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## Getting off the subject; English, drama and media and the commonwealth of powerful culture

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*Headmaster: I was a geographer. I went to Hull. History Boys – Alan Bennett*

### Them that's got shall get..

There is an old riddle that makes us teachers chuckle knowingly. Imagine that a train driver, a surgeon and a teacher fell asleep in 1908 and woke up to go to work in 2008. Which one of them would notice they had been asleep for a century? The same rows of chairs, the same mode of instruction in many cases, the same content and modes of assessment. The same power and powerlessness between teachers and learners over what is learnt, how it is learnt and how it is valued through assessment. Our early 20c teacher would wake to find that in many places what young people are taught as valuable and socially controlled knowledge is still comfortably organised into 'subjects'. And that of these subjects English, along with Science and Maths are the kings of the curriculum.

Over the sleeping century in the UK we have become naturalised into thinking that subjects are our only means of organising, delivering and assessing what young people learn about their worlds through schooling. Our children study the world through the frames of subjects and their success in later life will largely depend on their success in subject-based rather than real world-based learning. Primacy is given to achieving success in subjects rather than in a broader range of personal and social achievements and therefore to a curriculum which tends to isolate and reify the facts and figures from live(d) human experience. It is in England at least a curriculum code which continues to reflect Basil Bernstein's 1968 classical distinction between *collection codes* and *integrated codes*. Bernstein described the broader cultural and sociological effects of these different 'message' systems and what and how they conveyed to children about what was to be valued in their schooling. (Bernstein 1973). In the collection code, children literally 'collect' rather than construct or apply knowledge collectively.

*Knowledge under collection is private property with its own power structure and market situation....children and pupils are early socialised into this concept of knowledge as private property. They are encouraged to work as isolated individuals with their arms around their work (p.140)*

In Bernstein's theory of educational codes, the key concept of the subject-based collection code is 'discipline', learning to work within a received frame, learning and accepting which questions are appropriate, accepting that knowledge is hierarchically ordered over time. Evaluation is sequenced to reflect the temporal hierarchisation.

Success at one level allows progression to the next, the levels are objectively determined through pre-determined measurements and tests. Knowledge under the collection code also socialises children into *knowledge frames which discourage connections with everyday realities* (p.142). For some children the collection code will reinforce the gulf between school knowledge and home and school knowledges and experiences. What must be learnt and what is valued in the classroom may bear no resemblance or connection to what a child knows and experiences beyond school and beyond the subject. More than this, the child may also learn that their own knowledge and experience are not just different but also less valued – profane. Bourdieu describes the effects of this gulf on some learners as *La Violence Symbolique*.

However, our teacher from 1908 might be disturbed to discover that this disassociation of school learning from the real world and the pursuit of subject knowledge rather than personally meaningful knowledge is increasingly recognized as failing to meet the full range of needs of young people and of society. In the introduction to *Authentic Achievement*, Newmann et al. (1995) preface the findings of large scale empirical research into effective pedagogy with these words:

*The kind of achievement required for students to earn school credits, grades and high scores on tests is often considered trivial, contrived, and meaningless by both students and adults, and the absence of meaning breeds low student engagement in school work. Meaningless schoolwork is a consequence of a number of factors but especially curriculum that emphasises superficial exposure to hundreds of isolated pieces of knowledge. The term authentic achievement thus stands for intellectual accomplishments that are worthwhile, significant and meaningful, such as those undertaken by successful adults: scientists, musicians, entrepreneurs, politicians (p.26)*

It is interesting to pause here and consider what ‘authentic achievement’ might mean in the context of English, drama and media classrooms. What do successful adults do in these domains and how can their ‘authentic achievements’ be recreated by young people in the classroom? At the very least the idea of ‘authentic achievement’ is a reminder that beyond the ‘subject’ these English, drama and media together have the humanising potential for authentic, life long and life wide outcomes

But who benefits most from a subject based curriculum under collection? In the UK the pursuit of subjects has as its ultimate aim, entry into University and the more prestigious the institution, the purer the subject route will be. In the UK entry to Oxbridge is still seen as the pinnacle of achievement. And this selection depends on students gaining the highest results in a subject-based progression that starts at three years of age. But who goes to Oxbridge? Who do they become? The Sutton Trust is an independent research centre in the UK that seeks to widen participation amongst all social and cultural groups to the advantages of a University education. Their research shows that:

- 100 elite schools (3% of total) accounted for 33% of Oxbridge admissions in last five years,
- 80% of the 100 schools with the highest admission rates to Oxbridge are independent<sup>1</sup>

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- 32% of MPs attended independent schools. 43% attended leading Universities and 27% went to Oxbridge
- 68% of barristers, 76% of judges and 54% of news journalists attended independent schools

It is clear from these and other data that the subject based curriculum benefits those who are already advantaged and who will go on to become the next closed generation of the powerful. A narrow adherence to the idea of subjects as the natural means of organising schooling and an often even narrower focus, for the most disadvantaged young people, on the testing of basic technical skills of communication and numeracy have served to widen the gulf of inequalities in the UK. Research by Alan Smithers from the University of Buckingham, reported on the front page of *The Times* showed that at age 7 performance gap between children in the richest and poorest postcodes is 20%, at age 16 it is 43.1%

As the African-American educator Lisa Delpit (1995) has argued, there is a culture of power and it is enacted in classrooms. Those who already belong to the culture of power are least aware of its existence, those who do not are most aware of it (p.24) In the words of Billie Halliday,

*Them that's got shall get,*

*Them that's not shall lose,*

*So the Bible said and it still is news.....*

*Yes, the strong gets more,*

*While the weak ones fade*

*Empty pockets don't ever make the grade<sup>2</sup>*

The Sutton Trust research also shows that a student at a state school is as likely to go on to a leading university as a student from the independent sector who gets **two grades lower** at A level (2007). This suggests that a working class child who has achieved against all the odds to gain the highest academic results in the subject of English, for instance, will still be disadvantaged against a student whose schooling and upbringing have been within the culture of power. It suggests that access to the material advantages of an elite university education depends on acquiring the symbolic power of cultural capital as well as having access to economic capital. A student who has been privately educated in England is likely to have received a simultaneous and symbiotic cultural education from home and from school. This will have meant that the same cultural knowledge and experiences which are valued in the school curriculum will have also been experienced and valued, habitually, at home. For such children there is no gulf between the school curriculum under collection and their beyond school and beyond subject knowledge and experience. The gulf is replaced with a mirror. This distinctive education will have provided the student, at home as well as in school, with knowledge

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of and informed exposure to key works of literature and other arts and the experience of engaging with the arts as a life long and life wide resource – as part of their culture. As a mark of social distinction.

The narrow focus on the technology of language in the subject of English in the state of England, has tended to background the traditional centrality of literature, poetry and other cultural experiences in the English classroom. The acquisition of testable skills in Literacy in its narrowest sense has replaced the idea that English, drama and media can offer young people a life resource at every level of human experience; from the pragmatic to the poetic; from spectatorship to participation in a wide range of representative and communicative forms. By focussing on literacy at the expense of critical cultural learning, the idea that English classrooms are the principle site for young people to make and respond to cultural work has almost been forgotten. But recent policy developments indicate that the New Labour government may be waking up to the reality that alongside the need for all young people to acquire Standard English in order to participate in the culture of power there is also the need for them to acquire a Standard Culture which like its linguistic cousin is closely associated with certain social and economic groups rather than others.

### **Two truths are told..**

Under the title of *Find Your Talent* the UK government has announced its plans to ensure that every child in England has access to five hours of cultural activity a week (DCMS/DCSF 2007). Interestingly it is assumed that from 5-14 years of age there will only be two hours of cultural activity in the school curriculum. An hour of music and an hour of Art. It is assumed that there is no cultural activity in English classrooms, drama of course does not exist as a cultural subject in its own right in the English National Curriculum. But if poetry, film, drama, literature in school are made invisible so too are other cultural activities that young people enjoy out of school – football, going to the Mosque, hanging out with your mates and dancing for instance. The list of desirable cultural activities includes visits to theaters and galleries, creative writing, music and dance clubs. The sorts of activities which are the birthright of children of a certain class and home education. This egalitarian desire to encourage all young people to ‘enjoy’ the cultured pastimes associated with a few is of course a welcome redistribution of cultural resources. But in the DEMOS<sup>3</sup> discussion paper that provides the political rationale for the ‘cultural offer’ John Holden (2008) suggests that:

*‘However, in this Paper, ‘culture’ is used not in a wide ethnographic sense, encompassing the creation of meaning through all of society’s practices and symbols; instead it is used in a more focused sense of culture as a pursuit through the arts. Here ‘the arts’ are broadly conceived to include historic and contemporary arts, ‘high art’ and popular art, performing arts, literature and heritage, and arts within and beyond such institutions as museums and galleries. (page 10)*

This reduction of ‘culture’ to ‘a pursuit through the arts’ is of course deeply problematic for the tradition of ‘multiculturalism’ in both UK cultural policy and educational practice. If I take a Bangladeshi child to the Victoria & Albert Museum or to the National Portrait

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<sup>3</sup> DEMOS is a left of centre government think tank which has significantly influenced New Labour’s education, social and cultural policy making

Gallery it will be impossible for such a child to distinguish between culture as 'a pursuit through the arts' from culture as the complex of signs, values, symbols, histories of power and domination, tastes and preferences and other living practices which are also displayed alongside the artefacts. and portraits. This simple edit also circumscribes the history of how the word 'culture' became limited to mean the artistic pursuits of a particular class and their 'culture'. Many of the artistic 'activities' described in *Find your Talent* are already a regular part of the everyday 'culture' of many middle class children of different 'cultures'. To equate the arts with culture is to privilege and naturalise the particular cultural interests of already powerful groups and individuals. It also neutralises the artist as a critic of culture in its widest sense – it removes the arts from the circumstances of everyday life.

Despite the hollowing effects of a narrow and technicist focus on 'literacy', English/ Drama/Media (EDM) remains a principle site of cultural learning in its widest sense including through the pursuit of the language arts for young people. Through making their own stories, poems, dramas, media objects and other forms of representation and in responding to those of others, young people are actively engaged in forging their own private and public, personal and collective identities as well as developing the basic skills of human communication. Through these engagements young people may learn who they are and how they are placed in the world; to see themselves but also to see how others see them. Crucially, in the best of these classrooms, children of all backgrounds, will be given powerful, but also socially restricted, cultural experiences and learning opportunities. Part of this power will come from being able to make connections between the idea of culture as a 'pursuit through the arts' and culture in its widest ethnographic sense. To see the cultural learning on offer in the EDM classroom as being integral to their own life experiences and integrated with other areas of knowing in the curriculum. In this sense these classrooms will be moving beyond the subject to offer significant life long and life wide resources to all children.

*Hector: The best moments in reading are when you come across something - a thought, a feeling, a way of looking at things - that you'd thought special, particular to you. And here it is, set down by someone else, a person you've never met, maybe even someone long dead. And it's as if a hand has come out, and taken yours. (History Boys – Alan Bennett)*

The pedagogy of these classrooms sits more comfortably with Bernstein's *integrated code* of boundary-less knowledge, connecting classroom learning to the world beyond, establishing relevance and authenticity in learning and asking complex questions about the world which includes but is not limited to school. In the integrated code:

*The particulars of each subject are likely to have reduced significance. This will focus attention upon the deep structure of each subject, rather than on its surface structure....this is likely to affect the orientation of the pedagogy, which will be less concerned to emphasise the need to acquire states of knowledge, but will be more concerned to emphasise how knowledge is created....is likely to emphasise various ways of knowing in the pedagogical relationships.....(1973, p.242)*

However, the idea of a EDM learning space, based in critical cultural experiences and engagements, suggests that equal respect and attention will be given to the multiple languages, heritages, traditions of representation and ways of living and believing that

constitute a 'multicultural' society. Anansi, hip-hop, Sufi stories, traditional stories from around the globe can sit proudly alongside Shakespeare and Phillip Pullman. But of course even this short list poses problems of definition and purpose. The emphasis here is on 'geo-ethnicity' as the determinant of cultural difference. The purpose would be to give recognition to the linguistic and literary resources associated with the multiplicity of ethnic groups that constitute a society. To ensure that all children could see and recognise themselves in the EDM curriculum and that everyone's story would be heard in turn. And of course this is important. In a classroom dominated by mono-cultural images and stories, the child who is different has the double hurdle of acquiring a language and learning without being recognised as belonging. But if Anansi speaks for children of Afro-Caribbean heritage who does Shakespeare and Phillip Pullman speak for? White English children? Do James Berry's poems stand equally with Shakespeare's? If 'equally' then in what sense?

Of course, there are more cultures than there are ethnicities. There are other determinants to cultural difference like gender, generation, region and class. In any case many young people live between and across, as well as within, cultures and ethnicities; they are hyphenated, hybridised, unfixed in terms of stable categories. There are for instance now seventeen categories of ethnicity in UK government official documents. Even within an apparently monocultural classroom there will be highly granulated cultural differences between: what boys and girls do; differences in the tastes and preferences of the teacher and the children which may have been shaped by differences of education and opportunity; differences between the cultures of the poorest and richest postcodes. Even in such a classroom an approach to multiculturalism that sought to ensure that individual identities were recognised, respected and represented and which also sought to introduce children to 'other' cultures would result in an endless checklist that could never be completed. It would also be a classroom, well intentioned enough, that would focus on identity rather than community, on differences rather than commonalities. A classroom in denial of the existence of a culture of power.

From very different perspectives, Lisa Delpit and the literary theorist Terry Eagleton outline both the challenge and the honourable tradition of acquiring the necessary cultural capital to become economically and socially powerful rather than merely 'different'.

*What should teachers do about helping students acquire an additional oral form? First they should recognise that the linguistic form a student brings to school is intimately connected with loved ones, community and personal identity. To suggest that this form is 'wrong' or even worse, ignorant, is to suggest that something is wrong with the student and his or her family. On the other hand it is equally important to understand that students who do not have access to the politically popular dialect form in this country, that is, Standard English, are less likely to succeed economically than their peers who do. How can both realities be embraced? - (Delpit, L. 1995 page 169)*

*One of the most moving narratives of modern history is the story of how men and women languishing under various forms of oppression came to acquire, often at great personal cost, the sort of technical knowledge necessary for them to understand their own condition more deeply, and so to acquire some of the theoretical armoury essential to change it –Eagleton, T. 2000 page 125*

Both of these voices recognise the culture of power and that access to this culture requires explicit teaching of its codes and conventions and other 'rules'. Without this knowledge, children who are disadvantaged either through being culturally misrecognised in the curriculum or through the material disadvantages of poverty and denial of resources cannot change their lives or those of their children. There is a culture of power and it is enacted in classrooms. Those who already belong to the culture of power are often the least aware of its existence; those who do not are the most aware of it. If the idea of 'multiculturalism' suggests that there can be an equal recognition of a diverse range of cultural practices, reality suggests that the culture of power is in part defined by a shared set of tastes and preferences for particular cultural works such as Shakespeare and the other refined classics of the Euro American canonical tradition as well as a shared set of 'mannered' speech genres. It is this shared sense of an implicit culture and its rules which distinguishes those who belong to the culture of power and which may explain why a privately educated students in more likely to enter a leading university than and academically brighter student who does not belong to the culture of power and does not understand its rules as well.

Access and belonging to the culture of power requires knowledge of its symbolic and cultural heritage, sometimes referred to as 'cultural capital' and this can be acquired if it is made universally available through education, that is the positive in the 'cultural offer' proposals. For some children engagement with and access to the cultural learning associated with the culture of power is by accident of birth into the culture of power itself; most will rely on the vagaries of schooling which may or may not introduce them to the culture of the culture of power. In terms of power, all cultures are not equal.

The necessity of ensuring that all children have access to the linguistic resources of the powerful is of course the political imperative underpinning the National Strategies. But the narrowly technical emphasis on providing universal access to the skills of literacy associated with the powerful uses of language – Standard English - avoids any meaningful critique of the culture of power and tends to disassociate language from the human contexts and histories in which it is created. Language of course is only meaningful and comprehensible in context. And this is an important function of drama because it allows learners and teachers to explore different registers, dialects in context – as imagined yet lived experiences of language. Drama also allows for the critical and knowing dissection of behaviours associated with the imbalances of power and access to resources which characterise so many inter-cultural exchanges and transactions.

A home education, for instance, which gives the children of the powerful access to direct experiences of language being used powerfully gives a double advantage. A home education which is restricted in terms of the range of dialects and registers which are directly experienced together with a school education which introduces new and unfamiliar uses of language which are not representative of a child's out of school experience and identity serves as a double disadvantage.

*"..success in institutions...is predicated upon acquisition of the culture of those in power. Children from middle class homes tend to do better than those*



*from non-middle class homes because the culture of the school is based on the culture of the upper and middle classes” (Delpit, 1995, p250)*

Two truths are told – whilst greater recognition has been given in recent decades to minoritised cultures in terms of ‘multicultural resources’ the gap between the richest and the poorest continues to widen. Granting ‘recognition’ to a diverse range of cultures has not led to a redistribution of wealth. Recent research by Lucinda Platt for the Joseph Rowntree Foundation (2007) shows that ethnic minorities are twice as likely to be poor as white people. 65% of Bangladeshis in Britain are living in poverty. This compares to 55% of Pakistanis, 45% of black Africans and 30% of Indian and black Caribbean people. Over half of Pakistani and black African children in the UK, and a shocking 70% of Bangladeshi children, are growing up poor. But these broad categories hide finer differences between and within ethnic groups – differences between gendered experiences and expectations of poverty for instance. Ethnicity will make a difference to a child’s likelihood of growing into poverty, but poverty is the shared experience which transcends other differences.

A narrow emphasis on difference, on ethnic targeting of educational interventions (writing projects for Black boys for instance) distracts from identifying the social and economic commonalities of exclusion and disadvantage. By focussing on identity rather than on community, recognition rather than redistribution, children are denied what Friere described as ‘indispensible’ knowledge.

*The kind of knowledge that becomes solidarity, becomes a ‘being with’ In that context the future is seen not as inexorable but as something that is constructed by people engaged together in life, in history. It’s the knowledge that sees history as possibility and not as already determined (Friere 1998, p. 72)*

The argument here is for the recognition of difference in the resources and practices of the EDM classroom with an emphasis on seeking out the commonalities of disadvantage and inequality. In this approach there is an acceptance of the need for all children to access not just Standard English but also a Standard Culture. Standard Culture describes those manners, artistic works and practices, which are closely associated with the culture of power. Again those children whose home education closely reflects a school education in the socially restricted arts of literature, poetry and drama are doubly advantaged and those whose home education rarely includes experience of books, theatre visits and other hallmarks of a ‘cultured’ education suffer a double challenge. Access to the culture of power depends on access in the EDM classroom to cultural learning associated with elite groups and their education. As Pierre Bourdieu has shown

*Scientific observation shows that cultural needs are the product of upbringing and education...preferences in literature, painting or music are closely linked to educational level...and social origin.....To the socially recognised hierarchy of the arts corresponds a social hierarchy of the consumers. (Pierre Bourdieu: Distinction)*

### **Shakespeare is for posh people**

I was reminded of this recently when in discussion a twelve year old white boy in a Coventry school declared that *Shakespeare is for posh people not for kids in Coventry*. Where and how did he learn this? Where and how did he lose the hope that things can be different – that he can reclaim Shakespeare and pluralise our engagement with his

works as so many other disadvantaged groups and individuals from the Chartists to Nelson Mandella have done?

At Shenton Primary School in Leicester, a group of year 5 pupils are introduced to Shakespeare in ways that are designed to give both ownership and access to a common cultural resource. The class is bi-cultural rather than multicultural, the majority are of Bangladeshi Muslim descent and the minority Punjabi Hindu. They all are classified as having English as an additional language. The school, under the headship of Maggie Welton has given priority to developing drama as a strategy to improve the quality, or culture, of learning and life in the school. At the heart of this strategy is the idea of drama as a social ensemble based art. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 the school's 'culture of multiculturalism', which gave careful and equal recognition to the cultures in the school, both in the classroom but also in ensuring that staff were representative of the community, was ruptured forever by the radicalised responses of the community to the values of 'secularism' and 'mutual respect'. In a Year 5 poetry class on 15<sup>th</sup> September 2001, a child passed this poem to the teacher:

My hero is Mohammed Atta  
He is like a lion  
I want to be a Muslim brother like him  
I want to see the destruction of all Christians  
And when I grow up I want Islam to rule the world like him.

Amongst the pain and loss caused by this incident to the school as a community, there were two particularly strong responses. The first was the awareness of 'dis-ease' in the community and the failure of the narrow curriculum imposed both by the Strategies and the Inspection regime to address the real needs and problems in the school as a community. Teachers had become conditioned to cross-reference their work plans against NC and NLS requirements and had forgotten how to reference them to the human requirements of pupils living not in a multicultural world but in a perpetual struggle between dominant and dominated cultures. The second response was a faith in theatre and drama as a means both of making the curriculum more relevant and human and also as a means of integrating cultural differences, misrecognition and failures of respect into a new Common Culture. A common culture based on the struggle to find a common way of life, in the school, which recognises the deep differences of belief, tradition and access to resources and power within the local community. A common school culture based in the principles and practices of egalitarian democracy, seeks to address inequalities and cultural misrecognition through an insistence on equality of representation and representations but also by both critiquing and redistributing the cultural resources, like Shakespeare, associated with the culture of power.

So some years later, it is not Shakespeare the legend who is introduced into the classroom, it is an example of his work. It is not introduced as something which must be revered and respected or as an iconic example of the white English canon. It is

introduced as a common resource that we might all find some truth in, and relevance to our own lives and cultural experiences. It is introduced as a universal touchstone rather than as a culturally distinctive and historically relative text. The class are asked to find for themselves its 'greatness' in its ability to speak across time and culture rather than be instructed in why it is 'great' literature.

Pictures of Ford Madox Brown's illustration for Act 1i of King Lear are distributed to groups. They are told that this is a story of an old King, his daughters and a kingdom and nothing more. The picture is chosen as an accessible entry point to the historical world of the play. It is temporally positioned in a 'fairy tale' time of castles and candles and princesses. It speaks of the past both in an actual sense but also it triggers globalised Dinsneyesque representations of history. What is remarkable is what these children from traditional cultures bring to this reading. Daughters were paired with husbands, they were asking their father for permission to go on an expedition, one daughter is loved more than the others, there is a fortune teller (Kent In the illustration), there is trouble ahead, the old king is disappointed in his daughters. In the excitement of this reading I almost forget to notice two girls – one Muslim the other Hindu – almost sitting on each other as they pore over the image. These two children model for us the future. They have struggled to find a common culture in the classroom, in the playground, in the local streets. And drama has been part of this struggling towards a culture which transcends historical hatred and the fear of the other. A common culture which stands against persecution and prejudice and segregation. This is drama as a process of healing and being together. In this school Drama has provided a powerful integrative force for bringing unfamiliar knowledge into knowing engagement. But it has also been a process of ensemble making. A way of modelling how through collective artistry, negotiation, contracting of behaviour and skilful leading, the ensemble in the classroom might become a model of how to live in the world.

The children discuss the meaning of 'bond' in the context of father-daughter relationships and again the traditional cultural discourse brings me closer to an early modern understanding of the play than I would have expected in a mono-cultural white classroom. Using the love lines from 1i the children draw objects of affection that Cordelia might keep in her room to remind her of her bond with her father and her dead mother. These include crowns and rings but also money – so important to migrant cultures – a secret tower and a crystal for telling the future. The objects linked to a selected line from the text are passed to new groups who make images of how these objects might have been given; these images include references to the dead mother, the transfer of affection from mother to youngest daughter, the rage of the older sisters, a careless father. The lines are spoken against the images and reflected on in terms of how the line, object and depicted moment might have both strengthened and weakened bonds of affection and duty in the Lear household

Working from the class's suggestions the teacher 'creates' Cordelia's bedroom. It is rich in detail; thick velvet curtains surround her bed; candles flicker in the roof, a secret door leads to a secret tower, a cat purrs on the cushion, a picture of her mother hangs over her bed, there are tapestries depicting her father's victories and hunting adventures.

Eventually the teacher in the role of Cordelia enters the 'bedroom' and using a mix of acting, narration and lines from the text tells the story of what has just happened in the king's chamber (<http://www.youtube.com/w#1CD6A9>)

The role dwells on the ideas of duty and honesty, on arranged marriages, on honour and banishments. The role ends by asking the children which of the objects she should take and which she should leave behind. There is much discussion – the money goes of course as does a sword and some jewels. There is much discussion about her diary and the key to the secret tower. After ten minutes of discussion and some further role play between Cordelia and her most trusted servant, the teacher asks if anyone in the class understands how Cordelia feels and would like to speak for her.

Fardowza puts up her hand. Earlier in the class she had described the line *A love that makes breath poor and speech unable* as meaning "feeling the love so much you just can't talk". She came into Cordelia's 'room' sat on her bed clutching the diary and for the next ten minutes quietly and confidently answered questions in role as Cordelia from the rest of the class. Here are some of her responses:

*Q: Do you love your father more than anything?*

*A: Yes of course*

*Q: Why not say it then?*

*A: I said it in a different way but he chose not to understand it.....*

*Q: Where will you go?*

*A: Deep into the forest, I will cut some wood and build myself a home. I'll eat grass and leaves if I have to.....*

(This is an interesting response, which mirrors the rejected daughters behaviour in two of the traditional source folk tales for Lear, *Cap O' Rushes* and *Dear as Salt*)

*Q: If you mother was alive what would she say to you now?*

*A: She was so kind she would say calm down, your father is mistaken he is not a man of stone. But I cannot think what else she would say because I love her so...*

*Q: What will you leave behind for your father to find?*

*A: I will leave this ball that we played with and a message. I will leave these outside the door to the secret tower but the door will be locked to him just as his heart is locked to me....*

In responding to the richness and bravery of her answers, again I nearly forgot to notice that this Somalian Muslim girl was being attentively listened to and given respect by every boy and girl in the room. A common culture transcending the complex politics of gender and power that so often characterise and are sometimes legitimised by 'multicultural' classrooms. In this space there is a common insistence on mutual respect whatever 'cultures' are represented in the class. Later I discover that Fardowza has

been in Leicester for one year, six months earlier her parents fell foul of immigration and were sent home to Somalia. Fardowza lives with her two uncles and rarely communicates with her parents.

I cannot begin to think about what circumstances caused Fardowza to want to be Cordelia. To express herself through the character of a daughter rejected publically by her own father. For her to want to stand in the shoes of a girl from another place, time, history, culture, class and find common cause. She owns a piece of Cordelia now. It speaks of this young Somalian girl, she has brought herself to this play and made it part of her culture just as her wonderfully engaged responses have re-shaped the play in my own cultural understanding and response. She has shown me new things. It is our common resource and it transcends the fragmentation of the heart as well as the social sphere that comes from a disempowering insistence on 'relativism' and 'multiculturalism'. Standard Culture can become common culture if it is taught in ways that stress our common humanity, which allow for different cultural perspectives to add to our common understandings; If the objects and processes of Standard Culture can be taught as commonwealth rather than the private property of a particular and dominant class culture.

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