

Would you risk it for Shakespeare?

A case study of using active approaches in the English classroom

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Published in English in Education, Vol 45, Issue 1, February 2011

Our ever growing trust enables us to experiment, improvise and rework on the floor with an astonishing freedom and confidence. This ensemble is a secure environment without ever being a comfort zone. All of us are continually challenging ourselves and being inspired by those around us to reach new levels in all aspects of our work.

(Geoffrey Streatfeild, actor in the RSC Histories Ensemble)

‘A secure environment without ever being a comfort zone’ – does that sound like a description of a good classroom to you? In 2000, the government commissioned Hay McBer report concluded that in classes run by effective teachers, pupils: ‘feel secure in an interesting and challenging learning environment. And they support one another and know when and where to go for help.’ (Hay McBer 2000: 1.2.4) Explaining his ensemble approach with the Histories Company, Michael Boyd, artistic director of the RSC, highlights trust, empathetic curiosity and courage as some of the conditions for achieving excellence in a rehearsal process (Boyd 2008). The ethos of the education department at the RSC is that an excellent classroom is like an excellent rehearsal room; an experience of shared learning where the teacher/director facilitates supported but challenging exploration towards a collaborative understanding of the text. Key words in this approach for students are: ownership, empowerment, problem solving, relevance – but perhaps the overarching term for everyone involved is risk taking. The risks come from engaging the dialogic imagination of students/actors in relation to the dynamic, unstable play text before them in order to create personal meanings. It is a prosocial and personalised approach to learning that many teachers have found successful in supporting their students towards greater and more rounded attainment with Shakespeare.

Shakespeare wrote for the theatre and theatre at its best is a risky business: it should make us think and question. Shakespeare himself walked a tightrope with the censors of his time: the delicious ambiguities in his plays allowed him to question the politics and social norms around him, while avoiding the fate of imprisonment or worse suffered by many of his contemporaries. And these ambiguities explain the enduring success of his work; which can and should provide us with, in Bakhtin’s words, ‘a living contact with unfinished, still evolving reality’ (Bakhtin 1981: 7). While most writers write to find answers, it seems

Shakespeare wrote to explore questions. Unfortunately exploring questions is not the experience of Shakespeare that many of our students get in the classroom. Pressure to achieve the highest attainment grades often pushes teachers into providing a reactionary, monological experience of Shakespeare for their students, protesting that the English curriculum does not allow time for play and the English classroom does not allow space for play. Yet play with all its attendant pleasures and risks, is how we find out about the world. So why is play taken away from us when it comes to studying the work of our greatest playwright - this widely acknowledged resource of human action and emotion that Michel Boyd calls a 'comprehensive world in which to explore the anxieties of growing up.'

In exploring the creation of a new teacher's identity, Deborah Britzman, describes how natural it is to fall into the 'cultural myth' of 'teacher as expert, as self-made, as sole bearer of power and as a product of experience' (Britzman 1998: 31). Many teachers want to be revolutionary risk takers but fall into the role of reactionary knowledge givers, creating an internal tension and anxiety because, inside, we all know we don't know it all. Each study of text in the rehearsal room or classroom should explore the heteroglossia, the interface of voices and experiences for those students at that time; remembering, as Britzman states, that 'meaning is historically contingent, contextually bound, socially constructed and always problematic' (Britzman 1998: 37).

Good teachers have been shown to have a significant effect on a child's attainment regardless of the general environment - a recent study using identical and non identical twins even showed the power of good teaching to overcome genetic differences indicative of intelligence (Taylor 2010). A survey carried out by CEDAR, University of Warwick, found that difference in attitude to Shakespeare was four times higher between classes than between schools, indicating that the teacher made a significant difference (Strand 2009). But is a good teacher one who 'plays,' taking risks and exploring questions in their classroom, or who 'directs,' imparting knowledge and securing high exam results? This is, of course, a false dichotomy. Effective risk taking is not about random uncalculated risks, on the contrary it requires high expectations, planning, clear boundary setting, strong reflective assessment; it requires the teacher to build confidence, trust and respect, to be flexible and responsive, to create appropriate but stretching challenges and to think quickly and conceptually – all attributes of a good teacher exemplified in the Hay McBer report (Hay McBer 2000). However, the risk taking dialogism of active approaches to Shakespeare is far from embedded in the culture of English teaching, requiring as it does support and trust from senior leaders and policy makers.

As part of the RSC's exploration into effective teaching of Shakespeare, ten hub schools per year from across the country are recruited for a three year partnership into the 'Learning and Performance Network' (LPN). Each hub partners up to seven cluster schools in their region, creating a national network. In year 1, this involves INSET days for key staff, plus postgraduate training for two teachers who work through action research towards a postgraduate certificate in the teaching of Shakespeare, awarded by the University of

Warwick. Year 2 involves further CPD, workshops for students towards a regional performance festival for the cluster of schools, and culminates with a national festival in Stratford-upon-Avon. Year 3 is flexible and supports each school in developing their relationship with Shakespeare in the most appropriate way.

One of our early recruits into this programme was an ethnically diverse comprehensive girls' school in London with nearly 60% of students speaking English as an additional language and an above average number of students with special educational needs and/or disabilities (Ofsted 2010). The English teacher recruited to the postgraduate programme was Karen, a mature entrant to the profession, whose talent and commitment has resulted in a rapid rise to become Head of English at the school this year.

The school's application to the LPN had been a drama department initiative and the English department seemed not only less informed, but sceptical. In her assignment for the postgraduate certificate, Karen writes: 'I was more than interested despite the subtle negative responses of some colleagues.' As a relatively new teacher, Karen could easily have been put off by the disinterest of her more experienced colleagues, but a taste of the active approaches during her PGCE training gave her the confidence to try something different. When it came to the INSET held at the school, her colleagues came to see the value of the work. Several teachers openly expressed trepidation at the start of the first INSET day, including the then Head of English, who said: 'This is completely new for me- thirty odd years teaching behind a desk.' At the end of the day, she told the RSC practitioner: 'I can honestly say that that was the best INSET day I've had in 33 years. I'm teaching Carol Ann Duffy on Monday and I'm going to use some of the techniques.' Her written response on her feedback form was: 'I've learned how to make people think about language/consider meaning; how to make language interesting. There are loads of strategies here that I can apply to other texts, especially poetry, and I am really excited about it!' Other feedback comments expressed similar appreciative surprise at and enthusiasm for, the usefulness of the activities, perhaps summed up in this comment: 'I actually learned a lot about the plays themselves, even though I've taught two out of the three before!' These experienced English teachers were learning that they didn't know everything - and more importantly that they didn't need to know everything.

The approaches the teachers were introduced to are the embodiment of the RSC's manifesto 'Stand up for Shakespeare' (RSC 2008) which calls for studying Shakespeare to be an active, collaborative process including ensemble techniques used in the rehearsal room. Karen fully embraced the pedagogy of active approaches. Her definition of ensemble reflects this:

RSC ensemble techniques mean that you experience the play as a living text which is interpreted through emotional response and active participation. It is a shared journey towards a common goal underpinned by mutual trust and inclusivity. In the classroom, RSC methods recreate the spirit of the rehearsal room and incorporate practical approaches into a safe learning environment that is both multilayered and

multisensory: kinaesthetic; holistic; through movement and language; experiential and reflective.

But however much Karen's colleagues could see the value of the approaches, there was and remains some resistance to using them which seems to stem from four main issues:

Space - Karen decided that she would create space in her classroom and believes the results for her students more than pay off the efforts involved in moving the furniture. However, several feedback comments from the INSET days addressed this issue, for example: 'I'm concerned about having access to suitable teaching spaces – constantly moving desks/chairs would be cumbersome.' And a recent informal discussion with Karen's colleagues revealed that the reluctance to risk moving furniture still exists.

Commitment – Karen's action research found that not all activities work straight away. She had to not only take risks, but also think on her feet, adapting exercises for the needs of her students at that time. Teachers with less enthusiasm and determination to see the active approaches through may well be put off without immediate success.

Time – Although active approaches can, in the long run, save time, in the initial stages of familiarising both teacher and students with the techniques they can seem very time consuming. Curriculum pressure may well force a teacher less immediately convinced by the approaches to return to more traditional methods.

Confidence – Active approaches require risk taking. Many teachers do not feel supported in taking these risks, despite understanding the advantages.

A study of the efficacy of dialogically-organised instruction (authentic discussion) in the US by Christoph and Nystrand looks at Kathy, a teacher with 20 years experience who is described as in transition – attempting to evolve her pedagogy to incorporate more active dialogism, despite the pressures of the curriculum, the cynicism of her colleagues and the external pressures of public scrutiny on test results. We can see Karen's situation reflected here, particularly in a comment she reports from a colleague who said she would like to be more creative in Year 9, but that 'playing with the text' would not help her attain the school target of 80% Level 5 or above.

The US study praises Kathy's fostering of an inclusive environment of trust and respect that allowed for more 'dialogic bids' than normal in similar classrooms. Kathy posed questions and then listened; and by listening she could respond authentically to her students' interests. The authors claim 'starting a discussion is a lot like starting a fire. With enough kindling of the right sort, accompanied by patience, ignition is possible, though perhaps not on the first or second try' (Christoph & Nystrand 2001: 251).

Of particular note in this study is the context for the most successful of Kathy's dialogic bids, that context being *A Midsummer Night's Dream (MND)*. A short discussion is described as 'remarkable not only because it challenged students to analyse the text and use evidence to support their own positions but also because it seeped into the lives of students outside class' (Christoph & Nystrand 2001: 268). The discussion was fuelled by Kathy's simple question 'Who is the most important person in the play?' The authors are adamant that this short discussion was more successful and meaningful than any other exchange throughout the year. They ascribe this to the interpersonal relationships built up and to Kathy herself not having a pre-conceived answer to the question. They see the text as incidental, however, Shakespeare's ambiguity allowed the students to respond variously to Kathy's question according to their perspectives of the gender and power relationships within the play. Here Shakespeare's text was the dialogic bid allowed to ignite by a skilled teacher prepared to risk giving him oxygen.

In London, Karen's own study of *MND* with her Year 10 mixed ability group was predicated on the dialogic bids that active approaches require and the text encourages. In this six week unit, Karen wanted to combat the feelings of boredom and dread that she found invariably accompanied her announcement to a class that they would be studying Shakespeare: 'a resounding dread that ripples through the class in the form of an agonised groan.' Karen hoped that the active approaches would both promote greater understanding in her low ability students and stretch the interpretive and analytical skills of her more able students, but her key aim 'was to try and change the view of most of my students from that of a chore – having to study Shakespeare in order to complete their coursework folders – to one that was much more positive.' Karen made the brave, prosocial decision that enjoyment is as important as attainment, explaining, 'I wanted to make my delivery of Shakespeare a social experience for them; a shared and co-operative activity.'

Karen had her work cut out for her. In an initial survey of her students' attitudes to Shakespeare, she found, 'that while they understood they had to study Shakespeare, the experience was often difficult and challenging and they could see little value in the exercise [...] most did not see him as relevant to the modern world.' One student even, 'declared quite emphatically that she didn't 'do' Shakespeare; that she had spent three months dreading English in Year 9 when she had done *Much Ado about Nothing* and that she didn't expect this time to be any different.'

Karen intended that this time would be different. She credits two particular aspects of the active approaches as instrumental in changing her students' minds. The first was space. Many English teachers feel unable to use drama in their crowded classrooms but Karen soon had her students well trained in moving the furniture to allow space for active work. 'The physical change of the room was significant in promoting a different approach to the text. The girls were excited at the prospect of lessons in this format – their cooperation in preparing the room at the beginning of subsequent lessons was admirable and they got the change down to a fine art.' In her essay, Karen describes how on one occasion when the

furniture was not moved, 'The girls were unresponsive, they lacked interest and their ideas were limited. I felt strongly that the desk bound reading had changed their learning style to one that was passive.'

The second significant approach was to only use text extracts or 'scripts' with her class rather than book editions or 'texts.' Karen explains:

The advantage of this was two-fold: firstly with sections of the play photocopied as scripts, they would only need to focus on one section of the play at any one time, thereby reducing any anxiety of tackling the whole text – in this case, less was more; secondly the script became personal – it would be their own working document to annotate with their ideas, responses, questions and in planning activities.

Karen references Rex Gibson who dismisses the term 'text' believing it to be associated with 'authority, reverence, certainty' whereas 'a script declares that it is to be played with, explored actively and imaginatively brought to life' (Gibson 1998: 7).

A student explained the advantages in this way:

I think when we had the books you just see the book and you're like 'Oh God I can just switch off my brain now because I'm not going to get a word anyway' but I think when we do the activities and we have the script, we write, basically we write our own words and everything, our own notes and this way we just make sure it's in our brains it's not on the paper it's in our brains, because when you have it in the book and it's on the left hand side (schools editions had translations facing the play text) you just read it, and you remember it for two or three days and then just forget it afterwards because it's in the book...but this way we can just write it down and we have it all for ourselves. (Lloyd 2010)

The courage of Karen's decisions is particularly reflected in her 'failures.' She readily admits that not all exercises worked but she and her students learned from the failures and their subsequent learning becomes stronger as a result. For example, Karen dedicated three precious lessons to creating the world of Athens as a context for the first scene:

They appeared impatient to be given a whole section of the text and at times, I sensed that the girls felt the activity wasn't 'real' or adequate because they were not yet using language. Some students were reticent about sharing ideas; they complained that they needed more time for planning, that I hadn't provided enough detail; that they needed to know more. In hindsight, I do not see this as a failing on my part; rather I think it was a result of their perceptions, based on their previous experiences of what learning Shakespeare ought to be as opposed to what it can be. Once they realised that there were no constraints, the more they explored the idea of creating their own market[...]Student Y who had declared that she couldn't and wouldn't 'do' Shakespeare two lessons previously took a lead role in directing the group of market traders and the class confidence increased.

The girls were well on their way to becoming an ensemble, with a collaborative understanding of the world of the play creating an empathetic curiosity about the characters' words. The question 'What is the world of Athens like?' posed through the activity is an example of what Morgan and Saxton describe as a good question being 'an expressive demonstration of a genuine curiosity: behind every question there must be the intention to know.' (Morgan & Saxton 1994: 78) Karen wanted to know what her students would come up with and the activity became a successful dialogic bid.

Another 'failure' was in closely examining the language of Hippolyta and Theseus. Karen used ensemble reading approaches as an introduction to the text but when she asked her students for any words they were not sure of, they were silent. When she asked them to talk in pairs, several words emerged, but initially the students had been reluctant to admit that some words were challenging: 'They seemed to think that they needed to 'get it' first time,' writes Karen, feeling that the lesson then became about translating:

At this point I could not see that they had any better understanding of the play's opening than with a non-active approach or more traditional method. I felt deflated and wanted to revert to tried and tested text based approach. The breakthrough came when having explained the context of the 20 lines, we read each speech though individually but this time emphasising the lone vowel sounds 'o' and 'ee' (Berry 2008: 51) We did this twice. It created lots of laughter and several moments of over exaggeration but the point had been made and somehow they began to identify with Theseus' anguish and impatience to be married.

This created a springboard to quite sophisticated observations of how the language reflects emotions and how metaphors are used. Teachers less committed to the active approaches may well have returned to desk bound explication and annotation of the text, but Karen's commitment to allow her students to really engage with the language made her resourceful in trying another of the active approaches.

The students were given a homework task to write about the opening scene of *MND*. Here is an example:

In the first twenty lines of the play Theseus and Hippolyta discuss their approaching wedding day. In this act we notice that Theseus is very eager and cannot wait to be married to Hippolyta. In the play you can tell that Theseus is moaning and the way the script is written you also notice that he is very impatient when it comes to the wedding. We know he sounds impatient because he says, "O me thinks how slow this old moon wanes" this shows how impatient he is. Whilst Theseus is persistently moaning Hippolyta tries to reassure him and explains how quickly the four days will go. I get the feeling from this extract that their love for each other is genuine and very strong. It also shows how keen he is to marry Hippolyta. In these twenty lines the moon is mentioned twice in line three and four. Shakespeare is using a simile by

saying that this new moon is going to be a new fresh start. Hippolyta is telling Theseus not to get all stressed because he knows the new fresh start is right here but he feel it's taking too long. In the first few lines Shakespeare is using repetition and he uses the moon as a symbol of change that is happening.

This writing is interesting because it comes from a student who battled with her study of *Much Ado About Nothing* in Year 9, claiming she couldn't write anything. Yet here she is not only working towards a grade C but doing it willingly: she volunteered to read this work out to the class.

The use of the vowel came as an epiphany to many students and was something they remembered (as 'dragging'). One student explained:

I feel that there would have been things that we wouldn't have enjoyed if we were just reading it - if Miss didn't have the advantages of being able to do all these exercises, then we wouldn't have the proper knowledge of it; because when she said drag on the words it actually tells a story and helps us with it without having any knowledge of the language correctly and we're just like, we can actually manage to go along with it and we know like what's happening in time and everything like that. That's why sometimes I think if you ask Year 9s they're not happy with it because they've not had the education. (Lloyd 2010)

In a subsequent lesson, students used ensemble reading approaches to understand Egeus' feelings in his first long speech. This time, when asked for words they were unsure of, they were not only happy to ask about difficult words, but also to support each other in finding meanings. When the group went on to use punctuation shift (Berry 2008: 39) with the speech, they were able to recognise the chaos and intensity as Egeus' angry thoughts pour out. For example, one student commented, 'Egeus is angry and confused and doesn't know where to turn for help.' The students also discussed where the speech calms down and reflected on whether Egeus might have been trying to control himself because he is in front of Theseus who is a very important man.

Karen felt her hard work had paid off as her students became visibly more engaged with the text and with each other. She quotes one student as summarising a general feeling that 'learning has become more fun' and 'we are analysing without realising it' and another student as saying:

I enjoy all of us being together in the circle; the exercises have helped us to identify with the characters' feelings[...]when you are reading at your desk or just watching the film version, I have no interest because you are being told everything. This way I feel better about myself because I am learning things for myself.

Allowing Shakespeare to connect and react with what is inside us, rather than imposing a pre-digested version of him can be a powerful dialogic process when managed by a committed, confident and supported teacher.

The majority of Karen's students reported feeling much better about studying Shakespeare after completing their unit on *MND*. Karen adds, 'This was reflected in their written responses which were much more individual and detailed; they had a better understanding of how Shakespeare crafted his writing to reflect emotions. In this respect, I would say that my expectations for them were exceeded [...] and most student achieved grades better than expected.'

Two years on and Karen said: 'The active approaches for me are embedded into my teaching and I have used them consistently when I am teaching Shakespeare[...]What works is: breaking the text down, connecting emotions to characters, looking at key words - before I didn't have the training to do that whereas now I feel brave enough to do it.' In other words Karen now has a toolkit of drama techniques to use but as importantly, the training has given her the confidence and the permission to play rather than give answers. Karen described her new tried and tested approach to *MND*, first devised for her action research assignment. First she facilitates her class in creating the world of Theseus' Athens which builds confidence, ensemble working and ownership of the world of the play. Then they look at the opening scene between Theseus and Hippolyta:

The opening of MND is quite difficult for students to understand in terms of the imagery and the role of the moon and connecting that with the title - and before I had the RSC training I would have stood at the front of the class and tried my hardest to communicate that through a sort of: there's the script; let's underline some words; this is what you need to know. Whereas the exercise that I use is one that Cecily Berry introduced to us and that was the idea of having Hippolyta and Theseus in the restraining exercise (Berry 2008: 109). We start off very slowly with punctuation shift and we have circle time where we can ask each other about the vocabulary so we understand and then we go into the restraining exercise and by the end of it rather than worrying about whether they're going to understand it which is what they think at the beginning[...]they are no longer thinking about that, the language is no longer a barrier they are talking about which words express the feelings and emotions and how different Hippolyta's response is - how she is a woman and she is calming him down and how they can tell that by her positive language. And that all comes from those exercises; it isn't from me standing there and telling them all this. They discover that and that's the special quality that it has, discovering it for themselves[...]Once that's done the shackles seem to be off and they're away. They don't seem to see the language as a barrier any more[...]It's quite strange. As quite a knowledgeable perceptive teacher I wouldn't have believed that kids could find Shakespeare so easy in the end and they find it - not difficult - to write their essays and the essays are of a very high quality.

This high quality is achieved through the students capturing their immediate responses to the active work, using their scripts as log books or diaries to annotate with responses rather than just explication. They record their 'three dimensional literary criticism' on their personalised scripts and through short written tasks. Karen explained how it is important to:

Give time not just to reflect on their own experience but to reflect on the language – how they'd understood character reactions, thoughts and feelings, motivations, injustices, complications - and that's why I think they've written the essays that they have[...]I've never had such perceptive comments and sensitive comments and confident comments as well. They know what they're talking about. They can talk about metaphor. They can write about pace and tone and the choice of words and rhythm very confidently because they have done the exercises[...]It's like watching little light bulbs go off every time we do it. It's very exciting[...]you get different classes with different make up of kids, different experiences and it's just wonderful to see. It makes me feel good every time I teach it.

In her new role as Head of department, Karen remains positive but realistic about the confidence of her colleagues to use the active approaches. Recognising their need to feel 'safe,' she explained: 'It's being able to see that something new can work and then once they can see that, they're confident with it and there's no stopping them. I think English teachers, by the nature of their subject are very creative - but there's the stalwart of the desks and chairs ...' Somehow the geography of the classroom imposes a default pedagogical style.

Taking the risk to bring the rehearsal room qualities of trust, empathetic curiosity and courage to the classroom can create a more relevant and rounded approach to Shakespeare, but as James Stredder states: 'Teaching remains an art, practiced through the teaching relationship. Active approaches remind us of this because they begin with recognition of the situation of learners: teachers with their resources and power to develop or inhibit must respond and relate to the learners and to the opportunities that arise, but this can only be done with art and with practice' (Stredder 2004: 15). And for teachers to grow as teaching artists they need time and training and trust.

There is a perennial tension between educationalists who often prefer to see education as long term, holistic and qualitatively messy, politicians who need short term, quickly tangible and usually quantitative results and subject academics who jealously guard the unassailable integrity of their subject. The history of Shakespeare teaching is no different. Calls from teachers throughout the last century were for active engagement with a play text. From The English Association's pamphlet in 1908: 'The forum scene in Julius Caesar comes one step nearer the dramatic if the teacher is Anthony and the other parts are distributed and the class transformed into a Roman mob shouting for the will;' through AK Hudson in 1954: 'The unsuccessful methods [of teaching Shakespeare] normally display two features: they are non-dramatic and they reflect a tendency to regard school children as textual scholars in embryo;' reaching a zenith with Rex Gibson's 'Shakespeare in Schools' project in the 1980s.

The DES heralded his methods when Shakespeare became enshrined as the only compulsory author on the new National Curriculum. The Cox report, English for Ages 5-16, said that Rex Gibson's work:

Has shown that Secondary pupils of a wide range of abilities can find Shakespeare accessible, meaningful and enjoyable. The project has demonstrated that the once-traditional method where desk-bound pupils read the text has been advantageously replaced by exciting, enjoyable approaches that are social, imaginative and physical.

Why did Rex Gibson's work not reach a critical mass – supported as it then was by many teachers, academics and policy makers? That spirit and soul of risk taking, the momentum of exploratory, experiential learning advocated by Gibson seems too often to have been crushed by the heavy machine of the testing regime and the accountability of league tables, which led to paranoid conservatism in the classroom. As Ted Wragg once so eloquently put it in his TES column:

At its best the examination process is a check on what people have learned, a valuable tool for pupils, teachers and society at large. At its worst it can comprehensively and irrevocably hammer the life out of something, however magnificent or dynamic, so that children never want to see it again as long as they have breath.

Taking risks means admitting you don't have all the answers – embracing Keats' negative capability, as Rex Gibson proposed (Gibson 1998: 25). For if a teacher is occasionally allowed to be 'capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts without any irritating reaching after fact and reason,' how much more might students discover? As Jonathan Neelands summarises: 'Disassociation of school learning from the real world and the pursuit of subject knowledge rather than personally meaningful knowledge is increasingly recognised as failing to meet the full range of needs of young people' (Neelands 2009: 178). Shakespeare teaching in the twenty first century must allow for more than reciting quotes and received opinions.

The recent Ofsted report on Karen's school recognises this. Praising the focus on developing students' learning and thinking skills, and their increasing self-reliance, the report notes: 'The school's work within partnerships is a significant strength. Innovative projects include links with the Royal Shakespeare Company and the University of Warwick which have transformed the teaching of Shakespeare in Year 9' (Ofsted 2010). And the University of Warwick survey found that attitudes to Shakespeare are slowly shifting in the school as fewer students disagree with the statement: 'Shakespeare's plays help us to understand ourselves and others better' (down from 40% to 26.5%) and more students agree with the statement: 'Shakespeare's plays are relevant to events in the modern world' (up from 25% to 36.5%) (Strand 2009).

Maxine Green describes the distortion between teachers and policy makers as seeing things big or small. She defines seeing things big as bringing us 'in close contact with details and with particularities that cannot be reduced to statistics or even to the measurable,'

connecting us with the incompleteness of human existence. While ‘the visions that sees things small looks at schooling through the lenses of a system – a vantage point of power or existing ideologies’ (Greene 1995: 10). Teachers are always caught in the middle– striving for a personalised and meaningful engagement for their students, which nevertheless allows box ticking and categorising to validate their work. I would suggest that Shakespeare see things big; that a good Shakespearian director sees things big; that a good teacher of Shakespeare sees things big; and that the gift of all three is to help us to make sense of the big messy world of human relationships. But that requires taking a few risks.

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