space*. London: Penguin Books.
- [6] Bruner, J. S. (1996). *The Culture of Education*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- [7] Claxton, G. (2008). *What's the point of school? Rediscovering the heart of education*. Richmond: One world.
- [8] Dewey, J. (2004). *Arts as Experience*. London: Pedigree.
- [9] Geertz, C. (1973). *Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture. The Interpretation of cultures: Selected Essays*.
- [10] Gibson, R. (1990). *Secondary School Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Non Subs Records via Curriculum Corporation AND TCF.
- [11] Grady, H. & Hawkes, T. 2007. Introduction: Presenting Presentism. In Grady, H. & Hawkes, T. (eds.) *Presentist Shakespeare*. London: Routledge.
- [12] Greenblatt, S. (2005). *Will in the World. How Shakespeare Became Shakespeare*. London: Pimlico.
- [13] Kincheloe, J. L. & Berry, K. S. (2004). *Rigour and complexity in educational research: conceptualising the bricolage*. Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- [14] Ranciere
- [15] Shakespeare
- [16] Silverman
- [17] Stake
- [18] Vygotsky