“Reshaping Shakespeare”
Dr Greg Cunningham, Barker College, Sydney

Abstract: Teachers teaching Shakespeare often voice their frustration at having to temper creativity with the vagaries of formal assessment requirements or, quite often, where innovation hits formal systems and the challenges that this presents in balancing the joy of Shakespeare with the required assessment of it. This presentation considers striking the balance between the teaching and assessing of Shakespeare, particularly at the senior levels, incorporating ideas and practices drawn from personal teaching practice and the latest innovative pedagogic approaches to Shakespeare emanating from the Unlearning Shakespeare conference held in Oxford in June 2012.

Defining creativity
Creativity is about producing an idea, product, performance, or way of doing something that is both novel and appropriate. Novelty is not sufficient creativity; it simply refers to something new. Creativity comprises an outcome that is new and also appropriate to the task, useful, meaningful, or valuable in some way.

(Plucker, Beghetto and Dow, 2004).

Conditions for promoting creativity in classrooms
- Teachers providing sufficient time for creative ideation, incubation and production, as well as designing tasks that value creativity;
- A balance between student autonomy (intellectual, task and environmental freedom) and structure
- High expectations and challenge afforded by intellectual rigour, complexity and higher order thinking
- Exposure to diverse stimuli such as new ideas
- Allowing students to find a physical environment that supports (or at least does not hinder) them to get into the creative flow
- Being part of a network with “creative like minds” who share their level of and passion for creativity
- Access to experts to model creativity, including industry leaders, mentors, and teachers with real-life experience
- Cognitive support for creativity – teaching creatively, encouraging creative learning, being open to creative ideas and providing creativity-specific feedback, and increasing the breadth and depth of knowledge and skills that students can apply to creative tasks
- Affective support through accepting, valuing, encouraging and recognising creativity, having high expectations of students’ creative capacity; and encouraging intrinsic motivation for creativity by incorporating students’ passions into their learning.

Teaching Shakespeare through Performance (James Loehlin)
- Since 1970s performance has been used more and more in the classroom both at undergraduate level and in secondary and primary education
- Forms of performance differs wide: reading scenes to complete staging of plays

Functions of performance pedagogy:
- Acquaint students with Elizabethan stage conventions
- Make students aware of performance cues
- Encourage students to attempt different interpretive possibilities for scenes
- Performance pedagogy may include comparative study of film performance to instructional material such as RSC’s Playing Shakespeare series
- May use performance exercises to heighten awareness of play’s language and imagery
- Teacher may bring particular theoretical framework to their performance work incorporating cultural materialist, feminist or psychoanalytic perspectives
- Recent developments in Shakespeare studies, criticism and performance practice have made the performance in the classroom no longer “an easily romanticised option”
- Performance pedagogy grew out of stage-centred criticism by scholars such as JL Styan and Bernard Beckerman, RSC methods by Berry and Barton and touring performance and education groups
- By mid ‘80s it seemed that performance would dominate pedagogy for a long time
• However, new theoretical perspectives (e.g. feminism, cultural materialism) raised new questions that did not lend themselves to performance teaching
• By the late ‘90s much stage-centred work had been undermined, supported by the view that textual authority had reduced the creative potential of the performer
• Performance pedagogy was questioned as the only way of discovering textual meaning
• A more “pluralistic approach” encourages students to take possession of their interpretive responses to Elizabethan texts

Performance in the Classroom

1. Attention to Text
• Although New Criticism has been rejected over the past generation, most teachers of Shakespeare would agree that giving detailed attention to the language is a useful practice of students to pursue – and many syllabuses still require “close study of text”
• For promoting scrutiny of textual detail and nuance, performance is hard to beat
• Students needs to know what the words mean
• Internalising the lines gives students a particular command of sentence structure, work order, meter, register, imagery and rhetorical devices.
• “Confronting the text” – try to create a sub-textual mental process that will lead them to “need” the particular words the play gives them
• Speaking the text gives students a visceral understanding of the words and the text

2. Consciousness of Interpretation
• Any performance approach can give students insight into the process of interpretation
• It also accords well with de-authorising tendencies in modern criticism – meaning is not necessarily fixed!
• Performance will involve them in multiple interpretive decisions that will make them co-creators of the pay’s meaning and sometimes challenge the authority of the text
• Performance pedagogy is not trying to unlock the inner life of the character but to understand the force of the text’s rhetoric under different interpretive conditions

3. Sense of history
• Performance can also make students aware of the plays as situated in history, conditioned by the original circumstances of their performance, but also remade according to changing cultural conditions down to the present.
• Can help understand how meaning was produced in Elizabethan theatre, but can also make students aware of subsequent cultural changes and their impact on the play’s meanings
• Classroom performances reveal also the workings and constraints of the various conventions of Shakespearean theatre – e.g. thrust stage vs. proscenium arch, dimensions of the stage, absence of representative scenery, constant daylight, and possibilities of addressing the audience directly
• Tracing the performance legacy can also assist in understanding (e.g. Garrick’s revised ending in R&J, the various versions of Lear)

4. Understanding Expressive Choices
• Further value in teaching through performance is to open students to the range of expressive factors available in contemporary production: making the students more sophisticated and critical audience members (e.g. that certainly productions of R&J advance the ethnically-motivated tensions between the Capulets and Montagues)
• Informed viewing of Shakespeare on film can help attune them to the expressive potential of different devices like camera movement, editing, soundtrack, etc.

5. Sense of Ownership
• Performance can lend a certainly degree of mastery over the text
• Time is the issue in doing performance teaching, but the dividends are considerable
• A student who engages with a text through performance can see it from different angles and more detail – the student has a real investment in the play.

6. A performance model: Shakespeare at Winedale (University of Texas)
• Winedale Historical Centre as a “green world” – a space of licensed misrule
• University students studying English come for a summer programme
• Preceded by directed readings, online discussion and preparation
• Three plays’ production, but all student driven – no directors or technicians – all students act in all three plays
• Theatre work is supplements by improvisations, sonnet workshops, movement exercises, fight training and individual text work
• No rehearsals – each engagement with the text is a performance
• Most importantly, it makes Shakespeare real for the students, giving them something they can live with and live through.

Unlearning Shakespeare Conference, Oxford, June 2012

Models of creative practice across secondary and tertiary Shakespearean studies

➢ Dr Paul Prescott’s “hybrid” model at the University of Warwick
   Encouraging students to make cross-subject connections (bring a skill or piece of information from another subject into Shakespeare class, trace connections, conflicts etc), e.g. physics students learning in performative ways.
   Past and present productively coexist as traditional forms of pedagogy (lecture, seminar, essay + exam) are complemented and interrogated by the widespread introduction of performance-based, open-spaced and creative approaches to teaching and assessment, approaches informed and inspired by the University’s close working relationship with the Royal Shakespeare Company.

➢ Impact of learning space on learning – consideration of how the students relate to the space they’re in. Look at “embedding contexts” (complex terms); e.g. the use of a luminarium – moving outside the seminar room into the extraordinary space of a luminarium, this project considers to what extent student explorations of A Midsummer Night’s Dream and As You Like It can be enhanced by taking them outside the confines of traditional university learning environments. Can space be configured in relation to students? How much ownership do we want students to have of their space? Expectations related to physical embedding context? If students associate their learning of Shakespeare fundamentally with experience of secondary school, it makes sense to consider how they approach the latter. Also external learning – get students to read a sonnet or a short play excerpt in a specific location (they can identify their own perhaps), and reflect on links between their location and what they read.

➢ Older students teaching younger ones. Could this work at school level? Senior students getting involved with younger years on small tasks – could this not benefit both age groups and also provides decentralised, self-organised learning experiences?

➢ Approach the use of complexity theory and the tensions between core tenets of complexity (such as self-organisation and decentralised control) and the formal structure of educational environments;

➢ The ready availability of digital technology in schools means that use of moving image adaptations of individual Shakespeare plays has become commonplace as a pedagogic practice in Key Stage 3 and 4 classrooms. To what extent is the potential to provide diverse ‘Shakespeares’ for classroom exploration taken up by secondary teachers? How far do assessment constraints which focus on the plays as literary artefacts serve to close such possibilities down?
Reshaping Shakespeare: Radical Shakespeare Teaching

A/Professor Liam Semler, University of Sydney and Dr Greg Cunningham, Barker College

Better Strangers Partnership: University of Sydney and Barker College; proceedings from Shakespeare Institute, Stratford-upon-Avon, June, 2012.

1. Be Shakespeare, before you learn Shakespeare.
Shakespeare is not out there and to be overcome as a challenging other, but is in here, inside the student, and his work can be known by matching it to easily discovered skills and qualities within the student. Fundamentally, it is about Shakespeare as a poet, and all students as users of language are also readily capable of being poets too. Get students through a range of activities to exemplify poetic aptitude that is characteristically Shakespearean. Then have them read some Shakespeare which exemplifies the same thing, its strangeness now removed. Shakespeare’s difference from the student becomes that of degree, not kind.

For example:

- Functional shifts
  - Nouns to verbs
  - Verbs to nouns
  - Modifiers displaced

- Shared metaphor in conversation (includes light punning, but also serious extension of metaphor used by interlocutor). Metaphor must open up the topic of conversation. Wide and diverse vocabulary relating to the metaphor must be used.

- Deliberative speech and soliloquy. Creation of speech that has process in it: mental consideration/exploration of options. Must include metaphor use.

- Rhetoric
  - Doublets
  - Antitheses in sentences, ideas and paragraphs
  - Repetition of words in a single line or sentence or anaphora
  - Parallelism in expression
  - Internal rhyme, alliteration, assonance, sonic echoing and contrasts

Spend a number of lessons exploring collaboratively these features of language use in conversations among and with students. This is effectively priming them to be conscious and artistic language users. Then get them reading Shakespeare: ideally it will feel somewhat familiar. This idea focuses on poetry: but it could perhaps be designed to focus on performance.

Related Work

2. Paradigms of Understanding
Consider the Harvard Teaching for Understanding framework and how that might impact significantly on planning teaching and learning around central notions of:
1. Generative topics for Shakespeare
2. Understanding goals
3. Ongoing assessment and feedback
4. Performances of understanding.

Related Works
Project Zero at Harvard. See: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/index.cfm
Project Zero’s TfU page. See: http://www.pz.harvard.edu/Research/TfU.htm

3. Dogme Shakespeare pedagogy
Is it possible to imagine a ‘Dogme’ style Shakespeare pedagogy? How might it look in the classroom? What vow of Chastity might we create for Shakespeare pedagogy? What benefits would it deliver?
The original Dogme filmmakers’ ‘Vow’:
I swear to submit to the following set of rules drawn up and confirmed by DOGMA 95:

1. Shooting must be done on location. Props and sets must not be brought in (if a particular prop is necessary for the story, a location must be chosen where this prop is to be found).
2. The sound must never be produced apart from the images or vice versa. (Music must not be used unless it occurs where the scene is being shot.)
3. The camera must be hand-held. Any movement or immobility attainable in the hand is permitted.
4. The film must be in color. Special lighting is not acceptable. (If there is too little light for exposure the scene must be cut or a single lamp be attached to the camera.)
5. Optical work and filters are forbidden.
6. The film must not contain superficial action. (Murders, weapons, etc. must not occur.)
7. Temporal and geographical alienation are forbidden. (That is to say that the film takes place here and now.)
8. Genre movies are not acceptable.
9. The film format must be Academy 35 mm.
10. The director must not be credited.

Furthermore I swear as a director to refrain from personal taste! I am no longer an artist. I swear to refrain from creating a "work", as I regard the instant as more important than the whole. My supreme goal is to force the truth out of my characters and settings. I swear to do so by all the means available and at the cost of any good taste and any aesthetic considerations.

Thus I make my VOW OF CHASTITY. Copenhagen, 13 March 1995. On behalf of DOGMA 95: Lars von Trier, Thomas Vinterberg

Compare Thornbury’s ‘Vow of Chastity’ for ESL / EFL:

1. Teaching should be done using only the resources that teachers and students bring to the classroom - i.e. themselves - and whatever happens to be in the classroom. If a particular piece of material is necessary for the lesson, a location must be chosen where that material is to be found (e.g. library, resource centre, bar, students’ club...)
2. No recorded listening material should be introduced into the classroom: the source of all “listening” activities should be the students and teacher themselves. The only recorded material that is used should be that made in the classroom itself, e.g. recording students in pair or group work for later re-play and analysis.
3. The teacher must sit down at all times that the students are seated, except when monitoring group or pair work (and even then it may be best to pull up a chair). In small classes, teaching should take place around a single table.
4. All the teacher’s questions must be “real” questions (such as “Do you like oysters?” Or “What did you do on Saturday?”), not “display” questions (such as “What’s the past of the verb to go?” or “Is there a clock on the wall?”)
5. Slavish adherence to a method (such as audiolingualism, Silent Way, TPR, task-based learning, suggestopedia) is unacceptable.
6. A pre-planned syllabus of pre-selected and graded grammar items is forbidden. Any grammar that is the focus of instruction should emerge from the lesson content, not dictate it.
7. Topics that are generated by the students themselves must be given priority over any other input.
8. Grading of students into different levels is disallowed: students should be free to join the class that they feel most comfortable in, whether for social reasons, or for reasons of mutual intelligibility, or both. As in other forms of human social interaction, diversity should be accommodated, even welcomed, but not proscribed.
9. The criteria and administration of any testing procedures must be negotiated with the learners.
10. Teachers themselves will be evaluated according to only one criterion: that they are not boring.

(Scott Thornbury: It’s for Teachers, Feb 2001)
Related works
Levring, Kristian (dir). *The King is Alive*. 2000. [The ‘Dogme’ *King Lear*. A superb film, but not very Dogme, and poss. not very useful for this idea of ‘Dogme Shakes pedagogy.’]
http://www.thornburyscott.com/assets/dogma.pdf
http://www.thornburyscott.com/tu/Harmer%20response.htm
[Thornbury is the go-to guy for the ‘Dogme’ method in the field of English as a Foreign Language]

4. Complexivist Shakespeare pedagogy
Complexivist approaches (based on complexity theories) suggest ways of resisting some of the hallowed truths of contemporary teaching and learning theory including: constructive alignment, outcomes/objectives-based learning and teaching, scaffolding, predestined learning paths and goals, teacher’s control of what is taught and learned.

A fundamental of complexivist thought is that the ramping up of energy and uncertainty (so called ‘positive’ feedback, rather than ‘negative’ feedback which seeks to dampen instability and keep things regular and at equilibrium) can drive systems into increasingly chaotic activity, into disequilibrium and near chaotic states, out of which new patterns arise naturally without any tyrannical direction by any single entity. The arising of a new pattern out of a near chaotic state is referred to as ‘emergence’.

- What understanding and learning might emerge in complexivist classrooms?
- How might complexivist approaches to Shakespeare pedagogy be imagined and what benefits would they deliver?
- How can complexivist approaches be imported into current curriculum, syllabus and assessment, and QA frameworks?

Related Works
*Complicity* is the journal in the field. The website gives open access to the journal issues.
Or try: http://ojs.library.ubc.ca/index.php/tci/article/view/75/278

Slow Shakespeare pedagogy
Research is demonstrating how thinking can get in the way of insight, learning and understanding. It is also showing that our bodies, or at least motor neurones, respond to thoughts almost instantaneously and often well ahead of our words. In the latter case, language can inhibit the expression of ideas that our bodies are already seeking to express via more spatial means. It can be counterproductive to demand a student stop waving their arms and start speaking properly: try the opposite.

- Is there a way of escaping the overcrowded, rushed and over-assessed curriculum in the learning of Shakespeare?
- Can we teach in slow time, outside class time and space, via the slow and hazy percolation of ideas in the student mind? This is the ‘off-line’ thinking of students, while other things
occupy their conscious thought: the dreamy, reverie-like, intuitive state of response to Shakespeare rather than super-precise and analytical focus.

- What watercolour versions of the facts (of Shakespeare and his plays and plots) are generated in this easier mode, rather than the intense focus of pencil-drawn precision and logic (the metaphors are Claxton’s).
- Can we, and is it ethical to, marshal student unconscious time outside class and semester? How would one do it? How do you sow ideas and help them grow of their own accord outside class time?

**Related Works**

Claxton, Guy. ‘Turning thinking on its Head: How Bodies make up their minds,’ *Thinking Skills and Creativity* 7 (2012): 78-84.
———. *What’s the Point of School?* Oneworld, 2008.

5. **Edward de Bono’s Fractionation and Order of Knowledge Acquisition**

**Fractionation.** Can we disaggregate the Shakespeare play so as to reassemble it in more comprehensible form subsequently? Early on in teaching, one might disassemble the play into components/scenes/moments that can be explored and discussed piecemeal. Then later reassemble the pieces so that the puzzle comes together in a fully more explicable way?

**Order of Knowledge Acquisition.** De Bono believes that the order in which knowledge and habits of thought and fact etc enter our minds is crucial to how and what we learn because later thoughts and ideas must be slotted into pre-established habits and patterns wired into the mind’s neural networks.

- Consider what is the student’s starting point of encounter with Shakespeare?
- What are the habits of thought and pre-established patterns that will influence how learning occurs?
- What impact can we have on students via being aware of ‘order of knowledge acquisition’?

**Related Work**

Pdf copy available at: http://xa.yimg.com/kq/groups/20621977/303169082/name/Edward%252BDe%252BBono%252B-%252BLateral%252BThinking.pdf

6. **Escaping the usual Binaries**

Can we escape replication and endorsement of these binary structures of thinking?
1. Textual analysis vs. on-your-feet workshopping
2. Subject area content vs. syllabus and curriculum rules and measures
3. Discipline area learning vs. metacognition (learning about learning)
4. Linear, staged learning vs. non-linear, non-staged learning
5. ‘Sage on the stage’ vs. democratic collaboration of teacher and student
6. Transmission of information vs. personal experience and discovery

7. **One-character ownership**

Get students solely to inhabit one character from the play being studied. Everything they learn (and teach and share) is from their interpretation of that character and his/her/its perspective on other characters, plot, objectives, etc.
They express their identification with this one character via disparate multimodal means including:

- How would the character manifest today (what/who would it be)?
- Recast in modern words various sections of the character’s words
- What artistic/creative products could be created by the students as expressive of this character
- What emotions characterise the character?