WHOSE STORY? COMPETING VERSIONS OF ENGLISH IN A LONDON SCHOOL

JOHN YANDELL & JOHN HARDCASTLE

University College London

Abstract

In this article, we look closely at two accounts of parallel lessons in the same London school. Early on in our pre-service teacher education programme, student teachers are asked to write about a lesson they have observed. Soumeya and Faduma each described a lesson where the novel, *In the sea there are crocodiles* by Fabio Geda, was being read. The observations are of parallel lessons taught by two different teachers. We use these accounts to explore differences in pedagogy and in the versions of English that are instantiated in the lessons. These forms of practice bear family resemblances to many other lessons— and have complex histories. Our interest lies in the ways in which they reflect or contest the view of the subject that dominates the landscape of policy in England today.

Key words: diversity, globalization, teacher education, refugees, English pedagogy, L1 subject knowledge

1.   INTRODUCTION

Early on in our pre-service teacher education (PGCE) programme, student teachers are asked to write in detail about a lesson that they have observed, paying particular attention to the ways in which language is used, and to evidence of learning. They produce this piece during the first few weeks of their first practicum. Soumeya and Faduma had been placed in the same school. Both happened to choose to write about Year 8 English lessons in which the opening chapter of the same young adult novel was being read. *In the sea there are crocodiles* by Fabio Geda (2011) tells the story of Enaiat, a boy from Afghanistan, and his experiences as a refugee. Soumeya and Faduma's accounts of observed lessons formed the basis of an earlier essay (Yandell, Mahamed & Ziad, 2022), on which we have drawn in this contribution.

2.   INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY CONTEXTS AND THE POSITION OF THE OBSERVERS

The observations conducted by Soumeya and Faduma are, thus, of parallel lessons: lessons taught by two different teachers within the same department, each teaching the same 'content'—the opening chapter of the same text. Our focus of attention throughout this essay is not on the individual colleagues whose lessons were observed, and certainly not on either their commitment to their students or their competence: the accounts which Faduma and Soumeya wrote are sympathetic appreciations of the teachers' skill, exercised in all the complexity of real-life classrooms.

The accounts of two observed lessons are products of longer histories, both personal and institutional. At the same time, the production of these accounts contributes to the observers' formation as teachers. The lessons themselves are framed by a series of intersecting discourses, institutional and national policies. Since the imposition of the latest version of the national curriculum in England (DfE, 2014), there has been a further narrowing of the English curriculum in secondary schools. The GCSE English Literature syllabuses, the high-stakes examinations taken by almost all students in England aged 16, test students on their knowledge of the English literary heritage, and what is meant by that is texts that are construed as having been produced in the British Isles. Because the results of these tests have direct implications for the future of individual students, for the pay and career progression of individual teachers, and for the reputation of individual schools, the tests exert a shaping influence on the content of the ('key stage 4') curriculum for all the 14- to 16-year-olds following the GCSE syllabus. What is tested is what is read in class. In many schools, particularly those serving less advantaged communities, the curricular consequences have been even more far-reaching. There has been a backwash effect, so that it is common now to encounter a curriculum for the lower years of secondary school, 'key stage 3', which is little more than a rehearsal for the GCSE exams. Thus, for example, there are schools where students study *Macbeth* in Year 9, then again in Year 10, and again in Year 11. (By the time the examination arrives, they tend to be

heartily sick of the play. But they know it well, and are prepared to regurgitate what they know in the exam hall.)

In contrast, English departments in other schools have maintained a commitment to a distinctive curriculum for 11- to 14-year-olds—one in which young adult fiction figures more prominently, and in which more ecumenical text choices are likely to figure. The school where Faduma and Soumeya was placed was firmly in this camp. The choice of Geda's novel, a fairly recent work in translation, dealing with issues of contemporary relevance, is symptomatic of these commitments. And there is a long history of English teachers making text choices and indeed designing curricula that are informed by broad principles of engagement in the world beyond the classroom (Hardcastle & Yandell, 2018; van de Ven & Doecke, 2011; Yandell, 2008).

We should also say something about how Faduma and Soumeya are positioned. Their brief, to produce a detailed account of a single observed lesson, focusing on key moments and paying particular attention to language and learning, has for decades been a task set for pre-service student teachers of English on the PGCE programme at the London Institute of Education—a programme on which both of us have worked for long periods of time. Situated very close to the start of their first practicum, it requires an attentiveness to the particularity of classroom interaction and something of an ethnographic perspective, and sometimes a readiness to make the familiar strange. Like their peers, Soumeya and Faduma were encouraged to focus as much as possible on the learners and their interactions, with each other as well as with the teacher. Underlying such exhortations can be glimpsed a long tradition of writing about classrooms that has attempted to render something of the complexity of such interactions and their value in enabling the shared accomplishment of learning (see Barnes et al., 1969; Burgess, 1984; Hardcastle, 1982; Shah, 2013; Turvey, 1992; Yandell, 2013). And it is worth noting that this tradition intersects with the International Mother Tongue Education's focus on "the analysis of interaction between teacher and pupil" (Herrlitz et al., 2007, 34), as a counter to the too-easy generalizations about effective teaching that have characterized neoliberal education policy across the past four decades.

At the same time, it would be a mistake to imagine that these were the only forces acting on the student teachers as classroom observers. At this stage of their pre-service course, it is almost inevitable that they would be preoccupied with the question of what it is to be a teacher. Within a week or so of conducting this observation, they know that they will be in a much more exposed position, standing at the front of the class, inhabiting the role of the teacher. It is, thus, not at all surprising that the student teachers' main focus is on the teacher, on what they do and how they do it, how they establish themselves at the start of the lesson, how they manage their students, how they signal transitions, how they respond to the unexpected, how they teach. What, they tend to ask, does effective teaching look like?

It might also be worth saying something about the activity of lesson observation itself. The observations conducted by Faduma and Soumeya, as pre-service teachers, are wildly atypical in the context of schooling in England. They, the observers, are

the neophytes, hoping to learn from the experienced teachers whom they are observing. But most observations in England involve a very different power relationship and a very different notion of what observation is and what it is for: it entails the scrutiny of the teacher's practice by more senior colleagues within the school or by inspectors of the Office for Standards in Education: observation in such circumstances involves judgement—and has sometimes career-defining consequences for the teacher who is being observed.

3.   AUTHENTIC QUESTIONS VERSUS TEST QUESTIONS

 We are using the student teachers' accounts— 'good examples of practice', rather than examples of good practice, to invoke Kelchtermans' (2021, 1508) useful distinction—to explore the differences in pedagogy and in the versions of English that are instantiated in these lessons. These forms of practice are recognisable—they bear family resemblances to many other lessons—and it is worth unpicking something of the complex history that lies behind these lessons, as well as how they relate, differently, to competing curricular and pedagogic discourses currently in circulation.

We want to focus on a single moment in each account. Here is part of Soumeya's observation:

> Although the entire class is reading the novel together, the teacher assessed the students' understanding after each scene. She asked simple questions such as 'what three things did Enaiat's mother tell him to remember?' and 'why did Enaiat's mother tell Enaiat to count the stars?' This was a short test to see whether the students were following the storyline, and no one was struggling to figure out what was going on. The teacher had also placed a different set of questions on the interactive white board that she would like the students to think about as they read. They answered the questions in their book. The questions are colour-coded and cater to all the abilities in the classroom. For instance, the most challenging question on the board was in the colour orange and said 'Do you agree with her actions? Why/ Why not?' (Soumeya)

In the lesson observed by Soumeya, it is the teacher who asks the questions (and the students who answer them). These questions serve a number of distinct (or distinguishable) purposes. Those which Soumeya categorises as simple—the ones that the teacher poses orally when the reading is paused—are tests of students' recall. They enable her to assure herself that students are paying attention and that they have a grasp on the text as plot. There is, it is suggested, a disciplinary dimension to them, in the sense that they are a means whereby the teacher manages learning (and behaviour) in her class. At the same time, they might be construed as conforming to dominant ideas about learning and about curriculum: they test memory and retrieval, and they represent the experience of reading the novel as, at least in part, a process of acquiring (and storing) information—facts, if you like, such as the three things that Enaiat's mother told him to remember.

The questions that the teacher has displayed on the interactive whiteboard— ones she had prepared earlier—are different. One of them, at least, colour-coded as the most challenging, makes different demands on the students and positions them

differently in relation to the text. The question that Soumeya records—'Do you agree with [Enaiat's mother's] actions? Why/ Why not?'—asks students to evaluate the actions of a character and to provide reasons for the position that they take. In the lesson that Soumeya observes, this version of differentiation, where different provision is made for students of differing 'abilities', is represented in a relatively unobtrusive version: students are ostensibly free to choose the question they respond to, though usually with the tacit expectation that their choice will be guided by their knowledge of their place in the class's internal hierarchy of 'ability'.

We move now to a moment in the lesson observed by Faduma:

> Getting a class of twelve and thirteen-year-olds to understand or empathise with the plight of people like Enaiat is not exactly straightforward, and this is something I would overhear within some of the students' individual conversations. When instructed to discuss in pairs during pause points, a pair of students across me were fixated on a particular aspect of the novel. "Why would his [Enaiat's] mother abandon him?" exclaimed one student. His partner was quick to tell him that Enaiat's mother did not *abandon* him, "she just had to leave him to escape alone because of the Taliban". In this English lesson, where the whole hour was dedicated to reading and understanding what has been read as a class, were two students making sense of this challenging and complex part of the novel in entirely different ways. The first student seemed to be grappling with how any mother could do such a thing to their child, whilst the latter student remained aware of the root issue behind the mother's actions in the first place. They had not yet finished their conversation when Ms W's lesson drew to a close. (Faduma)

The question debated by the two students is the same as the 'challenge' question in the lesson observed by Soumeya, in that it addresses the same problem posed by the opening chapter of the novel: why would Enaiat's mother abandon him? In other aspects, though, this is not the same question at all. Here it is a student's question, or rather a reader's question—one that arises spontaneously from the shared reading of the text. It isn't a question imposed by the teacher, framed by levels of difficulty and hierarchies of 'ability'. As Faduma's account indicates, it is a question that has to be asked, its urgency deriving from the need to make sense of the story.

Nystrand et al. (1997) make a distinction between authentic and test questions:

> Authentic questions are questions for which the asker has no pre-specified answer and include requests for information as well as open-ended questions with indeterminate answers. Dialogically, authentic teacher questions signal to students the teacher's interest in what they think and know and not just whether they can report what someone else thinks or has said. Authentic questions invite students to contribute something new to the discussion that can change or modify it in some way. By contrast, a *test question* allows students no control over the flow of the discussion. […] a test question allows only one possible right answer, and is hence monologic […]. (Nystrand et al., 1997, 38)

But there are not just two poles—'authentic' and 'non-authentic'. It may also be a feature of school pedagogy—a bit like school knowledge—that questions serve a multiplicity of functions that alter, and can be differently construed, with changing contexts. Challenged by Soumeya, the teacher might say, 'I want the students to empathise with Enaiat, to understand his situation ….' However, in the context of teacher accountability, we might also say that the educative function is subordinated

(put on hold or lost) in the ongoing process of testing students. At various times and in various contexts, the dominant function changes.

In the lesson observed by Soumeya, the question of the separation of Enaiat from his mother has become a test question; in the lesson observed by Faduma, it is, quite unmistakably, an authentic question. The distinction between an authentic question and a test question parallels the distinction between meaningful writing (or other forms of language) and exercises (see Moffett, 1968; Edelsky, 2006).

There is more to be said, of course, about the interaction observed by Faduma. The two students involved are, as she suggests, coming at the issue from different starting points. The student who asks the question is wrestling with the enormity of what is represented in the opening chapter. In what circumstances, he exclaims, could it possibly be the case that a mother behaved in this way towards her son? His interlocutor has an answer: it is explicable because of the context of Afghanistan at that moment in history. This isn't an exchange between more and less capable, or more and less knowledgeable, peers. Both students are bringing knowledge of the world to bear on the problem that the text presents. In one case, it is knowledge of what mothers are like; in the other case, it is knowledge of Afghanistan, of the Taliban, and possibly of the experience of refugees. None of this knowledge is immediately identifiable as belonging to the domain of English as a school subject. It is, in Vygotskian terms, everyday knowledge (Vygotsky, 1987; cf. Yandell, 2013; Yandell & Brady, 2016), though to regard it as such is also to recognise quite how capacious a term 'everyday knowledge' needs to be if it is to encompass such disparate kinds of knowledge and of knowing. What Faduma's account suggests, too, is that this is an ongoing dialogue: the issue isn't resolved by the second student's mention of the Taliban—it is a conversation that carries on beyond the confines of the English lesson.

Faduma's position, at the back of the class, enables her to gain a different sense of the lesson than that which would be available to the teacher. To recognise the complexity of the professional learning involved in this experience is to call into question the notion that the formation of teachers can be reduced to anything so straightforward as the imitation of more experienced colleagues. Is it fortuitous that Faduma overheard *this* conversation, in particular? Perhaps, but this is what students, given the opportunity to pause in their reading and talk about the first chapter, would have talked about. It is the central problem of the opening chapter—a problem that fictionalised Enaiat confronts in retelling, and hence reliving, the moment of his separation from his mother. It is the problem that pulls us into the story; at the same time, as Faduma's account suggests, it is the problem that confronts us with a difficulty of understanding, or of empathy. It presents us with a situation beyond what most of us have experienced (which is also something that fiction tends to do). And this returns us to the difficulty of the placing of this question as the 'challenge' in the lesson that Soumeya observed. We find ourselves wondering how you could read this chapter and not confront this question. What would such an experience of reading feel like?

4.   DIFFERENT PEDAGOGIES

It's all very well for us to claim this, to assert that in some sense the question is intrinsic to the experience of reading the novel. We don't know that all the other students in the lesson observed by Faduma were having similar conversations. Neither, we assume, would the class teacher know this. In Faduma's account of the lesson, the reading was punctuated with 'pause points', moments for students to reflect, in conversation with their peers, on the sense they were making of the novel. But these reflections were not framed by a set of questions, prepared earlier by the teacher, as was the case in the lesson observed by Soumeya.

A rationale for the lesson that Soumeya observed might be that such a structure, such a way of organising the reading of the novel, is designed to ensure that the students are paying attention, that they understand what is going on in the story, and that they are presented with specific, targeted questions designed to provide the appropriate level of cognitive challenge for each and every one of them. This rationale might also indicate that the way in which the reading was supported enabled the teacher to remain properly accountable for the learning that was being accomplished. In the lesson observed by Faduma, on the other hand, it might seem that learning is left to chance, that the teacher has abdicated her pedagogic responsibility. Alternatively, one might consider that the teacher whom Faduma observes is treating her students as collaborators in the process of meaning-making, and that the evidence available to us would suggest that they are responding appropriately to this confidence in them.

Equally uncertain is Faduma's evaluation of what she observed, in the moment of observation or at the time of writing. For us, as readers of Faduma's account, the dialogic character of the exchange between the pupils, the presence of an authentic question, the very fact that the conversation spilled over beyond the allotted time of the lesson, might all be regarded as positive signs of engagement. But for Faduma, at that very early stage in her formation as a teacher, the unfinished nature of the conversation and the absence of a neat closure to the lesson might well have been regarded as problematic. In England, throughout this century, there has been a marked tendency to treat each individual lesson as a more or less sealed unit, with a recognisable shape and a clearly defined conclusion: the 'plenary', the function of which is to assess whether the pre-specified learning objectives have been attained (Stannard & Huxford, 2007). It would be surprising if Faduma's reading of the lesson were not inflected, in part, by this conception of what a lesson should look like.

The lesson observed by Soumeya might be seen as aligned with currently powerful ideas about teaching: direct instruction, deliberate practice, and 'promoting good progress'. Thus, new teachers are inducted into the profession by:

> … analysing with expert colleagues how to reduce distractions that take attention away from what is being taught (e.g. keeping the complexity of a task to a minimum, so that attention is focused on the content) … breaking complex material into smaller steps … [and] how to sequence lessons so that pupils secure foundational knowledge before encountering more complex content. (DfE, 2019, 11)

5.   DIFFERENT FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE —IN AND BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

Such an approach to teaching and learning is predicated on a set of assumptions: that what is taught is what is learnt; that learning is an incremental, largely linear process; that teaching, and planning for teaching, involve the segmenting and sequencing of material so that it is presented to learners in an order whereby 'foundational knowledge' is encountered (and assimilated—consigned to memory) before 'more complex content'. It is also a version of education as something which is done to the learners: students' interests or agency do not figure in this account at all.

These nostrums might seem commonsensical. We tend to assume that it's a good idea to start at the very beginning (because that's a very good place to start). But this is not really where schooling ever starts. Learners, in this model, are represented as blank slates. But they arrive at school—or at the opening of *In the Sea There Are Crocodiles*—with all kinds of prior knowledge and experience that are directly relevant to how they will read the text. Almost certainly, that knowledge will include knowledge of mothers and how they tend to act. And, in the East London school where Soumeya and Faduma conducted their observations, it is likely that some students will arrive at the novel with first-hand experience of migration, and possibly of being a refugee, while others will know a great deal about the languages, cultures and histories that are invoked in the novel.

There is, in the field of English education, a long history of attentiveness to students' lived experience—their experience of what happens beyond the school gates—as constitutive of the subject (Dixon, 1967/1975; Britton, 1970; Rosen, 1981/2017; Burgess & Hardcastle, 1991; Turvey, 1992; Doecke & McClenaghan, 2011; Brady, 2014; Shah, 2014; Yandell, 2016; Bracken, 2018; Doecke & Yandell, 2018). If this dimension of knowledge, which includes both first-hand experience and experience of the texts (including oral stories, books, films, and computer games, for example) that are encountered beyond the classroom, is to be taken into consideration, it becomes difficult to determine what is to be categorised as 'foundational knowledge' and what might represent 'more complex content'. If we think about the conversation overheard by Faduma, we might speculate that the second student—the one who emphasises the importance of the Taliban in the decision that Enaiat's mother makes, that is forced upon her—might have arrived at the lesson with greater knowledge of the political context of Afghanistan. What knowledge looks like in this context is itself not at all straightforward, in that the perspectival dimension of knowledge is particularly salient here. The student's response to their partner's question might equally be interpreted as evidence that they had more fully assimilated the way in which the Taliban had been represented in mainstream Western media and by Western politicians. In the two observed lessons, the relationship of scientific (or curricularised) to everyday (or extracurricular) knowledge is markedly different. In the lesson observed by Soumeya, the teacher works hard to provide the students with contextual knowledge, while also trying to involve them in the exploration of the world of the novel:

> The teacher promoted inclusivity by asking students if they knew what *Ba omidi didar* means. Since no one put their hand up, she used Google translate to investigate. It didn't provide a meaningful translation, so the teacher set a mini-homework task for the students to go home and to try find out what the phrase means so that they could share it during next lesson. The teacher also explained 'Shia' and 'Taliban' so that the students could have a better understanding of Enaiat and his mother's escape from Nava. Thus language is used by the teacher to access social and historical context that is related to the novel; the teacher also explained the proximity between Afghanistan and Pakistan since Enaiat travelled through Pakistan. (Soumeya)

Compare this with Faduma's account:

> Whilst the teacher's performative reading of the text indicated how much students' learning is shaped by their teacher, there were also various points in the lesson where this was almost reversed. This might have been in part due to the phrases and excerpts of Pashto and Dari that were woven into the novel, but it was also an interesting example of how teachers themselves learn from students. The two official languages in Afghanistan, Pashto and Dari, are used in the novel. These phrases are sometimes translated/explained to English readers, and sometimes they are not. This is where students with south Asian heritage in the class would intercede and translate the meaning—chiming in and talking between themselves about *chai* and *jaan* (term of endearment). At that moment, the language reflected their shared experiences, cultures and backgrounds. And in turn, their language was marked by an air of confidence as they shared their expertise. The teacher adopted a receptive and keen attitude in this dynamic, allowing for another form of learning to flourish in her classroom. (Faduma)

Here, as Faduma notes, the heteroglossic language of the novel is approached differently. This classroom functions, in such moments, as itself a 'third space', "a site where no cultural discourses are secondary" (Gutierrez, Rimes, & Larson, 1995, 447; cf. Yandell, 2013, 71): the teacher becomes a learner, the students become the teachers. A very large proportion of the students in this school are of South Asian heritage. Why, then, in Soumeya's lesson, was the teacher's attempt to promote inclusivity unsuccessful? Why did no-one raise their hand? Was it because no-one had the answer, or because students were unsure of the legitimacy of their out-of-school knowledge, of whether it was permissible in the context of an English lesson? *Ba omidi didar* is translated in the text, but not immediately. Later in the same paragraph, it is glossed as 'We'll meet again soon' (Geda, 2011, 15).

The difference between the two classrooms is not, in any straightforward sense, a difference between students who have knowledge and those who do not. In one class, though, it would seem that students share what they know because they are confident that their own 'funds of knowledge' (Gonzalez et al., 2005) will be valued. Students, in one lesson, appear to have the agency that they lack in the other, despite the efforts of the teacher to elicit responses from them.

6. DIFFERENT VERSIONS OF ENGLISH

It would be reasonable to consider the difference that we have sought to establish between the lessons as differences in method, or pedagogy. These are real differences—differences in the social relations of the classroom that have a marked

impact on how students behave, on who gets to ask questions and who feels able to answer questions, on how learning gets done. We should also make clear that we do not believe that these pedagogies are simply the products of the individual teachers' beliefs and values. In what follows, we make connections between what Soumeya observes and the dominant discourses that are currently exerting a strong influence on what happens, moment by moment, in many classrooms. Nonetheless, it might appear that, for all these differences, these are lessons in which the same 'content' is being explored. After all, these are lessons covering the same part of the same text; they are lessons in which, as should already be apparent, many of the same features of the text are being brought into prominence. We want to suggest that this isn't the case: that it is only in the most trivial sense that the same content figures in the two lessons, and that what is enacted in the two classrooms are two irreconcilably different versions of English.

As we have already indicated, the version of English that is instantiated in the lesson observed by Soumeya is one that is in alignment with a view of subject knowledge, curriculum and pedagogy that dominates the landscape of education policy in England. This is the model that is reflected in such recent documents as the *ITT Core Curriculum* (DfE, 2019), quoted above, and the *Early Career Framework* (DfE, 2021), both of which have produced what is, in effect, a mandated curriculum for teacher development. In this model, the responsibility of teachers is to:

> Deliver a carefully sequenced and coherent curriculum, by […] identifying essential concepts, knowledge, skills and principles of the subject and providing opportunity for all pupils to learn and master these critical components. (DfE, 2021, 12)

A teacher's role is thus to deliver; learners, by implication, are to receive. What the subject is—its essential concepts, knowledge, skills, and principles—has already been established, somewhere at some remove from the classroom, presumably by people other than teachers and their students. Such conceptions of knowledge simply don't know what to do with the everyday knowledge that is at the heart of exchanges within English classrooms—everyday knowledge that, in important senses, provides the content of English (Yandell & Brady, 2016). It is entirely consistent with this model that both the policy instruments we have mentioned place such emphasis on memory and the retention and retrieval of information (DfE, 2021, 10-11); on explicit teaching and the anticipation and correction of misconceptions as the core work of teaching (DfE, 2019, 13; 2021, 12); and on repetition and practice as the means whereby students acquire knowledge and skills (DfE, 2019, 12, 18; 2021, 11, 17).

This model of teaching and learning might be considered reductive in relation to any discipline or school subject: it is a banking model of education (Freire, 1972). When the text that is being read is a novel that, in its locations and narrative perspective, offers its own challenge to monocultural, monolingual norms, there are peculiarly sharp ironies in observing a pedagogy of transmission, one that positions the students as deficits. Here, though, we want to concentrate on the case of subject

English and to draw on recent scholarship in an attempt to explore the nature of the difficulty that is posed for teachers of English by an approach which assumes that knowledge means propositional knowledge and which places teaching in an ancillary role in relation to the production of knowledge.

Existing histories of English teaching in schools are surprisingly incomplete and sometimes misleading. Take an example that has particular relevance for IMEN. Commentators often mention the 'two competing paradigms' version of the history of English. The main source of this influential (but misleading) account lies not in the domain of English studies, but rather in the sociology of education (not that there's anything inherently wrong with that, of course). The 'Tale of Two Paradigms' doesn't derive from an 'internal' history of the subject written by an English specialist, nor does it come from a historiographical study of curriculum change. Rather, it comes from a study in the sociology of school knowledge, and, strictly speaking, it belongs in the research domain of the sociology of curriculum formation.

In several places, but chiefly in his influential article 'Competition and Conflict in the Teaching of English: A Socio-Historical Analysis', Stephen Ball (1982) makes much of what he called 'two competing versions' of English, with a set of opposing binaries formulated 'loosely', as he says, 'after Thomas Kuhn' (Kuhn, 1962). 'Two paradigms' - 'Cambridge and London', 'literature and language', with London winning out. Ball (1982, 17) writes: 'This [the London version] formed the basis for the emergence of what I call the socio-linguistic paradigm of English teaching.' The 'socio-linguistic paradigm', he insists, characterizes the 'London School'. Of particular relevance in our context, is the way that the 'two paradigms' version of English was central to the chapter Ball contributed to the 1984 IMEN survey of standard language teaching in nine European countries (Ball, 1984). Ball's story is not an intellectual history (in fairness, it doesn't pretend to be). It is not concerned primarily with the history of ideas about language and literature that stand behind the curriculum subject English. It's a tale of two competing ideologies built around the traditional division between 'language' and 'literature' teaching, as well as some of the assumptions associated with Cambridge and London that are said to lie behind them.

But Ball never discusses the model of language developed by the so-called 'London school'—and it is a model that is simply not reducible to (socio-)linguistics. For James Britton, who worked at the heart of the 'London School', the borders of language studies were never co-extensive with the domain of modern linguistics. Characteristically, he pursued broad philosophical and psychological enquiries into the active role that language plays in the development of mind—what language accomplishes—a tradition that goes back (at least) to the European Enlightenment—in relation to children and their learning and development. Thus, for example, at the Dartmouth seminar in 1966, convened to define English and how it should be taught, Britton decisively rejected an answer to the question, 'What is English?' that involved the parceling up of the subject into different content areas—grammar, literature, communication; instead, he insisted on an operational view of the subject, focused on what English teachers and their students could achieve in using language to

structure experience (Britton, 1966). This version of English involved a different orientation towards literature, to be sure, but not its marginalization.

The shape of English that was passed down through the ancient foundations (the public schools and endowed grammars) in the nineteenth century has its distant origins in the grammarian's school in the late Roman Empire. In the grammarian's school children of various ages from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds learned the forms of correct language, read in a small number of classical texts (literature) and turned their knowledge of literary models into composition and speech (Kaster, 1988, 11-12). The grammarian's school prepared pupils for entry into schools of rhetoric from where they would go on to become members of the imperial élite. Two assumptions stood behind the syllabus. The first concerns the status and the authority of texts; the second, pupil development. Classical texts were taken as repositories of timeless standards and values to be passed on to future generations by grammarians and rhetoricians who regarded themselves as *custos*, guardians, of language. It was assumed that an education in language, literature, and composition would enable future citizens to attain the 'condition proper to humanity'.

It was taken as given that a literary education was a humanizing process, and that exposure to Classical texts bearing enduring truths produced the necessary condition for citizenship. But according to Robert Kaster, the pedagogy killed the spirit of the poets, fragmented students' literary understandings (they rarely read whole works), provided disjointed, incoherent encounters with de-contextualised language, and generally failed to help the future members of the governing class to understand their own culture.

Today, it is interesting to imagine what pupils in the late Roman Empire made of it. How did the humanizing process work? How did pupils of different ages, speaking different languages from different cultures respond to extracts from the *Aeneid*? The prestige of the grammarian's school derived from the authority of the teacher, and the literary education they gave, provided the *mores* of the imperial élite. And the basic pattern of humanistic literary education remained more or less unaltered through the Renaissance into the nineteenth century across Europe.

In his book of 1966, *The Disappearing Dais,* Frank Whitehead, who features in several accounts as a member of the so-called Cambridge School—for example, in James Squires' contribution to the American National Council of Teachers of English comprehensive *Handbook on Research on the Teaching the English Language Arts* (Squire 1991, 10)—recommended a small number of fundamental principles:

> The main business of the English teacher is not instruction in any direct sense, or even teaching in the sense which may be applicable in some other subjects. It is the provision of abundant opportunity for the child to use English under conditions which will most conduce to improvement; opportunity, that is, to use his mother-tongue in each of its four modes (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and for all its varied purposes (practical, social, imaginative, creative) which make up its totality; opportunity moreover to use it in situations which will develop ultimately his [sic] power to be self-critical about his efforts. (Whitehead, 1966, 16)

Whitehead's position is much in accord with James Britton's claim that, 'given favourable circumstances, [all] children can write' (Britton, 1960). It is the teacher's responsibility, says Whitehead, to provide circumstances best conducive to progress. Whitehead called for a change in the way that learning in schools was organized—the way lessons were run, which implied changing pedagogy. He was always keen to recognize children's agency in their learning. This change implied a shift away from 'instruction' (the direct transmission of pre-specified contents—say, facts about authors' lives or items of grammar) towards careful observation and considered interventions in children's learning processes.

Whitehead (1966, 12) makes a carefully-argued case against the commonly held view—the prevailing view in 1966—of English as a 'content' subject. English is not, he insists, about the acquisition of information—knowledge about the English language, literature and communications skills. English teaching is not about telling children facts about Shakespeare and parts of speech. Rather, he argues the case that it is about creating conditions in which children *actively* increase their mastery of listening, speaking, reading, and writing (of which self-criticism will be a part)—and this is a key point—through 'use'. Whitehead's starting assumption involved a conception of the role of *self-activity* in all learning—an assumption that belongs centrally to the body of philosophical and psychological ideas that occupied Britton over a lifetime.

Douglas Barnes (1976) made essentially the same point when he distinguished between 'transmission' and 'transformation' regarding the curriculum. In Barnes' view, knowledge is not passed on—'transmitted' as a finished entity—directly from teacher to learner. Rather, he insists, 'coming to know' involves *change* in the learner ('transformation'), and 'knowing' involves a *process* in which learners themselves take an *active role*. On this view, of course, there is no guarantee that what is taught is what is learnt. Whitehead, Britton, and Barnes focused both teachers' and researchers' attention on learning processes, which had profound implications for English pedagogy. In 1966, Barnes, who was a leading figure in the London Association for the Teaching of English (LATE), and who had recently left Minchenden Grammar School in North London for an academic post in Leeds (not far from Whitehead, who had moved to Sheffield), carried forward ideas that he had been developing in London about the *active* role of learners expressed through their use of language into a modest research project involving practising teachers in Leeds. The involvement of teachers as research partners was already well-established in London through the activities of LATE, and the Barneses (Douglas and Dorothy) aimed to extend the practice in the North of England.

Douglas Barnes offered a series of seminars in 'Language and Education' for teachers studying for a Diploma in Curricular Studies at Leeds University Institute of Education. It was a path-breaking course. He describes how the research project emerged: 'I embarked on the descriptive study of lessons experienced by eleven-year-old children during their first half term in secondary school' (Barnes et al., 1969,

14). Barnes' systematic enquiries into classroom talk marked new directions for research in English. But he was not a specialist linguist. The research method that he adopted employed fledgling classroom *discourse analysis*—studying the patterns and underlying structures of classroom interactions—to understand better the role of peer interactions in classrooms. It was a modest research initiative set up with a view to deepening participating teachers' interest in children's learning. Barnes was not proposing sociolinguistics as new curriculum content. Crucially, there was minimal separation between research and teaching.

Good English teachers—Barnes, Britton, Rosen, and Whitehead insisted on it—made well-judged interventions in learning processes that are already underway. They focused attention on children's learning and development. They did not focus on teaching correct forms of expression or facts about books and authors. And they were especially cognizant of what children's language attains independent of schooling—the part that language has already played in their development so far. The task of the English teacher, they always maintained, was not to replace the language and culture that the child already possesses. Harold Rosen made this a central plank of his defence of working-class speech (see Richmond, 2017). Rather, it was the English teacher's responsibility to support, extend and improve what each child's language and culture has already accomplished, which requires a combination of careful observations and well-judged interventions.

The title of Whitehead's book, *The Disappearing Dais,* revealed an altered relationship between teacher and taught. This alteration involved a fundamental rebalancing of their respective roles. Whitehead's title endorsed a shift away from traditional teaching methods that relied on the teacher as the single source of authority. It implied instead a transfer of teachers' energies away from direct instruction towards attention to learners and fostering dialogue to draw out and develop pupils' inherent capabilities. The 'new' pedagogic approach demanded a generous spirit of co-operation among teachers and pupils.

7.   A NETWORK OF PRACTICES

Soumeya and Faduma are being inducted into professional practice grounded in the approach that Britton, Whitehead, and Barnes (with others) established, within which the authors have worked as colleagues (and friends). According to Britton, in order to successfully learn something, learners must make—or, more precisely, '*re-*make'—the knowledge for themselves. This 're-making' by pupils involves something being done. It requires active participation. It requires measure of control in learners over the pace and direction of their learning. It involves change. And it recognizes in full pupils' own agency in their learning.

In *The Teaching Archive: A New History for Literary Study*, Rachel Sagner Buurma and Laura Heffernan (2021) argue that there is a longstanding problem in the way that the story of the discipline has been told. Earlier versions of the narrative have located developments primarily in the published output of literary scholars. Each

movement, from Practical Criticism (Richards, 1929) onwards, has been charted through the works of the individual figures centrally associated with it. What has been ignored in this history is that these same figures, and their many peers, have spent most of their time teaching. Thus, claim Buurma and Heffernan (2021, 6), 'literary value *seems* to emanate from texts, but is actually made by people. And classrooms are the core sites where this collective making can be practiced and witnessed.' When they talk of classrooms, what they have in mind is all sorts of teaching space, in all sorts of institutions:

> Literary study was not a long-ago elite formation that somehow opportunistically adapted to the more pragmatic needs of mass education; it was often cultivated alongside or even as part of vocational education. The disciplinary shape of English bears the marks of this history, but it will be visible to us and to others only once we see classrooms at vocational programs, night schools, community colleges, and technical institutions as part of our intellectual genealogies. (Buurma & Heffernan, 2021, 213)

This isn't simply a problem of history, though; as they make clear, it has huge repercussions for us now, since '[t]he separation of teaching and research enables the cleansing of pedagogy from the expensive stain of disciplinary knowledge' (Buurma & Heffernan, 2021, 210). Even more important, this has implications for how we understand what it is to do English, or literary study, in school just as much as in university. Perhaps singularly among the disciplines, literary study is enacted rather than rehearsed in classrooms; the answer to the question 'Did I miss anything last week?' is truly 'Yes—and you missed it forever' (Buurma & Heffernan 2021, 4).

A similar argument has been made, on this side of the Atlantic, by Ben Knights:

> English (more perhaps than many other disciplines) constantly performs its own invention as a pedagogy and form of knowledge. It is a misunderstanding to treat 'English'— or any other academic subject, for that matter—simply as a body of knowledge, or as a tribe of specialists, cumulatively adding to the sum of knowledge which it subsequently transmits to its student initiates. It should be seen, rather, as a network of practices, and a social and cultural intervention. (Knights, 2017, 21, 34)

The emphasis on English as a network of practices involves taking seriously what happens in the classroom, as the site not of transmission but of cultural making, not some pale imitation of literary study but as the thing itself. In this view of English, pedagogy is not the 'method' (as it would be called in some other countries) whereby disciplinary knowledge is passed on to a new generation; it is, rather, constitutive of the subject itself. In this version of English, the model of teaching and learning offered in recent policy (DfE, 2019; 2021) seems inadequate, to say the least. Direct instruction, information storage and retrieval are not the processes that Knight envisages, when the practice of English is, every bit as much as the texts which are its objects of study, irreducibly implicated in the play of meanings.

> In going beyond the seductions of manifest content, and deferring the quest for information, students are implicitly expected to make their own incursions into the unsayable, complicating, as they do, the protocols of everyday speech. As a result, the medium of teaching is in actuality no more transparent than the modernist text with which it shares a challenging opacity. In short, English - residually at least - *not only studies the*

> *aesthetic but also performs it in its day-to-day practice.* There is an assumed continuum
> between the verbal and conceptual play of the text and the play of the articulate read-
> ing. (Knights, 2017, 108; emphasis added)

If we return, for a moment, to the two students overheard by Faduma, what matters is not that the question is answered but that it is asked, and thus forms the basis of an ongoing conversation. This is the 'play of the articulate reading'—play that takes itself seriously just as it marks a serious engagement with the text and the moment that is represented in the text. The teacher aims to prepare the class for a reading of a key episode of the novel where Enaiat's mother tells her ten-year-old son how to conduct himself before she leaves. But, as Faduma wryly observes, 'Getting a class of twelve and thirteen-year-olds to understand or empathise with the plight of people like Enaiat is not exactly straightforward.' Her assumption is that the teacher wants the class to understand and empathise—to help them to make sense of and to respond appropriately—to the story. In this context, making an appropriate response involves making independent, evaluative judgements.

Later, the class will read how Enaiat and his companions made the perilous crossing from the Turkish mainland to the Greek Island of Lesbos and how, after the boys become separated, Enaiat discovers the courtyard of a private house. The house is surrounded by a low wall, with a big tree in the middle. He hides from a barking dog and falls asleep under a large branch. At this point, the biographical narrative is interrupted by the author, who empathizes with Enaiat: 'I can imagine that you were pretty tired.' There is a shift in time, from the courtyard scene to the moment when the author hears what happened. Thus, readers are reminded that this is a fictionalised version of a true story—as Fabio Geda puts it, 'a recreation of Eniatollah's experience that allowed him to take possession of his own story' (Geda, 2011, Author's note). In the English version, the interruption is actually a translation of reconstructed speech. But we are hardly aware of the fact because we are moved by the story. It is a measure of the strength of the writing that we *care* about Enaiat's fate.

> After a while, an old lady who lived there came and woke me up, but gently. I leapt to
> my feet, and I was going to run away, but she made me a sign to come inside. She gave
> me some good food to eat, vegetables and something else. She made me take a shower.
> She gave me some nice clothes, too: a shirt with blue stripes, jeans and white trainers
> […] In the afternoon, after I'd had my shower and got dressed, the old lady went with
> me to the bus station and bought me a ticket (yes, she actually bought it for me), put 50
> euros in my hand, a whole fifty euros, said goodbye and left. Yes, I thought, there really
> are some very strange and very kind people in the world. (Geda, 2011, 165)

The episode represents an unexpected turn of fortune. (Enaiat has found a safe haven where, perhaps, there are no crocodiles.) Pressed for details by the 'author', Enaiat responds, 'I'm only interested in what happened. The lady is important for what she did. Her name doesn't matter […] anybody could have behaved like that (Geda, 2011, 166). The old lady's 'kindness' is exemplary—but so, too, is Enaiat's expression of gratitude. We are presented with a *reciprocal* relationship—a 'ritual'—that honours both the giver and the receiver. The episode encapsulates a universally

attainable 'condition proper to common humanity'—'anybody could have behaved like that,' says Enaiat. Kindness, he implies, is not unusual.

We recognise Enaiat's word, 'kindness', but in the context (the Eastern Mediterranean), the classical Greek concept of '*xenia*', 'hospitality', is, perhaps, more appropriate. *Xenia* is a common theme in Classical Greek and Roman literature, where households are judged by their observance or neglect of the rules of hospitality. '*Xenia*' constitutes a deep moral obligation—an expression of basic sociality. To give just one important example, in the *Odyssey*, the Phaeacians (Lesbos was a Phaeacian island) show exemplary hospitality *xenia*—to Odysseus when he is shipwrecked on the island of Sicheria (Phaeacia). He falls asleep in a grove where Nausicaa discovers him naked. She clothes and feeds him and directs him to the palace of the Phaeacians who generously provide ships for his return to Ithaca. The parallels are unmistakable. There is more than a trace of intertextuality. But our point is not about tracking sources or identifying literary archtypes. Instead, it is about the power of literature to transmit and renew values through the afterlife of a work of art. It is not necessary to tell the class of twelve and thirteen-year-olds about Odysseus and Nausicaa for them to empathise with Enaiat's plight (and by extension, people like him); to recognise and feel the 'rightness' of the old lady's actions. They will each have their own views. (The concept of hospitality is unlikely to be unknown in an East London classroom.) But it's worth knowing. And at some future stage it might deepen their individual and collective understanding of the universal 'obligation' to show hospitality to 'people like Enaiat'—foreigners, refugees. In classical literature, examples of 'good' *xenia* are used to expose 'bad' *xenia,* failure to follow basic rules of sociality. The suitors that occupy Odysseus' palace, are shown hospitality that exposes their greed. The old lady's 'kindness' exposes the lack of humanity in the Western treatment of refugees.

8. THE CONTINUING STRUGGLE OVER MEANING

What is of particular interest to us (in the context of Faduma and Soumeya's classrooms) are the non-reiterative parts, the understandings and evaluations of the participants that are intrinsically part of dialogue. Bakhtin (1996, 123) put it like this: 'Purely linguistic relations (that is, the object of linguistics) are relations of a sign to another sign.' He writes, 'Utterance is never the simple reflection or the expression of something that pre-exists it, is given and ready. It always creates something that had not been before, that is absolutely new and unrepeatable, and, moreover, it has always some relation to value (the true, the good, the beautiful, and so forth)' (Bakhtin, 1996, 119-120). 'Did I miss anything, last week?'—'Yes—and you missed it forever.'

Of course, this presents IMEN researchers with a problem. How can an investigator ever hope to retrieve and assemble all of the relevant 'data'? Is it practical for research purposes? We are also thinking about the historical circumstances—the 'objects and states of affairs' referred to, the things spoken about that are usually

bracketed out of much formal and structural analysis (as the *referent*)—the Taliban, say, and the present refugee crisis.

The version of English that Faduma observes is not, therefore, 'a carefully sequenced and coherent curriculum' (DfE, 2021, 12). Such notions of curriculum—and of the teaching that would best 'deliver' it—are supported by the work of cognitive scientists like Daniel Willingham, who has argued very strongly for a hierarchical model of knowledge, and thus of learning and of thinking, in which there is an absolute separation between the mental activities of novices and those of experts:

> It's not just that students know less than experts; it's also that what they know is organized differently in their memory. Expert scientists did not think like experts-in-training when they started out. They thought like novices. In truth, no one thinks like a scientist or a historian without a great deal of training. (Willingham, 2009, 128)

Willingham (2009, 141) makes a sharp distinction between 'knowledge creation' and 'knowledge understanding': the former is the job of experts; the latter what might be expected of learners. From this stems his injunction to teachers: 'Don't expect novices to learn by doing what experts do' (2009, 143). What Willingham's version of English might look like is in line with the lesson observed by Soumeya.

For Ben Knights, on the other hand, the novice/expert divide is not a binary opposite, at all, since both are engaged in the same practice:

> Students are not expected to turn into Frank Kermode or Judith Butler overnight, but they are expected to be able to act out the novelty of insight in their essays or their seminar contributions. The 'scene of reading' into which we seek to induct students consists of small-scale dramatisation of the steps of discovery—with its own narrative of ignorance (simulated or actual), a weighing of alternatives, triumphant disclosure, and teasing provocation to the credulous or literal-minded. As a subject where in principle a student is as capable of startling new insight as an experienced scholar, 'English' establishes criteria for what is *interesting* or enlivening in the absence of any immediate semantic pay-off. (Knights, 2017, 114; original emphasis)

In the lesson observed by Faduma, when the students are discussing Enaiat's mother's abandonment of him, they are participating in a struggle over meaning. They enter into dialogue with each other and with the text not merely to understand someone else's (expert) knowledge but as people assuming their right to contest and construct knowledge, using the resources available to them. Here, what is being enacted is a form of literary sociability (Doecke, 2019) that exceeds the confines of the lesson itself precisely because the students have an interest in what they are discussing.

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