VICTORIA ELLIOTT

"Study What You Most Affect": Beginning Teachers' Preparedness to Teach Shakespeare

This paper explores some reflective accounts written by teachers in training on their anticipation of teaching Shakespeare and uses these accounts to discuss the potential challenges of preparing English teachers to teach the plays. The discussion is situated in a particular teaching philosophy that draws on practical theorizing and the concept of participants and spectators, in the context of the Oxford Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

The PGCE is the main teaching qualification in the UK; it is a one-year course that combines two lengthy school placements with ongoing college sessions. At Oxford University, the "internship" model is intended to allow students to develop critical understandings of pedagogy and practice and to experiment in the classroom, in contrast with what might be termed an apprenticeship approach (hereafter, I shall use the term "interns" to discuss participants in this study--the term both reflects their status and distinguishes them from the students they teach). The curriculum (as opposed to professional) course is taught by three permanent tutors, of whom I am one; we share the curriculum sessions among us and supervise the interns on their teaching practice and their academic assignments. There are also a handful of guest speakers who deliver specialist sessions through the year.

Despite the emphasis on Shakespeare as the only named author in the English National Curriculum, and the effectively compulsory study of literature to the age of 16, in England today we are facing the challenge of what Sue Dymoke calls the "dead hand of the exam" (85) that reduces engagement with literature. Jane Coles has also noted that, in the

main, academic study of Shakespeare serves to emphasize his dislocation from teenagers' lives ("Every Child's Birthright?" 55). These are the challenges that we must prepare beginning teachers to overcome for their future working lives. They are not the only challenges, however. Trevor Wright tells his readers, an audience of beginning English teachers, that "You may have loved *Twelfth Night* at school, but then you were good at English, and this is a handicap for you now in a number of ways" (2). That is certainly one handicap, but there is a converse one also: the student teachers who, despite achieving an undergraduate degree in English or a related subject, are unfamiliar with Shakespeare, who fear him, or whose educational experiences with his texts have been universally negative.

The challenges of teaching Shakespeare are vast, therefore, and the experiences of those who begin English teaching varied (as is illustrated below). Beginning English teachers need enough knowledge and experience of different teaching approaches to tackle these challenges with confidence, and this need is something they are aware of, as will become clear.

The Teaching Philosophy

The Oxford internship model has a philosophical base in "practical theorizing," in which the integration of professional and academic perspectives opens up a range of options for the intern to take into the classroom to use whichever is the most appropriate in their context. In this approach, Donald McIntyre argues,

> the theoretical knowledge which we offer student teachers should be treated by them as tentative, inadequate and constantly to be questioned and, where appropriate, falsified; but it should also be knowledge which we offer them because we believe it to be of practical value to them as teachers. Our commitment to the process of experimentation and falsification should be

> equalled by our commitment to making available to our students theoretical knowledge which they will mostly, with refinement, be able usefully to assimilate to their professional thinking. So acceptance of the importance of theory as process need not, and should not in my view, limit the importance we attach to theory as content. (41)

In other words, there is a reciprocal relationship between practice and theorizing, in which beginning teachers are encouraged to hypothesize and test out those hypotheses in practical teaching situations, supported by the provision of theoretical knowledge in their college sessions.

In its praxis, the PGCE has a strong theme that draws on James Britton's concept of participants and spectators. Brian Edmiston and Amy McKibben write, "Experiencing as participants, people can use language, movement, and other tools to accomplish goals in their interactions with others. However, it is only when people are able to slow down and step back to reflect as spectators on events, for example orally, in writing, or through movement or drawing, that they make meaning about those experiences" (92–93). Lecturers, they continue, regularly adopt the "teacher-in-role" approach: "a drama strategy that teachers can use to position students as both participants and spectators" (93). We regularly include modelled teaching in our curriculum sessions, treating our interns as school students and stepping into the role of classroom teacher, acting as "teacher in role" in so far as we step in and out of the persona of high school teacher, leading our interns in and out of their role, to enable and insist on reflection and metacognition about the learning experience, the transferability of this experience to their own classrooms, and practical theorizing. In doing so, we aim to give interns the range of knowledge, empathy, and experience they require to be able to make informed choices in the classroom rather than unthinkingly mimicking their own learning or

doing what they assume will work (such as, in this context, showing the film or using a "translated" version of a play).

Shakespeare in the Classroom

A similar situation pertains to the literature about teaching Shakespeare, which Anthony Wilson identifies with poetry writing (55): there is a preponderance of professional pedagogic texts, or even proselytising guides, far greater than the body of empirical research into Shakespearean pedagogy. In particular in the UK, there has been a great emphasis on the "active methods" pedagogy popularized by Rex Gibson and, more recently, promoted heavily by the Royal Shakespeare Company and the Globe Theatre's education projects in the UK. Sarah Olive argues that active methods have "harnessed a discourse of empowerment and ownership around its methods and their outcomes" (66), which speak directly to some of the fears around the lack of engagement with Shakespeare by teenagers.

Active methods draw largely on the principal of the rehearsal room and an emphasis on the "play" as playscript: they insist on the vital importance of the dramatic in understanding the plays. As an approach, Olive explains, "it places the emphasis on Shakespeare as a process rather than a product - multiple, dynamic and constructed rather than single, unified and received" (64). Adherents (among who I would include myself) claim that, according to James Stredder, "practical work in Shakespeare [. . .] is invaluable [. . .] not least because it offers every individual student personal contact with the plays, in the context of the pleasure and support of social, creative activity" (6). Likewise, Tracy Irish, in describing a classroom experience of active methods in her role as an educator at the Royal Shakespeare Company, quotes Geoffrey Streatfeild, an actor in the RSC Histories ensemble, as describing the ensemble as being "a secure environment without ever being a comfort zone" (7); as Irish points out, this sounds like the ideal classroom – a place where challenge is

not undermined by fear. She goes on to argue 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" (I7).

The role of drama within English in general, and in its incarnation as active methods, is one that is often a cause of worry to beginning English teachers. It is the philosophy of "participants and spectators" that overcomes this worry for most: by having to participate in dramatic activities and to reflect on their use in the classroom, many (though admittedly not all) lose their initial reluctance and become advocates for active methods themselves (or so it appears through their course evaluations). Edmiston and McKibben, in an article describing an active approach project argue that "as pupils participate in pedagogical activities adapted from the rehearsal room they have affective, embodied, cognitive experiences that are both imagined and real" (90); the same is true of beginning teachers.

One challenge to the active methods approach is that it is facile, provoking enthusiasm and "fun" but little real engagement with the text--or understanding of the language. Proponents would say this is a fundamental misreading of the approach that, Jonothan Neelands argues, "expects students to engage with the technicalities and artistry of the language as in all ‘real work’ with Shakespeare" (4). The language of Shakespeare is a particular focus of anxiety around Shakespeare teaching, *vide* the "No Fear Shakespeare" series, comic book adaptations or simple "translation" approaches. Neelands further points out that "Shakespeare’s artistry with language, in particular, can appear to be a formidable obstacle in the pursuit of intellectual and aesthetic rewards for young people who may be more used to the immediate pleasures of popular culture. Shakespeare makes intellectual demands on audiences as well as on performers and directors" (4). It is also worth noting that active methods do not exclude the more traditional approaches, and that, as Coles observes,

create a "false dichotomy between ‘desk-bound’ teaching (bad) and ‘active’ teaching (good)" ("Testing Shakespeare" 34) that is a damaging on all fronts.

Active methods are not the only approach taken in the English classroom: they are almost certainly, despite the proliferation of resources to support them, a minority. Barrie Wade and John Sheppard surveyed the methods used to teach Shakespeare in 45 schools clustered in one local area, albeit over twenty years ago. The most popular strategies were play-reading, literary analysis, scene-summarising, watching videos, and visiting theatres. The least popular strategies, identified as "rarely" or "never" used by more than a quarter of respondents included performance, improvisation, role play, and hotseating (a drama technique in which a student answers questions from the rest of the class in role as a character from the play). While this is an old study, it is indicative; a repeat of the survey today would be an interesting read.

Aside from reading around the room, using film adaptations is a frequent tool for the English teacher that, according to Coles, often "results in a degree of dishonesty whereby teachers substitute the film for the printed text in lessons, yet construct essay assignments for their students that for the most part rely on them ignoring the film version" ("Teaching Shakespeare" 81). As well as being the only compulsory author on the English National Curriculum for students aged 11 to 14, Shakespeare is a core author for both the GCSE (General Certificate in Secondary Education), the national qualification taken at age 16, on which schools' effectiveness is assessed, and A level, the national qualification taken at the end of school. As a result, the plays bear a heavy assessment load and take on a significant weight in the minds of teachers and students, in which, to use Dickens' immortal words, the importance of pouring "imperial gallons of facts" into the "little vessels" (9) for their coursework or examination essays is paramount. Coles notes the tension that arises between the engagement of active methods and the drier preparation for assessment ("Testing

Shakespeare" 37) and the problems –even a sense of betrayal – that emerge for students as a result. This leads to a situation in which, Irish explains, "exploring questions is not the experience of Shakespeare that many of our students get in the classroom. Pressure to achieve the highest 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" (7).

In truth, the monological experience may also be concealing a lacuna in the knowledge of teachers. Mark Pike recounts the interview process for the PGCE at another institution as an "eye-opener" (32) with regard to the subject knowledge of graduates in English: "When asking which Shakespeare plays an English graduate has read it is not uncommon for just three or four plays to be listed (often *Romeo and Juliet* which they read in Year 9, *Macbeth* from GCSE, one from A level and one at degree level)" (32). Similarly, Liam Semler recounts that a high school teacher on his "Shakespeare Reloaded" project (a collaboration between secondary and tertiary educators to explore the pedagogy of teaching Shakespeare) confessed to "never having studied Shakespeare at university, or even beyond Year 9 when I was at school, so it was great just being able to deepen my understanding of Shakespeare so that I can teach it better" (60). This is a pattern that is repeated in the accounts considered below. Those interns who named the plays with which they were familiar tended to cluster around the same familiar few; *Romeo and Juliet* (5), *Hamlet* (4) and *Macbeth* (3), with a surprising three also having studied *Measure for Measure*, most likely due to its position as a set text for a major A level five or so years ago.

The Data

Our interns are asked to keep a reflective journal for their own use during their training year. I asked them to write a piece about their feelings about teaching Shakespeare as a preparation

for a week in which we had a three-hour curriculum session on Shakespeare and in which they would additionally have a four-hour session at the Globe in London, including a workshop on active methods. I asked them to share these pieces with me if they were willing to do so. Twelve interns sent me their journal entries. In addition, I asked them to write reflections after the week of training, if they were happy to. Five of them wrote these additional reflections and sent them to me. In total, there are about 8000 words of reflective accounts. Twelve students is just under half of the entire English cohort (25) for this academic year.

The accounts vary in their detail: some are very short while one gave a whole narrative account of his lifetime's experience of Shakespeare as an explanation of his position today. I have drawn some themes from these accounts, which I present below; these have emerged during an inductive analytical process that has sought to represent what occurs, not to claim that these themes are representative or exhaustive. This is a small sample, and my aim in this has been to illustrate some of the considerations that we should bear in mind when preparing beginning English teachers to teach Shakespeare.

Previous Experiences of Shakespeare

Wright comments, "Perhaps the first time you saw Shakespeare it was in an elderly, soft-bound book[. . .]. The teacher handed out the parts to some keen volunteers who read clearly and entirely without understanding for the next six weeks" (2). It is barely a caricature, so recognisable is the situation that Wright describes. Seven of the accounts drew on their own educational experiences of Shakespeare to inform their own positions going forward; another intern was heavily influenced by her experience as a teaching assistant the previous year. The intern who gave the longest narrative account had a vivid recollection of Shakespeare at school, particularly of his experiences on a school trip to Russia:

> *Early encounters at grammar school involved an impromptu performance of an act of* The Merchant of Venice *by a senior English teacher and the head boy whilst [we were] visiting a school in what was Leningrad, USSR. Strangely, I still remember the head boy's name, Tim M******. The teacher, I have long forgotten. I was embarrassed for them both. I thought the "performance" to be at once intimidating, out of context, a boast, and somewhat far removed from where we were geographically and socially. The Russian children just wanted our Wrigley's chewing gum, our cans of Coca-Cola and stories of our home. Not Shakespeare, not Shylock. I think that I remember the school putting on* The Merchant of Venice *that summer. I was not involved. I found the language unapproachable. Indecipherable. An anachronism, much like the head boy and the teacher.* (I4)

This was the most emotive of the recollections of early encounters with Shakespeare, and illustrates the lasting power that the first encounter can have: this particular student is some twenty years older than most of the cohort of interns. Another intern recalled her own Shakespeare learning in reference to what she worried about delivering to her own students:

> *The hours that we spent studying Macbeth and Romeo and Juliet in Year 8/9 at school all blur into boring, off-putting nothingness in my memory. I remember only the pace of the lessons being painfully slow in order to accommodate everyone as we read aloud in turn, and I kept being told off for reading ahead. No one in the class could pronounce the words correctly and I was frustrated and bored. I think it was these key memories of studying Shakespeare that put me off.* (I2)

Alongside Wright's "keen volunteers" (2), this is an entirely familiar picture of Shakespeare teaching in schools. Divided between those who cannot understand a word and those who are

deeply frustrated by the funereal pace, pupils of all kinds are turned off Shakespeare by such experiences.

Another intern drew on her experience as a Teaching Assistant in two classes in which students "did not enjoy the plays and were very vocal about this"; however, she was "not sure what the teachers could have done differently" (I10). This intern had already begun to teach Shakespeare, something she had been "nervous" about with her lower-achieving set. She did not make the link between these nerves and her prior experience herself, but she did say that "the low attainment level of some of the students there" and "the bad behaviour in the class" could have been "why the teacher struggled to get the classes to engage with Shakespeare" (I10). These early interactions with Shakespeare are clearly significant, and have lasting effects: "Because I don't readily choose to engage with Shakespeare as a result of my schooling, I also don't actually know many of the texts all that well, and this gap in my knowledge concerns me" (I2).

Fears about the Challenge of Teaching Shakespeare

There were three strongly inter-related concerns that occurred in some form in every account: overcoming the perceptions of students; the challenge of the language; and the challenge of teaching Shakespeare to lower-achievers. It is relevant in this context that the majority of secondary schools in England divide year groups into sets based on attainment for the teaching of English; it is likely that behaviour of pupils will also affect setting decisions, whether that is intended and explicit or not. One intern drew on her own introduction to Shakespeare and the fact that the plays had been presented as "difficult":

> *If that's the way you're introduced to the texts, they will always carry that stigma.*
>
> *. . . My biggest concerns in teaching Shakespeare therefore are making it*

accessible and pacy. Enjoyable but not dumbed down. I also don't want any of the preconceptions that I *have to be passed on to the kids.* (I2)

Laudably, for someone who does not like Shakespeare herself as a result of her schooling, she is determined not to let her pupils have the same experience. Even those who enjoyed Shakespeare expressed similar concerns, however:

I love critically analysing his language and imagery and unearthing the historical, social contexts that surround his plays. Now being asked to step into the shoes of teaching Shakespeare has presented me with a myriad of questions, most importantly – just how do you address the language? (I6)

While teaching the language was seen as a challenge, it was for some the perceived difficulty that was most important, which was linked to pupils' larger perceptions of Shakespeare:

I'm aware that the language can take a while to grasp, and is an aspect that puts off pupils straight away/before they've read it as it looks threatening. I think most pupils see Shakespeare as boring? That's the majority of the reactions I've seen in schools anyway. This is one of the main reasons I see teaching it as difficult as students may be dis-engaged from the start. I'm not saying all Shakespeare lessons need to be exciting and creative, I'm just stuck for a lot of ways to engage pupils. (I1)

Engagement was a key worry around Shakespeare, and it was one that highlighted interns' concerns around how to teach lower attaining groups:

And that ties in to my second concern. How do I engage those kids who struggle enough with modern texts with a play that is full of language that they won't understand? The fact that foundation papers are gone and the grade boundaries are getting tougher means that I somehow have to get those kids to a good level of

understanding of the plays, and that's going to be difficult for those who won't engage. (I5)

The reference to foundation papers and grade boundaries reflects a period of examination reform in England in which the main qualification taken at 16 by all students is undergoing substantial changes. This extract reflects the specific challenges posed by Shakespeare: it's bad enough trying to get some students through "easy" texts without having to tackle Early Modern language. This seems to be the reason why Shakespeare is a locus for these worries, which are occasionally expressed at other times during the course:

However, two accounts provided a note of hope:

Right now I'm teaching Macbeth to a bottom set Y10 class and although I occasionally pitch it completely wrong, I'm amazed at how easily they understand the plot and the characters. Getting them to appreciate Shakespeare is harder but they are amenable to learning it at least. (I9)

When I first heard that I would be teaching Shakespeare, I was a little nervous. My class are a Set 3 and I was worried that they would not be able to understand the language. However, so far they seem to be enjoying it. One of the ways I have tackled the language is to pick out key words and analyse them rather than overwhelming them with huge chunks. (I10)

The worries about teaching Shakespeare to low-achievers were not realized in the classroom: having the opportunity to face this challenge enabled interns to overcome their fears and gain confidence. This suggests that not only is it essential that beginning teachers have the opportunity to teach Shakespeare while training, but also that it is useful for them to do so with the groups that they might find most difficult, in order to address the potential psychological barrier erected by their concerns over language, pupil perceptions, and lower achievers.

Confidence and Expertise

There seems to be a strong perception both that Shakespeare is central to the curriculum, and also that it is almost unacceptable to not like Shakespeare on a personal level. There is almost a sense of defiance expressed in the following two excerpts, suggestive of a feeling of going against the grain and fearing being sanctioned for it:

> *Here's the thing – I don't love Shakespeare. That's my unpopular English teacher opinion number one.* (I2)
>
> *I know that teaching Shakespeare is probably the first thing that people think of when they imagine English teaching, and I know that it is becoming even more central to the English curriculum, but it is not my first choice of topics to cover.* (I5)

While teachers are for the most part able to manoeuvre their way through the curriculum avoiding texts that they dislike, it is impossible to be an English teacher in England (as in the US) and to not teach Shakespeare. Facing the perception of teaching advice manuals that "you were good at English" (Wright 2) and that this must by default incorporate a love of and a facility with Shakespeare is a further pressure upon beginning teachers.

Aside from this potential pitfall, the interns in general expressed a sense that with knowledge of the plays came a confidence in teaching them, and conversely that they would only be comfortable teaching the plays they knew. Six of the accounts were aligned with a view that one expressed as "I would feel comfortable teaching now any play by Shakespeare I have studied myself in detail" (I6). Confidence in knowledge translated to confidence in the classroom. Conversely, there was a sense that a lack of detailed knowledge was a problem - vague knowledge of the plays was not felt to be enough to teach them. Gaining this knowledge might also be a difficulty; although many were aware of a vast number of

resources available to them about the plays (and indeed, most cited the expedient of simply reading the required play), it was time consuming. One intern commented,

> *I'm pretty confident on the plays that I've studied in depth, Hamlet, Macbeth etc. but there are so many other plays that could need to be covered. I don't particularly relish the idea of having to learn a Shakespeare play from scratch whilst planning for and teaching all other classes and topics*. (I5)

This is an interesting point of view: most of the interns will have to prepare texts that they are unfamiliar with during the year, and indeed so do many English teachers. In this respect, the intern echoes the opinion of Pike: "an English graduate entering nine months of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) in the United Kingdom should be able to focus on 'how to teach' rather than having to augment subject knowledge by reading what they might have read in their previous three or four years studying English at degree level" (33). This might be a desirable outcome, but it seems idealistic to me. It may also not be that helpful – one intern identified a fear that she would pitch her lessons at too high level because "all of the learning and information I can remember about Shakespeare" came from the final year of university study (I5). Because the PGCE is a professional course, we teach very little subject content, and certainly do not have time to remedy any lack, although we do ensure interns set subject knowledge development targets, which might include reading specific Shakespeare plays.

Knowledge was a focus of concern in a variety of ways. As well as the confidence that went along with knowing a text was a perception, present in three accounts, that not only knowledge but expertise was a necessary prerequisite for teaching a text. One commented that she would want to "revise thoroughly" before teaching a play (I7). But further than this, a sense of pressure to "get it right" was present in two of the accounts. One said that "the thought of being 'put on the spot' when analysing Shakespeare makes me feel anxious" and that "I feel that there is a lot of pressure put on to English teachers to know the plays inside

out" (I11). Another, who had already taught some Shakespeare, wrote: "I find it hard when students ask what something means that I haven't initially thought about. I can usually figure it out and often the annotations in the margins or footnotes help but this is a fear I have" (I9). It was perhaps reassuring that a reflection after the sessions mentioned that they were "reassuring because I realised that I didn't need to be an expert on every play – or indeed any play!" (I11).

This perceived need to have the answers to hand is an interesting one, and is perhaps something that needs addressing with beginning teachers. Although the majority of this group claim to adhere to the concept that "there is no such thing as a wrong answer in English" and to espouse teaching philosophies in which all children should be encouraged to explore without the fear of being condemned for failure, this aspect of the responses suggests they are not comfortable with setting an example of that to students. There is a wrong or right answer to "translating" Shakespeare, and they need to know it – despite the fact that most school texts have comprehensive notes, and modelling the working out of textual meaning would be a beneficial move for most pupils. I was intrigued to find that one intern had valued a group challenge to name all the plays "because we all realised that we knew more than we perhaps gave ourselves credit for" (I4), which seems an odd focus for an increased confidence in Shakespearean knowledge!

Sonnets

Three of the accounts brought up an unexpected (to me) concern: the sonnets. For one student, the sonnets had been the source of her single worst Shakespeare experience:

> *In the interview for studying English at the University of Oxford at undergraduate level, I was presented with a Shakespearean sonnet. At the time, I had never read a sonnet and did not know that Shakespeare had written one. I was clutching at*

> *straws for answers to the (kind) interviewer's questions and I remember feeling very flustered and embarrassed by my lack of knowledge.* (I11)

Two others mentioned a particular concern on how to teach the sonnets, while expressing confidence over the plays more generally. It surprised me that this should be a particular concern; we do cover the teaching of poetry in other curriculum sessions, and we covered the sonnets briefly during the Shakespeare curriculum session. It is perhaps related to the perceived need for knowledge: sonnets have received interpretations, which lead to clear "right" (and more importantly "wrong") answers. There is also much less scope for an ongoing discussion of meaning in a fourteen line poem in which the language will of necessity be the main focus.

Teaching Approaches and Excitement

There is a final theme that is perhaps more heartening for the teacher educator: a sense of excitement about the potential of different approaches to Shakespeare. Several of the accounts reflect the positivity of seeing a play in performance: such an experience might have been the only way that a dull schooling experience had been lightened or overturned at a later stage:

> *I think being able to watch a Shakespearian play in the original language is hugely valuable because they are much easier to follow, as this was the purpose of the plays anyway, so hopefully this will make Shakespeare less "scary." I know this helped me when I was in school.* (I1)

Others referenced films, ballets, school productions, and visits to the Royal Shakespeare Company as being experiences that they had enjoyed and hoped would be of use to their students. But the value of performance was not only in the watching. Many of them referred to active approaches and the enjoyment they foresaw:

> *I am looking forward to having the chance to use more drama in the classroom as I have not really had the chance to do that yet. The fact that it is going to be challenging to get some students to engage just means I am going to have to come up with a good mix of activities, and that's a thought that excites me. Shakespeare is a set author for a reason so there is so much to engage with, and at least that means I am going to have the chance to really test out a lot of different ideas with different classes when it comes to Shakespeare.* (I5)

The range of possibilities was a cause for excitement in most accounts where it was mentioned; most also wanted more ideas and activities.

The five interns who provided reflections at the end of the week of Shakespeare sessions, and in particular after their afternoon course on active methods with an actor/ educator at Shakespeare's Globe on the south bank in London, often reported their fears had been allayed by the experience:

> *I have come away far more confident about the prospect of teaching Shakespeare and armed with a wealth of activities I can draw upon. My fears about his language and works I am not familiar with have been mitigated and I am excited to try out the activities we tried in my own lessons*. (I6)

All five mentioned the range of ideas that they now had to draw on in teaching Shakespeare and how that would help them in being able to cater to the full range of needs in their classrooms, for "Differentiation has proved to be a very important part of teaching Shakespeare" (I4). There was also a sense that the participatory approach had given them confidence with techniques that they had not previously had experience of and an understanding of how they might work in the limited space of the English classroom: "It was really beneficial to be given activities to do which didn't require vast spaces or professional directing/acting skills" (I11). The demystification afforded by taking part in the activities that

were being recommended to them seems to have increased their intention to use them in the classroom. Their anxieties were not completely soothed, but they had been lessened.

Future Directions

This has been a small exploration of the attitudes of beginning English teachers towards the teaching of Shakespeare, and their feelings of preparedness. There are clear themes to the experiences that emerge from the varied accounts, and the thread that unites them, for me, is the emotive responses that the teaching and learning of Shakespeare provokes. Memories of learning Shakespeare at school stay with beginning teachers, much more powerfully than later experiences, and continue to color both their feelings about Shakespeare and, potentially, their actions in the classroom. The prospect of teaching Shakespeare themselves fills them with nerves and excitement; they are inspired by Shakespeare, or ashamed of their lack of love for Shakespeare. They respond, comments Olive, to his "unique position and widely-constructed, high cultural value (3) and to his position as the single compulsory author on the English National Curriculum. There are clear anxieties around the teaching of Shakespeare for beginning teachers--and in particular the challenge of teaching the plays to classes of lower-attainers or the poorly behaved by making the language accessible. Shakespeare also appears to be a particular case through which it is possible to explore conceptions of knowledge in English, the importance of the "right" knowledge, and of knowledge at the right level for teaching teenagers. Knowledge leads to confidence; is this true of other areas of English teaching?

It seems significant that there is little empirical research on the effectiveness of different approaches to teaching Shakespeare, whether that effectiveness is in engaging teens or in enabling them to understand and analyze the plays. The empirical accounts of active methods that exist are mostly individual case studies written by practitioners; they are

valuable testimonies, but do not generalize. Significantly, they rarely consider the use of active methods by normal English teachers, who do not have the experience of the rehearsal room that specialist practitioners do. The exception to this is Coles' study reported in "Testing English" that is both a study of a normal teacher and somewhat of a critique of the active methods approach. A regular survey of the type reported by Wade and Sheppard might also enable teacher educators to focus on the types of approaches that are most used – or potentially those that are least used, because they are those that beginning teachers are least likely to see in schools during their teaching practice.

There are ways in which this small scale study can be of use for teacher educators preparing English teachers to teach Shakespeare. One message has been, for me, that it is not always the expected topics that are problematic for interns; the unexpected trouble with sonnets might also crop up in other areas I would consider more straightforward to teach (perhaps writing of non-fiction texts, for example). Also, it seems likely that a focus on how to make the plays accessible for a diverse range of students would be welcomed by beginning teachers. Knowing how influential past experiences are – whether good or bad – makes the case for offering a range of different ways of teaching Shakespeare, both, as Wright formulates, to enable beginning teachers to escape from their own fears of repeating the past and to ensure that they do not simply replicate what they themselves enjoyed without realizing the "handicap" of having been good at English (2). It is my contention that only by experiencing some of these methods, as participants and spectators, can beginning English teachers fully understand both what the methods are, and how students might respond to them. Beginning teachers must be equipped with the knowledge, experience, and expertise to choose their routes into Shakespeare with the classes they teach; only by doing so are we fully preparing them to meet the challenge of Shakespearean texts. Although on our course we have a substantial (considering the limits of time) focus on active methods and practical

approaches to texts to be used in conjunction with the pedagogies interns have already experienced, it is by no means certain that teaching students at other institutions will have such an experience, with a few exceptions. The methodology and texts to support such a focus exist, and it is important that universities should take advantage of this in training teachers. The difficulty lies, perhaps, in the expertise of teacher educators, who without direct experience of these approaches may themselves shy away from teaching how to use them in the classroom. It is not only intimidating for our beginning teachers the first time they try an active approach as either participant or teacher, it is also intimidating for us to introduce them to it. We are lucky in the UK in having access to the expert actor-educators of the Globe and the Royal Shakespeare Company; in the US, there is the Folger to provide similar support. In the UK, we are progressing slowly towards a common core curriculum for teacher education, binding upon all training providers: my wish would be to see an element that ensured all beginning English teachers had experience of a range of approaches to teaching Shakespeare and the confidence to use those approaches to tailor their practice to their students.

Oxford University Department of Education

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