



RSC Associate Schools programme Case Study

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REGIONAL THEATRE PARTNER: The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury

Summary of the core aims involved in Leading the Teaching of Shakespeare: raising aspirations through cultural engagement.

In 2013, when we embarked on our journey with the RSC, one of our main driving forces was the realisation that, as a coastal school where the demographic is amongst the most economically challenged in the country, we needed to find a way to break through the mindset of generally low or limited aspirations engendered by this. It was a shocking fact that many of our young people on arriving at secondary school had never even taken a trip to London. Many of our students and families never leave Thanet, often taking up local employment based around family trades and contacts rather than thinking bigger. Certainly, many of our students often come from backgrounds where cultural engagement is low, with so called "high" culture, including Shakespeare, seen as something that exists, but has nothing to do with them.

We realised that a culture shift was the best way to raise aspirations and, in turn, academic and personal success, giving greater opportunities to our students to raise their confidence and their sense of entitlement to aspire to greater things and see that there is life outside Thanet. Starting at the 'cultural top' by changing perceptions of Shakespeare for our students, feeder schools and local community, through enthusiastic and fearless engagement with Shakespeare seemed like a very good place to start.

We have found that the work we have done in this field as a lead school and the outcomes we feel we have achieved over the last five years in total are echoed in the evidence of national studies such as that of CEDAR, published in March 2018. **(see Appendix 1 - extracted evidence)**

Specific impact on the students in our school that we have achieved as a Lead Associate School.

Day to day practice in the classroom and its impact on active learning and achievement.

There are many expected and unexpected results that have arisen from the transformation



of teaching and learning about Shakespeare's work created by leading the use of rehearsal room pedagogy at King Ethelbert School that have occurred over the five years (in total) of our partnership with the RSC (with four years actively leading first the RSC LPN and now, in our second year as a Lead Associate School).

The main objective for us in leading change has always been a simple one - to elevate Shakespeare study in the perception of our students from dry, dusty, inaccessible and fearful to lively, accessible, relevant to all and, most importantly, enjoyable to study. I feel we can confidently claim at King Ethelbert that any student in our school, if asked, would say that they enjoy learning about Shakespeare and have no fear of it.

Turning the attitude of 'the teacher is the expert' on its head has been of key importance in the process. This has been achieved by introducing an essential culture that the teaching and learning process is more of a shared journey involving students and their teachers in discovery of the texts, their characters, themes and different ways of getting under the skin of the text through performance experimentation.

One of the first things to manage change in as a lead teacher was to 'sell' this idea to the English Department teachers and to 'upskill' them to lead change in teaching and learning practice on the ground in their classrooms. This was quickly and successfully achieved through whole department training – inside and outside of school. Teachers are, at first, understandably nervous about emerging from long established comfort zones in teaching Shakespeare in a delivery style, but quickly come to enjoy great success and personal enjoyment from adopting rehearsal room pedagogies:

***English teacher of 10 years:** When we began on our journey to make Shakespeare learning more active through rehearsal room approaches, I was probably the one who was most resistant as I lacked the confidence to join in, much less deliver a rehearsal room session. However, once I had delivered a series of rehearsal room lessons I was quite happy taking students through a whoosh! (in a very small space!), allowing them to play about with a text and find out for themselves in parts. It is the sum of the parts that makes the whole when it comes to understanding. As I have approached rehearsal room learning in a variety of ways, I have understood that it is not about 'acting' and whether I am good or not. It is about helping the students understanding through activity, whatever that may be, and to appreciate language in a variety of stimulating ways.*

Leading other teachers to see that risk taking is key has had an important impact on this process for teachers. Choosing texts to work with which are outside the core secondary curriculum 'cannon' that our teachers have had little or no prior knowledge of – which have been chosen to link up with RSC Live Broadcasts or First Encounters Productions to be performed in our school, such as *Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *The Comedy of Errors* – has

been beneficial in encouraging teachers to break out of their previously held comfort zones and sense that 'ownership' and 'delivery' are the most important things. But to enable teachers unfamiliar with some texts to succeed, part of the leadership role has been to produce detailed schemes of work to assist teachers with ideas and practices as a starting point for the work. **See appendix of two sample mini-schemes – *Julius Caesar* and *The Comedy of Errors*.**)

As a department, our English teachers quickly embraced the idea that, through a combination of rehearsal room practices, even students whose behaviour they thought would impede the process (and sometimes *particularly* those students) are, for the most part, quickly engaged and enlightened. They have found that their students make rapid progress, made all the more powerful for them for having unearthed it themselves, shared it and experienced pride and confidence in the acknowledgement of their fellow students and their teacher.

An obviously important aspect of teaching and learning is to remove or smooth anticipated barriers to learning. An important part of the INSET process as a lead teacher has been to lead ways into accessing Shakespeare's language to obviate fear of the difficulty of language. Students who have been 'sneaked' skilfully by their teachers 'under the radar' of the perceived language barrier of Shakespeare rarely experience fear or dread of it and, usually, within one or two rehearsal room lessons are hooked and immersed in the work. It has been important to establish a core concept not to 'dumb down' Shakespeare's language in our teaching and learning. Our teachers quickly found that by immersing students in smaller chunks – for example, using intriguing floor- sized quotations at the beginning of study for them to respond to physically and verbally without even knowing they are studying a Shakespeare text – students of all ages and abilities can successfully engage with language and enjoy it without even thinking about fearing it. This is just one of many rehearsal room text approaches teachers have been introduced to as part of the 'leading learning process' that achieve the end of students being able to access and actively engage with language effectively.

Hearing it from the students: Evidence of student engagement and progress through rehearsal room approaches.

"When my teacher started our first lesson with practical activities I realised it was quite simple and a lot easier for us to interpret. I didn't allow myself to become overwhelmed with the difficult language, instead I was enjoying interpreting the play and understanding it"
(Year 10 English Literature GCSE student studying *Much Ado About Nothing*)

**(See appendix 2 and 3 for evidence of students' work on *Macbeth* from Year 8, June 2018)
Changing students' lives outside the classroom:**

As previously stated, leading an Associate Schools' cluster (and previously, the Learning and Performance Network – LPN cluster) has a wider outreach beyond the essential classroom academic/results-related focus. It is about transforming lives through the uptake of special opportunities which are either provided by the RSC or created by school RSC Associate Leadership teams themselves. Such opportunities are rich and various and often enabled by the, as yet unmentioned, key element of the Associate Schools' Partnership – the theatre partner: in our case, The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury.

Student opportunities and experiences and their impact on lives – performance based, local and national:

- **First Encounters Productions performed in schools by the RSC.** These are 90-minute performances designed to engage students 9-13 and their local communities, performed in Lead Associate Schools. (2013 – The Taming of the Shrew, 2017 – Julius Caesar, 2018 – The Comedy of Errors.) **Impact summary:** students participate in the performance alongside the RSC actors; members of the local community gain access to quality Shakespeare experiences on their own doorsteps, involving their own children. The profile of the hosting school is raised in the eyes of the local community and the local press.
- **A Midsummer Nights Dream (RSC National tour 2016, The Canterbury Players and King Ethelbert School) Impact summary:** Our students performed the role of The Fairies. Many of these students have gone on to become Shakespeare Ambassadors and have regularly performed in other public Shakespeare events lead by King Ethelbert School.
- **A Midsummer Night's Dream Re-Imagined – Dreamland, The Turner Contemporary and locations around Margate 2016 – Impact summary:** 9 schools from the cluster performed, attracting large audiences from the local community and national press attention.
- **Julius Caesar at The Marlowe Theatre March 2017. Impact summary:** 9 schools performed on the main stage, with student ambassadors taking up technical roles such as lighting, design and stage management.
- **The Playmaking Festival – The Swan Theatre, Stratford Upon Avon, Julius Caesar. Impact summary:** 2 actors selected from each of the partner schools performed a section of the play alongside school cohorts from the whole country involved in RSC partnerships. Head teachers from the schools and some parents formed part of the audience. Some students helped to provide live music and song for the performance. **(See appendix 3 for evidence from a student participant from July 2017)**
- **Macbeth In The Keep: June 2018 – Dover Castle. Impact summary:** 12 schools from the Associate Schools Partnership performed scenes from the play in 12 locations

within Dover Castle, attracting audiences from the local and wider communities of Kent.

Further student development opportunities and experiences and their impact on lives.

Student ambassadors: part of leading the Associate Schools programme (and previously LPN) has been the development of a team of student ambassadors. **Impact summary:** These students have received major benefit from their professional training opportunities in school, at The Marlowe Theatre and in Stratford-upon-Avon. Many of them have gone on to participate in Next Generation Backstage and in technical roles alongside theatre professionals, such as lighting design and operation, stage management, design and publicity. All of them have developed massively in confidence. All of the students upon reaching the age of 14 so far have chosen Key Stage 4 performance or theatre related GCSE and BTEC courses.

Work Experience opportunities: As the Lead Associate School, we have facilitated special Year 10 work experience week opportunities for two of our Shakespeare Ambassadors and a third is planned to take place this year. This could not have been easily achieved without the close and massively beneficial partnership we enjoy with The Marlowe Theatre. **Impact summary:** Both of the students so far involved have been inspired and enabled to choose theatre related career plans and further study courses as a result.

Leading the cluster of Associate Schools partners in teaching and learning pedagogy and practice:

The process of leading and guiding the partner schools of the Associate Schools programme is essentially similar in many respects to that described above in leading teachers in the lead school itself. Every school in the cluster has a different school community with varying levels and size of staffing, cohort of students, experience, facilities and opportunities. One thing we have aimed to achieve in the make-up of our cohort is that there are common issues demographically, generally speaking, as our schools are mostly selected on the core principle of likely need in terms of enabling access to Shakespeare as a way to raise aspiration and opportunity in areas of greater need. Having said this, we are privileged to have recruited an exceptionally rich and diverse range of schools in our current cohort, including a balance of primary schools, secondary schools, one fee-dependent independent school and one school which is a designated school for additional educational needs.

Just as in the lead school initial process, the following key principles are at the heart of the remit and responsibilities of the leadership of the cluster, alongside and supported by The Marlowe Theatre and The RSC:

- Enabling all schools to grow and flourish in the development of classroom skills of rehearsal room pedagogy and practice in their teaching and learning of Shakespeare. This is achieved mainly through INSET provided by RSC practitioners hosted by The Marlowe Theatre and additional workshop providers in school.

- Enabling schools to develop teaching and learning through the provision of schemes of work, ideas and resources created or acquired by King Ethelbert School lead teacher(s). **(See appendix of example schemes of work as mentioned above.)**
- Creating access to special opportunities to attend and to participate in performances, courtesy of and in close collaboration with the Marlowe Theatre. **(See references to whole cluster projects** – the main one in particular to our current cohort being *Macbeth In The Keep* and, in March 2019, *Romeo and Juliet* Regional Schools Festival collaborative production.)
- A clear remit to schools of the core aims of the partnership in establishing whole school change as well as at the level of individual student and teacher achievement and development, **and a requirement to reflect and to report on progress in their schools via case-studies.**
- Regular cluster meetings to keep in touch, keep on track, share experiences and disseminate these through case-study opportunities.

What has been the specific impact of the leadership of the Associate Schools Partnership on our cluster schools? Impact summary.

- All of our partner schools have regularly attended INSET opportunities and cluster meetings, and all schools participated very successfully in *Macbeth In The Keep*. **Impact summary:** over 200 students across the cluster, including those with particular physical and emotional needs, were represented and performed skilfully and professionally. **Impact summary:** The outcomes were tremendously inspiring and rewarding.
- All of our schools benefited from additional in-school workshops on stage fighting for *Macbeth In The Keep*. **Impact summary:** Great fight scenes in the performances. The students loved the workshops.
- All of our partner schools took part in a **residential INSET** in Stratford Upon Avon in January 2018. **Impact summary:** The object of this was early team-building and development of a range of rehearsal room practices. All were keen to do this again! In addition, the event was a cross-cluster event, **enabling collaboration and learning** between both of the Canterbury clusters.
- Interim **case studies** were collected before the Headteachers' Symposium in July 2018 and each school is scheduled to present a case study in the academic year 2018-19, which is the second year of the Associate Schools' Programme for our cluster. **See appendices for extracts detailing work and its impact in some of our cluster schools.**
- **Longevity and endurance** – in the second year of the Associate Schools' Programme we have seen a lot of new teachers in our cluster from many of our schools, where the mantle has been passed on in order to spread out the expertise, or where

movement or change of responsibility of the original lead teachers has created vacancies. The fact that new teachers have taken the helm shows, in my opinion, a robust enthusiasm and commitment to the partnership, which promises endurance and longevity to the partnership.

What have we learned about leading the programme as a school leadership team? Apart from those things I have already described, detailed and evidenced above and in the various appendices attached, this can be summed up with the general statement that, over the course of the Associate Schools' partnership (and the LPN partnership which preceded it), working actively using rehearsal room approaches has clearly been significantly enriching for our students across the partnership and their teachers in many ways, and has led to significant gains in terms of literacy, oracy, examination results (**see appendix 4 summary regarding examination-based data**) social and personal skills of a large number of students. Moreover, the partnership continues to provide a rich seam of professional and personal development opportunities for teaching staff involved.

In addition, and importantly, in the current results-driven, competitive, isolating and stressladen educational climate of the UK today, it is refreshing to have the privilege and opportunity of working collaboratively with so many enthusiastic partner schools whose staff and students are clearly thirsty for culture and the arts to play a significant and recognised role in the development of the young people's educations, lives and whole of life chances. For us, this is also now being enhanced because we are working more closely with our other Canterbury-based cluster as a result of our partner theatre, The Marlowe Theatre, streamlining operations to ensure better value for our money and smarter use of theatre resources by working increasingly as one large cluster rather than dividing itself into two separated clusters working on separate projects.

Appendix 4: Summary of academic impact on schools: (CEDAR March 2018 extract, of which the King Ethelbert cluster is a part).

(Extract from published research of The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick)

"Elsewhere in the research senior school teachers agreed that the RSC approaches were especially helpful in preparing students for the new GCSE exam which requires them to critically analyse previously unseen sections of text. One primary school Headteacher echoed the widespread belief that since working with the RSC, KS2 SATS results in English Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling (EGPS) had risen from 41.7% to 96.7%. In addition, 56.7% of those students had achieved higher levels than expected."

Appendix 5: Impact summary extract based on interim case study interviews from two schools:

School 1 – Rainham Girls’ School:

Emily, one of the lead English teachers from Rainham Girls’ School is also an AQA Examination Board Team Leader. One important outcome RGS hoped to gain from their partnership with the RSC Associate Schools’ cluster was a boost in the quality of GCSE English Literature exam responses and results. As a team leader she was aware of the required change in focus of answers required to achieve grades 7-9. Examination boards are “capping” responses which are clearly “learned” responses heavily influenced by the teachers’ knowledge/received interpretations, and formulaic responses. Examining boards now place more focus on “fresh” responses based on a student’s personal interpretation and response, based on enjoyment, engagement and personalised contextual response. RGS English Department noticed a dramatic improvement in the responses of their Year 11 students following a programme of rehearsal room approaches to inform students’ personal engagement and understanding of Shakespeare texts for GCSE. They have now moved to a model of NOT teaching any “exam-recipe-for-success” formulae, instead only teaching students how to write introductions and formulate conclusions (so basic structure of a critical argument/essay). They have since moved onto trialling a heavily weighted rehearsal room approach pedagogy and practice with the whole of their Year 10 English Literature GCSE cohort, confident that their student responses will be greatly improved in the upper end of the GCSE mark bands (7-9).

School 2 – Kings Rochester.

Steve, Head of Drama at Kings Rochester – an independent school with boarding facilities – has been working with the King Ethelbert cluster since the beginning of LPN (4 years). Over this time period his drive has been to unify drama and English across all of the age-groups of the school, which range from primary to senior – (5 – 18 years of age). The key stages of the school are on different sites within the school and before joining the LPN there was little interaction between Drama and English, or cross-school/Key Stage collaboration. During the 3 years of the LPN his focus was mainly on Key Stage 4 drama students but he has now developed strong links between Key Stage 2, 3, 4 and 5, with all age groups in the school taking part in rehearsal room approaches. He is now regularly working closely with the English and Drama post-holders responsible for the different key stages. For example, in 2018 Macbeth In The Keep at Dover Castle, he worked alongside the primary years teacher with a group of students aged 6-7 (the youngest students to perform in our cluster this year.) This has improved the whole school ethos and achievement in Shakespeare teaching and learning, which has gone from strength to strength.

Appendix 1 – extract from CEDAR research published March 2018

The results of new research undertaken over three years and published in March 2018 shows that a programme of work involving King Ethelbert School and its associate schools partners, alongside The Marlowe Theatre, Canterbury and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) can significantly improve student language skills and acquisition – with some schools reporting better SATS and GCSE English scores as a result. The research, carried out on behalf of the RSC by The Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) at the University of Warwick, involved 100 schools nationwide including King Ethelbert School involved in the Associate Schools’ Programme, a unique collaboration between the RSC, regional theatres and schools nationally. The study focussed on evaluating the impact of the RSC’s approach to teaching Shakespeare, which employs the same techniques used by actors in rehearsals, and its impact on the language development of children and young people. Work with schools using these techniques in the classroom has been rigorously tested over 10 years and King Ethelbert School, in partnership with The Marlowe Theatre, has been working in partnership with the RSC for five years.*

Appendix 2a

Two Year 8 Students’ Work - Act 2, Scene 3 – The discovery of Duncan’s murder.

In this part of the scene it has been revealed that King Duncan has been murdered. We analysed William Shakespeare speech and language structure by being assigned single speech units from the passage and then rushing around the classroom, apprehending everyone and delivering the line with a tone and expression that we saw best fit our line. All of the lines were very short and easy and we noticed that often they were just single words like “Murder!” or very short sentences like “Ring the Alarm!” By using this method, it proved useful as everyone understood what the material meant literally and also what atmosphere was created with the language and structure Shakespeare chose. It was fast and hectic and because we repeated our line a lot of times we got confident with it and were able to express it just as if we were the character showing shock and disbelief. Some of the lines were psychologically quite realistic, like “What is it you say?” which shows disbelief and confusion. Our teacher did it with us in role so together we made a really dramatic scene. One of the things we discovered was it didn’t even matter what order the words and lines were spoken in because the combined effect was to create a sense of panic and chaos. When we had finished we made a big class mind-map with all of the things we had noticed about the language and the structure, which is something we found hard in our Year 8 exams. Through this understanding we were able to produce efficient notes such as:



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the amount of short, dramatic phrases, the emphasis on certain words, several variations of semantic fields to do with death and blood, the variety of reactions towards an important plot point and much more. In conclusion the use of this approach was fun and a good way to give clear understanding of difficult selections

of text and to give us a more expressive way of learning. **Appendix 2b – Year 8 student 2 work as evidence of - Oscar, Year 8 impact of rehearsal room pedagogy and practice on deep learning.**

(See appendix 2b for Year 8 student 2 response)

Thursday 11th June 2018

(Isobel, Year 8
Macbeth)

Act 2 Scene 3
Discovery of
the murder

How does Shakespeare structure the reactions of characters to the ~~discovery~~ discovery of Duncan's body to create an overwhelming sense of panic and chaos realistically?

Shakespeare structures the reactions of characters to create a sense of chaos realistically by using many short phrases and exclamation marks builds up tension and with the bell ringing in the background, a hangover and lot's of shouting makes us feel sick. By performing the scene we discovered what the feeling would have been like, it puts us in the moment and the middle of the action. If we hadn't done this activity I wouldn't have understood the scene as well as I do now, we experienced what it must have been like to be there. We realised that order is suddenly chaos now that ~~the~~ Duncan is dead.



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Appendix 3: Student participant in The Playmaking Festival - *Julius Caesar* at The Swan Theatre, Stratford Upon Avon.

"I played the role of Cassius on the main stage at the Swan Theatre in Stratford-Upon-Avon for the National Schools' Festival in July 2017. It was a truly eye-opening and thought provoking experience that I will remember and treasure forever. The fact that I had the opportunity to work with an expert in his field, Robin Bellfield, the RSC director, was a fantastic and wonderful experience that I doubt I will ever have the privilege to do again. The whole team was professional, organised and hard-working and it was mesmerizing to witness a team that ran like clockwork. It felt fantastic to have the opportunity to perform on such a prestigious and famous stage that I expect so many people will never be able to do.

Overall, I think that this experience was truly incredible, being able to enjoy a subject that many of my peers across the country dread was surreal, and I think it is all down to the direct and proactive approach to bringing Shakespeare texts to life that our school instils, inspired by its partnership with The Royal Shakespeare Company." - Robin, Year 11