



Centre for Educational Development,  
Appraisal and Research  
University of Warwick

Centre for Education Studies  
University of Warwick

# The Work of Royal Shakespeare Company Education in the first year of the Associate Schools Programme

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## Executive summary

This report, commissioned by RSC Education, is on research conducted by CEDAR and the Centre for Education Studies (CES) at the University of Warwick, focusing on schools involved in its Associate Schools Programme (ASP). In its first year, the ASP replaced RSC Education's Learning and Performance Network (LPN) that operated for 10 years between 2006 and 2016.

This report is based on questionnaire survey responses from 99 teachers engaged with the ASP: 48% from lead associate schools and 52% from associate or cluster schools. Follow up interviews were undertaken with teachers and students in six selected schools which had experience of working with the RSC through the ASP and LPN. In addition, we draw upon a limited amount of observation of Shakespeare lessons.

### Main Findings

- Teachers valued highly the experience, expertise and sustained support from RSC practitioners.
- Teachers reported a range of student benefits from the rehearsal room approaches, and particular benefits were reported on 'disengaged' students.
- There were also strong indications that working with the RSC has a wider impact on written work and examination results, although a minority of schools were neutral on this outcome.
- Teachers were overwhelmingly positive about their work with the RSC.
- Overall, our results indicate that the work of RSC Education through the Associate Schools Programme is very highly regarded and judged by teachers as a very positive initiative.

### Detailed Findings

The following additional findings provided more specific information on the views of the teachers in the study, both those who completed questionnaires and those who were interviewed.

### Summary of findings

- Teachers value being part of a network of like-minded professionals that includes teachers within their schools and in other schools (94%).
- The experience, expertise and sustained support from RSC practitioners is valued by teachers (96%).
- Schools in their communities and neighbourhoods value the sustained connection with the RSC as an organisation, raising the profile of the school locally and nationally.
- Respondents, including teachers, head teachers and students, value the working relationship that has been established with local theatres, brokered by the RSC, previously through the LPN and currently through the ASP.
- Transition to the Associate Schools Programme is seen as a positive and constructive development, allowing schools and local theatres more flexibility in developing their work and relationships.
- Teachers and students are clear and positive about the ways that working through active rehearsal room approaches has greatly improved engagement with Shakespeare plays.

- There is some evidence that particular students, including disengaged students and boys, benefit from rehearsal room approaches (82%).
- Teachers and students are clear that rehearsal room approaches assist in helping students get to grips with and enjoy Shakespeare's language.
- Evidence suggests that active rehearsal room approaches encourage students to contribute their ideas and responses to practical drama work and discussions.
- Some evidence suggests that the exploratory, workshop-based nature of rehearsal room approaches helps students develop the capacity to think more critically and analytically.
- Consistently, evidence from teachers and students suggests that active rehearsal room approaches assist students in developing confidence and positive self-esteem.
- Some evidence emerges to suggest that rehearsal room approaches feed positively into written work and examination results.
- There is evidence that teachers' involvement in RSC Education networks and practices has made positive contributions to teachers' professional development, contributing to work in their specialist areas, cross-curricular work and in their capacity for leadership.

### Emergent recommendations

The following recommendations are made to RSC Education to build upon the current strengths of the programme in order to improve it still further:

- It may be fruitful for RSC Education to consider some means of sustaining communication within and across ASP clusters to share ideas and practices, possibly using social media platforms.
- More work may need to be done to support teachers in more systematic analysis of how RSC Education work in general and rehearsal room approaches in particular feeds into written work and examination results.
- Some teachers interviewed expressed the desire to have more direct feedback from the various research and evaluation projects commissioned by RSC Education.

## Introduction

This report, commissioned by RSC Education, presents research conducted by the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research (CEDAR) and the Centre for Education Studies (CES) at the University of Warwick, focusing on schools involved in its Associate Schools Programme (ASP). In its first year, the ASP replaces RSC Education's Learning and Performance Network (LPN) that operated for 10 years between 2006 and 2016. In this research, alongside reporting on the benefits of schools' partnership with RSC Education, some preliminary findings emerge on ways in which teachers perceive the transition into the ASP from the LPN.

The research process was in two parts, generating both quantitative and qualitative data:

1. **A questionnaire survey** was administered to teachers participating in the ASP attending an RSC Education festival of student performances at Stratford upon Avon in July 2017. There were 99 respondents involved in the survey: 48% from a lead school with the RSC and 52.0% from an associate or cluster school with the RSC. In terms of demographics of the schools, **74%** described the school as **'socially disadvantaged'**, **54%** as **'White British'**, **21%** as **'Very multicultural'**, and **26%** as **'Very aspirational'**.
2. **Follow-up interviews** were undertaken in six selected schools with 17 teachers and with students, in which questions probed deeper into the responses to the questionnaire, and to allow for discussion of wider issues identified by colleagues in schools. In addition, there were some limited opportunities to observe Shakespeare lessons with pupils in two of the schools visited. Three researchers – Joe Winston (JW), Anton Franks (AF) and Duncan Lees (DL) – were involved in school visits. Although they shared a common brief, their approaches inevitably differed slightly in their approach to research visits and in the ways the visits are reported.

Following the summary of findings below, the report takes its format following the layout of the questionnaire survey. Where teachers' responses in interview relate to particular sections of the survey, these are laid out below in the tabulated findings, verbatim where appropriate, or in summary comments.

The two concluding sections of the main body of this report are on areas that the survey did not cover but which emerge from visits to schools from interviews with teachers, students and some observations. These cover:

- The transition into the Associate Schools Programme from the LPN;
- Teachers' perceptions of benefits to their own professional development.

## Workshops with the RSC

All respondents had attended at least one of the workshops and each workshop was attended by over half of the respondents (Table 1). The most common were workshops led by RSC practitioners in their own school (73.7%).

*Table 1: Views on workshops in different locations*

	%	
	Yes	No
I have attended workshops led by RSC practitioners in Stratford	55	45
I have attended workshops led by RSC practitioners in my school	74	26
I have attended workshops led by RSC practitioners in a local school	52	48
I have attended workshops led by RSC practitioners in my regional theatre	58	42

### *Comments from questionnaire survey*

Respondents to the survey were very positive about this opportunity. For example, one commented:

‘Excellent opportunity for all to be involved!’

And another:

‘Feel very lucky to have taken part.’

This respondent set out their views in detail, including the views of a pupil:

‘Feeling very sad today because our Julius Caesar journey has come to an end. I am struggling to put into words what an experience it has been: Amazing, incredible, wonderful, inspirational! Our two days in Stratford-upon-Avon and the performance the children took part in has been highlight of my teaching career. Can't imagine anything beating it. Children from our cluster are a really special bunch and have come to feel like big Shakespeare family. Way they worked together, got to know each other and treated each other was truly wonderful. People I met in Stratford were incredible and made the experience unforgettable. Parents we took with us couldn't believe their children had been given such an experience.’

A year 4 Pupil said:

‘It was an amazing experience! I will never forget the Swan Theatre and performing on it’.

A rare negative comment identified some practical difficulties:

‘The last project included too few students and involved too much time out of school for both students and staff. Our hub school is too far away. I would like more interaction with us as a department in our school.’

### **Comments from school-based interviews**

As schools selected for research visits were mostly hub schools, lead teachers had attended workshops in Stratford, in their own schools, or, in the case of primary hub schools, in their regional theatre spaces. The teacher from one primary school that is part of a cluster reported that she had attended workshops led by RSC practitioners in the hub school and her own school. In addition, one of the lead teachers from the secondary hub school regularly led workshops with students and teachers in her school. In past years, they had also contributed to events at the local theatre and at the Barbican theatre in central London.

Year 9 students in the large secondary hub school in London, were enthusiastic about attending workshops with RSC practitioners:

‘We went to the Barbican. It was good and fun and a new experience. They told us not to worry about the audience and it makes it easier for us... And you get to experience new things that you’ve never learnt before. The language, it helps us understand it a lot more with people that are professionals’

## **Teacher Network and Partnership with the RSC**

*Table 2: Views on the partnership of the RSC with the network*

	<b>Strongly Agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neutral</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly Disagree</b>
The partnership with the RSC has helped me feel part of a like-minded network	58	36	4	0	2

*Missing N=1, 1%*

About 94% of respondents to the survey reported that the partnership with the RSC had helped them to feel part of a like-minded network. Examples indicate this kind of enthusiasm (Table 2).

### **Comments from questionnaire survey**

*'Found this a fabulous opportunity to meet like-minded colleagues and experience teaching across key stages. Bloody marvellous!'*

*'Attended workshops led by school staff who had attended RSC led workshops. Using the workshop/rehearsal approach I now use with non-Shakespeare texts'.*

*'This has been a wonderful opportunity to meet and work with other like-minded teachers across the key stages. It has also been very beneficial with practical teaching tips'.*

*'Totally unique and special experience for pupils, parents and teaching staff. Free sharing of expertise has been inspiring to all. Whole project has had a huge impact on my own professional development and raised expectations and levels of achievement'.*

*'I have seen the impact on other young people in the cluster, and have been inspired to link with the college's teacher training and education faculty in order to embed the practice into their programmes. From 2017 we will be a lead school'.*

### **Comments from school-based interviews**

Interviews provided more positive explanations for this positivity. Interviewed in her primary school in the north west, a classroom teacher spoke interestingly of how the network of hub and cluster schools brought people together who were 'interested in Shakespeare and effective pedagogy.' 'We all have a shared purpose,' she commented. For her, this shared purpose was very much about learning skills and sharing ideas, of being part of a learning community with like-minded others. She saw sharing her work with others and receiving their feedback as essential features of the cluster.

The head teacher of a large London secondary school thinks that meeting up at Stratford has been important for her as she's been able to link up with the lead practitioner at the only other hub school in London – 'We got on really well and we continue to keep contact via email and Twitter, sharing practice and bouncing ideas back and forth. At the training weekend, which is intense, we talked about the issues involved in being the lead school.' Although they had 'made plans and promises to meet up, it doesn't happen'.

She has a suggestion, that 'It might be useful for RSC to think of a better way to sustain connections between hub schools'.

Her Year 9 students also saw the benefit of networking with students from other schools: 'It's good because you get to work with new people from other schools and everyone helps each other.'

Working at the same school a teacher feels part of a network of like-minded teachers – 'Definitely. Going to Stratford has opened our eyes to the fact that we're doing something that works, we've seen how it works in other schools and not just ours. Now with the ASP, I am working with [a nearby

primary feeder school and part of the cluster, previously part of the LPN as well]. We're looking at how we can develop work on Shakespeare with them.'

*A teacher in a south east school says: 'Working in the professional space of theatre is the best environment and, in particular, attending Stratford workshops. The location and context is important... We're away from school and this promotes networking with more people, experiencing workshops with different members of the RSC. There's a choice of workshops, allowing a tailoring of the experience in relation to interests and needs. It's a new cluster, so it facilitated relationship-building, cross-pollinating with people... The social element is important, staying in the same place and the chance to see a performance. It's massively beneficial going to Stratford.'*

### Long term sustainability

Table 3: Importance of sustainability of working with the RSC and regional theatre partner

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
It is important that work with the RSC/regional theatre is long-term and sustained	75	20	2	1	2

96% of respondents considered it important that work with the RSC work is long-term and sustained (Table 3).

### Commentary on sustained, long-term relationship with RSC Education and regional theatre

#### Comments from questionnaire survey

*'Absolutely vital work which has been a challenge and a rare opportunity for students from my school. I hope this association with the RSC continues for many years'.*

*'For seven years I have seen positive impact in using rehearsal room approaches to teach Shakespeare and other subjects. Even severely SEN children can contribute and take part. Rehearsal room approaches allow children to engage with and understand Shakespeare's works'.*

#### Comments from school-based interviews

In her school in the Midlands, the lead teacher spoke of the continuing relationship with the RSC as being essential due to the 'absolute quality' they provide and also the way they allow individual clusters to network with others in the country, thus enabling them to share fresh ideas that each can use or adapt as they see fit. The fact that children and parents continue to have contact with RSC actors she sees as continuing to generate a productive excitement, and visible evidence of a connection they are proud of.

The head teacher of a primary school in the north west understood that 'like-mindedness' within the network developed because it was a long-term project that allowed for schools to make their minds up whether they wanted to persist with it or not. Those who persisted will share the project's aims. Whether a school persisted or not, she commented, depended very much on the leadership teams within particular schools.

At a primary school in the north east, the English lead teacher commented that the RSC

*'really live up to their name... The quality of their training is amazing. You can ring them with the daftest questions, they will help with anything. They're there at the end of the phone, at the end of an email. They can't do enough for you, and that matters.'*

The head at the school said, 'I think it's the school ethos, how it works here, but it wouldn't work without the link we have with the RSC. I think you need to keep on refreshing the teachers, to keep that impetus going.'

A teacher in a London primary school which is part of a cluster believes the connection with the RSC is really important, particularly in engaging the support of the senior leadership team in her primary school: 'SLT (Senior Leadership Team) likes the RSC brand. They're sure that there's quality behind this. The actors have to really believe in this work. Everyone knows the RSC.'

A teacher from another school in the cluster, who goes into school to work with their Year 6 students, thinks that over time, *'The network has made me feel quite supported. When the LPN ended, I said to [lead practitioner and Head of English] that this has to continue. Because this is the foundation of what we do in teaching Shakespeare. The relationship with the RSC really gives us the tools to continue the work we've already started and we can develop it further and really work with the students as the years go on... Even with this ASP, I was a bit nervous and thought 'Oh no, we're not going to get the support we've had before.'* But the training we had at the beginning of the year has set us up for the whole year. The sessions are always relevant and helpful.

The teacher from the primary school in the east 'feels more part of the institution.' She says, *'The RSC is good at making your contribution feel valued, they've a warm and non-threatening way of making you feel valued.'* She feels she's made a good, long-term relationship with RSC Education people. For this teacher *'The whole brand of the RSC is helpful. The profile of the school is raised, getting publicity in and prominence through local media and, through Head and Exec Head, national media.'*

## Impact of RSC involvement on students' learning

Table 4: Perceived value of working with the RSC and regional theatre partner

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Before working with the RSC and my regional theatre, I was dubious about the value of teaching Shakespeare	4	27	20	26	22

There was a spread of views about teaching Shakespeare before the respondents had worked with the RSC (Table 4) with almost half being negative or neutral about the benefits.

### Commentary on the effect of working with RSC approaches

A teacher in a London secondary school was definite about the effect that working with the RSC had on her pedagogy. She didn't recall having any input on active rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare in her training, so as an NQT, 'I taught Romeo and Juliet to my Year 9 set and it was terrible. If I was to do that again it would be 100% better using the active approaches. Because they wanted to get up out of their seats but I didn't know how to manage that in the classroom. I wouldn't say I grasped it straight away but, incrementally, I saw the effect of getting students up and out of their seats.'

Table 5: Improvement in student engagement

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Working with the RSC and my regional theatre has greatly improved student engagement with Shakespeare's plays	62	35	2	1	0

97% of respondents confirmed that working with the RSC and their regional theatre had greatly improved student engagement with Shakespeare's plays.

### Commentary on the effect of working with the RSC and regional theatres on student engagement with Shakespeare's plays

One head of English strongly agreed that working with the RSC and their regional theatre has greatly improved students' engagement in Shakespeare through participation in physical, drama-based activities. She's aware, however, that not all teachers and students in her large department are engaged with RSC's active rehearsal room approaches and so she's concerned to ensure that all are

‘impacted’. She observed that some active rehearsal room approaches and processes are more successful in engaging students than others.

The head of English in a school in the south east, said, ‘Introducing Shakespeare, taking lines from the plays and working actively without letting on that they’re Shakespeare has engaged students... When you start by relating it to their lives, they’re not scared of it all.’

In her primary school in the north west, the head teacher described the effect on children’s self-esteem as ‘massive’ – referring to how children who had previously been considered naughty, quiet or disengaged had begun to blossom. ‘Frankie<sup>1</sup> wakes up for Shakespeare’ she said of one Year 5 boy but she also spoke of Alice – a very disengaged girl in her current class, with very low self-esteem, who had discovered that she is, in fact, a fine actress. She commented on how Alice acts ‘from the gut’ and ‘becomes that character’ when under the spotlight.

In her east London primary school, a teacher has done more ‘hands on teaching’, getting the children up ‘on their feet’ – ‘let’s embody this passage’, or applying the technique of moving, reading up to punctuation and the next person has to read. She says, ‘I can definitely tell who’s speaking. Students ask “What does that mean?” And so I say, “Let’s work out what that means and what we feel about it...” It’s had the biggest impact on comprehension in depth, getting the hidden meaning of things.’

*Table 6: Impact of studying Shakespeare on students’ spoken and written language*

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Studying Shakespeare has had a positive impact on students’ spoken and written language	36	48	16	0	0

### **Commentary on positive impacts on spoken and written language from studying Shakespeare**

One teacher observed that, ‘Using warm up games, or using a single word, gets surprising results, even from young children in our cluster – you’d be astonished by what they can get from a word’.

A head teacher described how drama strategies helped the children in her primary school ‘get the words off the page’ through physicalising them.

In a primary school in the Midlands the lead teacher talked about how children’s reading continues to improve; a key reason, she thinks, is that they are constantly learning in their Shakespeare work to infer meaning through physicalisation and observation. Evidence of this was observed by our

<sup>1</sup> All names have been anonymised

researcher in class when she was asking children to show in a still image what they thought a group of conspirators might look like. Here she held back giving a definition of the word and instead picked out elements in their images of what children had inferred from the sound (and the way she had spoken it) that pointed to the actual meaning. Teaching in the same school, another teacher spoke about how she adapted these approaches to help her teach commas and semi-colons.

The head of English, in the London secondary school, says that there's a noticeable effect on 'middle attainers' writing. Verbally, they're quite strong, but unable to communicate that in the written form. She feels that there's some success in moving from a workshop, in which they can discuss ideas, and moving that into writing. With the middle attainers, 'It's about enthusiasm and motivation – they have a desire to write it down. If they've enjoyed a workshop, they want to go on and write it down.' However, the effect is not so clear on improvement in creative writing.

Table 7: Benefit to disengaged boys

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Disengaged boys particularly benefit from this work	31	51	15	3	0

Missing N = 1, 1%

Over 80% of respondents judged that disengaged boys particularly benefit from the work, with only 3% disagreeing and 15% neutral.

### Commentary on boys' engagement

#### *Comments from questionnaire survey*

*'This approach to learning Shakespeare is inspiring, engaging and fun. It has completely transformed my pupils' view of Shakespeare. I have had my disadvantaged boys choosing to read Shakespeare for pleasure.'*

#### *Comments from school-based interviews*

In London, the RSC lead teacher of one school commented, 'Boys get very excited about using active approaches, especially my Year 8s. Even in my Year 10 class, they ask when are we going to get up and do Shakespeare...? Boys like to do active approaches and they're more engaged in the work. The girls are more likely to want to discuss, but with getting up and doing it, the boys are more willing to verbalise it because they've been put in the characters' positions.'

In a north west primary school, a teacher spoke of 'Paterson and Paterson's mum'. From being a relatively disengaged boy, Archie now keeps a scrap book on productions of Shakespeare's plays (three are full already) and his mum regularly takes him and groups of mums to the Stratford

theatre. The head spoke of another boy who was a non-reader, not at all inspired by books, but who became engrossed in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* through the physical activities, the rhyming and play with vocabulary, who had eventually taken a key role in the Year 6 Shakespeare production. He had progressed from being a non-reader to desperately asking his mother to buy books for him. 'You wouldn't believe the transformation,' said the head, 'and this is true of more and more children.'

An experienced teacher and head of English from the south east school has witnessed the effects of active work on boys' engagement with Shakespeare: 'Most boys or less able students don't respond to sedentary approaches, but if you approach it actively, they really get into it. They often have low educational self-esteem, so realising that they can access this 'very high culture' is actually really inspirational for them. So, it's to put culture within reach of areas of the country or the demographic where they don't necessarily get access to that.'

*Table 8: Do academically able students benefit?*

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Academically able students do not benefit from RSC rehearsal room approaches	1	4	9	34	52

The large majority of respondents did not agree that academically able students do not benefit from RSC rehearsal work, with 9% neutral and just 5% agreeing this to be the case.

**Commentary on whether academically able students benefit from RSC rehearsal room approaches**

In the large London secondary school, the head of English pensively repeats the question: 'The more able? It does affect them. The last year 11s were like the guinea pigs in workshop-based approaches. The top set benefited by probing deeper into their thinking. They may have got there anyway, but...'

A teacher colleague in the same school is more definite in her feeling that active rehearsal room approaches are appropriate for students across the range of ability: 'Any student benefits from getting up and doing Shakespeare because it gives them a deeper understanding of what he's saying. Yes, you can analyse language, but you get a better understanding of character, their intentions, what they're trying to get across.'

*Table 9: Improvement in writing*

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
I have noticed marked improvements in students' writing since working with Shakespeare in this way	15	39	40	4	2

Missing N = 1, 1%

Just over half of respondents had noticed marked improvements in students' writing since working with Shakespeare using rehearsal room approaches, with 40% being neutral on this issue.

### **Commentary on whether teachers have noticed improvements in students' writing since being involved in active rehearsal room approaches**

What is evident is the relatively high percentage of neutral responses to this question in the survey, so this was probed further in interviews.

#### *Comment from questionnaire survey*

*'The learning is exciting and we have developed a rich vocabulary and the children have produced some fantastic work - esp. writing!'*

#### *Comments from school-based interviews*

A Year 2 teacher at her school in the north east detects the ways that active rehearsal room approaches feed into children's writing: 'Because of our area, because we're quite deprived, our children don't have this experience of language, and so through the active approaches, this opens the door to them. This is the key, and you'll see this language from the active approaches being transferred into the writing.'

The lead English teacher at the same school thinks that the improvement in students' writing is a result of the ways that they tie Shakespeare tightly into their curriculum: 'It's always been very linked here, that the Shakespeare is part of the English curriculum, we link it together. Other schools I'm working with don't have that tight link, and that's where it falls down. So, we're very clear [that] the writing tasks are almost set in stone, they're worded really carefully. They are special things...'

Anecdotally, a teacher from a London primary school is clear from her experience that active rehearsal room approaches with her primary school students in London, has had an effect on their writing: 'It's had an impact on children's writing and they talk in terms of "I wanted the audience to feel this." ... They see in their own work, how the choice of a few words makes a difference. They see that there's nothing in Shakespeare that's frivolous or unnecessary.'

Her Year 6 students agreed with her view that active rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare had helped them improve their writing:

*'We were able to some of his words and put them into our own stories to make them better'*

And

*'It helped us to realise the difference between modern day writers and Shakespeare, because modern day writers don't use such words and you realise the writing doesn't have as much effect as Shakespeare.'*

In the north west primary school, the Headteacher saw the chief academic gains her children made from the project in terms of grammar and vocabulary. 'Shakespeare is a fantastic vehicle for teaching this,' she commented. Confirming the idea that RSC rehearsal room approaches had value

in teaching grammar, she referred specifically to how she made use of the Punctuation Walk to help children consider where and how they should punctuate their own writing. Karen spoke of how using the physicality of the approaches helped embed knowledge in children; she spoke laughingly of how she has even made use of this physicality to teach the active and passive voice in sentence structure.

*Table 10: Reduction in fear of Shakespeare’s language*

	Strongly Agree	Agree	% Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students now show less fear of Shakespeare’s language	56	40	3	0	1

**Commentary on whether, through involvement in active rehearsal room approaches, students display less fear of Shakespeare**

96% of respondents considered students now showed less fear of Shakespeare’s language.

**Comments from questionnaire survey**

*‘I think it is helpful for pupils to have an overview of the whole play at the beginning of their study of it, in order to demystify it. The ‘Whoosh’ technique achieves that. Thank you!’*

*‘It has been great fun and at an early age shows that Shakespeare is fun and not just to be read in a classroom.’*

*‘Not only have the students been empowered, but also teachers and other staff and parents who were initially reluctant to “learn Shakespeare”. It is now the norm in school to talk/act/discuss Shakespeare. Thank you to the RSC for their vision.’*

**Comments from school-based interviews**

A teacher in her large London secondary school observed that ‘They’re not afraid of Shakespeare any more. So, when you set up we’re going to do Shakespeare, they don’t go, “Oh no, not Shakespeare, it’s really boring!” You don’t hear that any more, it’s not some lofty, unreachable text. Yes, the language is hard. But, Year 11, they’ve not been indoctrinated with the active approaches. So, they find it really hard, they’re not really accessing it like the Year 7s and Year 8s that have had it from the beginning.’

A Year 9 student in her school corroborates her observations: ‘It helps us to, like doing drama in the class, it helps us not to be afraid of Shakespeare, and it’s given us confidence.’

Working in her primary school in the Midlands, the lead teacher emphasised this point about inference – that children are coming across challenging language constantly in their work on Shakespeare and hence have to develop an ability to infer meaning and learn not to fear the

challenge. The active rehearsal room approaches she sees as providing them with strategies to enjoy the language, to explore and think about its meaning. ‘They become open to this exploration as you won’t get language more difficult than this!’ This ‘diet of the best’, as she called it, means that they won’t ever think a language test is too hard for them. In this way, it has developed resilience in the weaker readers as well as providing more able children with language and sentence structures to emulate.

The Year 6 students, in their London primary school, corroborate their teacher’s view on the efficacy of active rehearsal room approaches in helping them get to grips with Shakespeare’s language: ‘We got to understand the text better, because when you act it out, and when you read the text, you understand it better.’

She thinks that the lack of fear of Shakespeare’s language is down to active rehearsal room approaches: ‘The work lets them make mistakes, they need to make mistakes, and then have a laugh and a chat about it.’

*Table 11: Students’ willingness to contribute ideas and opinions*

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
As a result of this work, students are more willing to contribute ideas and opinions	49	47	4	1	0

#### **Commentary on students’ willingness to contribute ideas and opinions**

95% of respondents to the survey reported that students were more willing to contribute ideas and opinions.

Differentiating answers given here from those offered on contribution to class discussions on Shakespeare proved tricky.

The head of English in the London secondary school talked about a ‘school review’ by senior staff from another school had commented positively on ‘students’ willingness to talk’ in class and their levels of ‘oracy’ in generally. The head herself felt that as a result of active rehearsal room approaches, students were more willing to offer tentative ideas:

*‘In workshops, they’re more ready to contribute to discussion and voice their opinions. It has an effect across all of our English lessons and possibly a knock on in other lessons... they’re not so afraid to be wrong.’*

Table 12: Do RSC rehearsal room approaches help students critically analyse text?

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
RSC rehearsal room approaches do not help students critically analyse text	2	1	13	38	46

### Commentary on how rehearsal room approaches help students critically analyse texts

84% of respondents disagreed that RSC rehearsal room approaches do not help students critically analyse text, with just 3% agreeing that this was the case and 13% being neutral.

#### Comments from questionnaire survey

*'The children thoroughly enjoy working on a Shakespearean text and approach the activities with a great deal of enthusiasm. Practical tasks and rehearsal room approaches really help the children to understand the plot and the characters within the story, allowing them to explore both in depth, and ask questions and think critically about the events of the story and characters' actions/choices/responses. Both myself and the children have found exploring Shakespeare very rewarding. I've found the supportive and creative network of RSC staff and practitioners inspiring and feel I've learnt a great deal. I look forward to learning more.'*

*'Working predominantly with performing arts (performing arts students means that the level of engagement is good from a practical point of view). However, there has been a marked improvement in the students' confidence about working with Shakespeare, and an increase in levels of criticality.'*

#### Comments from school-based interviews

Year 9 students at the secondary school in London were definite that workshop approaches had helped them get to grips with Shakespeare's texts:

*'It helps us in the classroom and we'd have an advantage over other students because we'd understand the language and understand what the concept is – what they're trying to say...'*

Year 12 students in the same school thought that an understanding of the period also helped them in critical analysis:

*'I think that when we were doing the quotes and thinking about how people thought and society was in those days, it was really interesting. Like thinking about 'rotten orange' and its connection with a woman's virtue and things. Very interesting to think about how people thought in those days'*

Table 13: Improvement in discussion of Shakespeare's plays

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Class discussion of Shakespeare's plays is improved because of rehearsal room approaches	38	50	10	2	0

**Commentary on how rehearsal room approaches enhances class discussion**

88% of respondents to the survey agreed that class discussion of Shakespeare's plays is improved because of rehearsal room approaches, with just 2% disagreeing and 10% neutral.

The head teacher in a north west primary school believed learning new vocabulary, playing with it and getting used to its meanings, helped children make an effective, reasoned argument. She said that it tied in well with the school's own approach to exploring what she referred to as 'deep questions', where learning activities were structured to encourage children to debate and respond to each other's ideas. Evidence was seen by our researcher in the classroom where children were both encouraged and given time to listen, and agree and disagree with one another in reasoned ways when discussing whether Macbeth was a stronger character than his wife or not.

In a Midlands school the lead teacher said that behaviour has 'surprisingly' changed. 'Children now collaborate and take turns,' she said, and commented that this has moved beyond the classroom into the playground, where 'they play better, listen to and respect each other more.' She related this to the collaborative learning approaches they are now used to and to the way they have learned to tolerate disagreement and respect others' opinions.

Table 14: Improvements in examination and test work in English/literacy

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Students' examination or test work in English/Literacy has improved because of using rehearsal room approaches with Shakespeare	10	37	51	1	1

Missing N = 10, 10.1%

**Commentary on evidence of improved examination and test results**

Here again, as in responses to the question about evidence of improvement in writing, evident is the high percentage of neutral responses (51%) and, significantly, the highest number of null responses (10%) to this question. Overall, interview data suggest positive views, for example:

In London, the head of English in the secondary school has done an analysis of AQA GCSE examination scripts: 'I do have one bit of data: I analysed exam scripts of last year's Year 11s who were the first to progress from KS3 using rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare. As a year group, they clearly benefited a lot, scoring remarkably higher in the Shakespeare section than in any other section of the English Lit paper and they measured above the average AQA score.'

The head teacher at the north west primary pointed to the vast improvement in SATs results in EGPS (English, Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling) since the school's engagement with the RSC. Last year's cohort, she told me, was the first to have gone through the whole of Key Stage 2 studying Shakespeare. SATs results had gone from 41.7% of children achieving the expected levels in EGPS to 96.7 last year (i.e. one child not reaching the expected level). In addition, 56.7% had achieved higher levels than expected. She put this down largely to the children's increased willingness to 'have a go' and their increased belief in their ability to write well.

### Working with RSC rehearsal room approaches at Key Stage 4

Table 15: Relevance of RSC rehearsal room approaches at Key Stage 4

	%					
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Not applicable
At Key Stage 4 I find RSC rehearsal room approaches are still relevant for learning about Shakespeare	23	19	6	0	2	51

Missing N=34, 34%

#### Commentary on relevance of RSC rehearsal room approaches for Key Stage 4

The relatively high percentage of null responses reflects the fact that the majority of survey respondents worked in the primary sector. Teachers in two secondary schools were involved in follow-up interviews. Of these the large majority considered that rehearsal room approaches were still relevant at Key Stage 4.

#### Comments from questionnaire survey

*'Think would be beneficial for students to know more about the 'behind scenes' jobs and organisation, i.e. lighting design, costume/stage design. This could be useful for KS4 students who may consider a job in the theatre. It may also help the overall flow of a play/scene if children were involved in the design process rather than just being directed which can be confusing/overwhelming.'*

### Comments from school-based interviews

Working with RSC rehearsal room approaches for Key Stage 4 students is very relevant for Felicity and Shakina in London. The head of English says:

*'We do lots of workshop approaches with KS4... The only difference [at KS4] is that they are slightly less playful. The workshops with the RSC or those we do ourselves are more focused, like we need to explore these characters or this relationship. But with different teachers, there are lots of different approaches, some teachers are still more playful...'*

A teacher from the London primary school sees active rehearsal room approaches as useful in sustaining engagement in working with her Year 10 groups:

*'RSC active approaches are still relevant at KS4 because I still use them with my Year 10 set 4s, because they lack engagement in lessons generally and their writing and understanding of text is very poor. They're not able to understand explicit and implicit meaning. Getting up and doing active approaches, actually enables them to engage more...'*

At her school in the south east, the head of English was more ambivalent about continuing to use active rehearsal room approaches past Key Stage 3:

*'Our results have gone up generally. It's difficult to say. We do most of our active work in KS3 and that builds a foundation for deeply understanding characters, themes, connections with life and different modern contexts, which is very important in the new GCSE. We still do active approaches in the new GCSEs. But active approaches do take a long time to ... get a written outcome.'*

### Impact on other areas

Table 16: Helping students find a voice

	Strongly Agree	Agree	% Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
In my opinion, rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare can help students find a voice	53.5	40.4	5.1	1.0	0

#### Commentary on how work on rehearsal room approaches might help students 'find a voice'

94% of respondents considered that rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare can help students find a voice. However, in analysing transcripts and reports, it proved difficult to isolate effects on the development of student voice from other areas on the survey.

Interview data on the area of the development of student voice through active rehearsal room approaches can be found in the above sections: the impact on students' spoken language; students' willingness to contribute ideas; improvement in class discussion of Shakespeare.

Table 17: Impact on self-confidence

	Strongly Agree	Agree	% Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Feeling confident about Shakespeare also impacts on students' self-confidence	52	43	5	0	0

### Commentary on how work on Shakespeare impacts on student self-confidence

95% agreed that feeling confident about Shakespeare also impacts on students' self-confidence.

#### Comments from questionnaire survey

*'All the children have thoroughly enjoyed working with a "real" actor (excellent role model) - Can now speak confidently to bigger groups, e.g. assemblies - Brill experience performing on the stage at the Grand Theatre.'*

*'Point 5.2 cannot be overstated. It has had a remarkable impact with a number of children'. (5.2 Feeling confident about Shakespeare also impacts on students' self-confidence).'*

*'RSC approaches have greatly improved my confidence with teaching Shakespeare and had a fantastic effect on children's attitudes to performing in general; self-confidence and their literary skills.'*

#### Comments from school-based interviews

The Chair of the Board of Governors in the primary school in the north east believes that the work on Shakespeare with the RSC has an impact on children's sense of self-confidence and esteem: 'it's the best thing we've been involved in.' He goes on to say,

*'It extends the children's horizons, and it compensates for [the] experience deficit. It also gives the children a real sense of their own worth and their own ability, so that they begin to believe they can do different things... The confidence that the children have... they're able to talk about themselves, they have a respect for each other's views, they give space to each other...'*

A primary school teacher in London has categorically seen a development of confidence: 'They have much more willingness to tackle things that they're not completely sure of. They're fascinated by metaphors. They set something up and want to perform things.'

At the nearby secondary school, the head of English has also perceived an effect on students' self-confidence:

*'Confidence? I think the vast majority of students are more confident. You can see it at the end of a workshop, they are more confident. In our 6th Form, who've been doing the RSC work for a number of years, we have a lot of articulate students, and I would put that down to the nature of the RSC workshops. Not scientifically measured, but the impression is that students*

*are more confident and have a more positive attitude to learning, whether it's Shakespeare or algebra. It's more noticeable when you contrast with a group who've not had [rehearsal room] approaches.'*

Her Year 9 students make points that support her perception of the development of students' self-confidence as a result of being involved in RSC rehearsal room approaches to Shakespeare:

*'It helps us to, like do drama in the class, it helps us not to be afraid of Shakespeare. And it's given us confidence. We did an assessment in English, like who has power and all that. It's helped us mainly in English, in like performing.'*

In a similar vein, Year 12 students in the same school considered the question of confidence, not just in studying in English, but across the curriculum, and how it involves diverse students:

*'It's made us more confident, academically. In maths, there's one kind of answer. In English, it appeals to more different types of people. If we hadn't have done those workshops, we never would have thought about acting out scenes to remember quotes and understand the drama part of it, which is much more fun.'*

Table 18: Becoming critically aware how language is used to influence opinions

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Studying Shakespeare has helped my students become more critically aware of how language is used to influence people's opinions	31	48	20	1	0

Over three quarters (79%) of respondents considered that studying Shakespeare helped their students become more critically aware of how language is used to influence people's opinions. Only one person disagreed but 20% of the sample were neutral.

### **Comments from the interviews**

The Chair of Board of Governors at the primary school in the north east expresses it this way,

*'They look beyond the words. It helps them to see that there are different ways of expressing anger, or frustration... A lot of the things in the text might not be part of their experience, but they've got the skills to look and to work out what's actually being said.'*

In the Midlands, the cluster had chosen debate/rhetoric as their focus for the year which shows that this aspect of Shakespeare was appreciated by head teachers. The researcher was told, as an

example, that children were being asked to consider why Mark Antony kept saying that Brutus was an honourable man when he had just killed Caesar. And on discussing Caesar, the children had themselves brought up Hitler and Trump as points of comparison.

Felicity, in London, considered the question of critical awareness in relation to authorship:

*'If by critical awareness of how language is used, if we mean that students are more aware of author's purpose, yes, looking for reason behind word choices, yes, more critically aware... Another thing I've noticed is awareness of author. Whenever you introduce a new text, the first thing you want on your slides is a picture of the author, but if you look at the author first, then you're more aware of the person behind it... that characters are not real, that they're crafted by somebody. You're always talking about Shakespeare as the main man, he's the one that did it...'*

Table 19: Is this approach 'just a nice extra'?

	%				
	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Working with Shakespeare in this way is essential, not just a nice extra	50	41	7	1	1

### **Commentary on whether working on Shakespeare in this way is essential**

91% of respondents considered that working with Shakespeare in this way is essential, not just a nice extra.

*Comments from questionnaire survey*

'Anyone who thinks teaching Shakespeare would be boring are doing it wrong!'

### **Comments from school-based interviews**

Again, as in the section above on 'student voice', evidence from interview data is woven through other responses. In general, it is possible to assert that everyone involved in the survey and follow-up interviews, the ASP and LPN, showed commitment to the importance of using active rehearsal room approaches to work on Shakespeare and, in addition, in other areas of the curriculum as well.

For the head of English in a south east secondary school working on rehearsal room approaches has, 'Livened up pedagogy and practice, and enhanced attitudes to teaching and learning Shakespeare.'

### **Wider impact on teachers' professional development**

*Comments from questionnaire survey*

The positive reaction to the RSC's working with schools is seen from these comments appended to the questionnaires as additional comments.

*'I have personally found work done with the RSC to be the most refreshing and inspiring experience in my long career as a teacher of English. I have benefitted massively in my practice and am keen - even at the end of my career - to pursue it further.'*

*'I have taught for 15 years and can honestly say this has been the most inspirational project I have taken part in. It has changed the way I approach storytelling and has become embedded in our school's conscience. I will be teaching abroad from September at an International School and am hugely looking forward to sharing a love of Shakespeare with children from all around the world. Thank you!'*

*'I have thoroughly enjoyed working with the RSC and passing down my training to other teachers in school. I am very much looking forward to involving more year groups next year.'*

*'My feelings about Shakespeare were to quote, "boring, not for me and I don't understand what's so special about it !!!" How wrong was !!! This 3-year project with the RSC has been a huge inspiration in my teaching. I use lots of the ideas in my everyday class lessons alongside studying the plays. The young children in my school have grown in confidence, knowledge and performance through the RSC techniques. As for me, I feel honoured and privileged to have been able to work alongside the RSC team - most warm and caring people and make you feel 'absolutely fabulous'! I would now quote "I love Shakespeare so much and look forward to learning much more about his works and plays". Have also made it my mission to pass my excitement and enthusiasm on to others. I am so glad to have had the opportunity to know about Shakespeare and RSC, otherwise I would have died missing out on something great!!! Thank you so much RSC.'*

*'RSC training has also enabled me to do outreach work in other schools, work as a director mentor for other schools and run training workshops for teachers and student teachers as well as teaching Shakespeare abroad in schools (India, France, German and Spain).'*

*'Teaching Shakespeare has impacted my own teaching and learning through the use of the rehearsal room approach. I am now very confident in my understanding of Shakespeare texts.'*

*'The partnership with the RSC has been hugely beneficial to student progress and engagement as well as my own career development and engagement in educational practices.'*

*'The Rehearsal Room techniques have also made me more confident in my teaching of Shakespeare and when teaching and collaborating with students on drama projects. I am interested in using these techniques with a wider range of texts to support engagement in reading generally.'*

*'The RSC rehearsal approaches and the whole process of the LPN/ASP schools has had a significant and long-lasting impact on attitude and standards of children. The focus on training staff rather than practitioners working with children has resulted in a sustainable long-term impact. It has empowered teachers, encouraged them to go outside their comfort zone and developed them as 'teachers as researchers'. It has developed a reflective, supportive approach amongst the whole school community.'*

*'Working with other schools and the RSC closely has improved my confidence to teach Shakespeare to all ages of children.'*

### **Comments from school-based interviews**

The interviews also brought forward very positive comments on the wider impact of the work with the RSC on teachers' professional development.

A teacher in the primary school in London believes that, 'Rehearsal room techniques have changed my style of teaching, made me approach everything slightly differently.' She has learnt a lot about implementing active teaching and learning. 'It's reminded me of my training at university... It's not confined to English... I use simple warm up games in Maths.'

In the Midlands the lead teacher had moved from being someone who 'hated Shakespeare' to an enthusiastic teacher who contributes to the training of other staff. She had volunteered to go to the initial five day LPN training at Stratford as she thought she might learn something from it; but she hadn't expected to be as 'bowled over' as she had been. This experience and her subsequent development relates clearly to earlier research that has pointed to the potentially profound effect on those teachers who work most closely with the RSC and who take part in the Stratford experience.

A teacher in the same school hadn't liked drama at all when she was at school, as it made her anxious, and she never touched Shakespeare during her PGCE training. For her, then, it had been a 'huge learning curve' since she had been working in the school. The fact that children were already 'clued up' in these approaches had helped her considerably, as had other teachers who had given her advice on specific strategies. She recalled asking 'How do children walk the space?' and – importantly – 'How do they benefit from this?'

For the head of English in the London secondary school, working with the RSC has had a great impact on her career. She put a particular emphasis on how it's contributed to the development of her capacity for leadership:

*'It's had a huge impact on my teaching. Being able to be lead practitioner, it's given me the experience to do that. And it's impacted on me personally in leadership development. The programme really helped me to develop as a leader within the department and then as a leader. To form connections with people wider than that.'*

For a teacher working alongside her, resilience and creativity appeared to be the major spin-off benefits for her professional development:

*'It's made me more creative and more resilient in going for texts I wouldn't really have gone with before – for example, Oliver Twist, that I wouldn't usually go for. I feel I've taught it more effectively because of using active approaches. I wouldn't have done that before, because I would have just stuck with what I knew.'*

### Transition to the Associate Schools Programme (ASP) from the Learning and Performance Network (LPN)

In a Midlands school both the head and lead teacher commented positively on the increased freedom the ASP has allowed them. The school runs a cluster of nine primary schools. He holds the purse strings, charging £450 a year to the cluster schools, a sum that includes the budget for training. Despite the increased freedom, he believes that the ASP cluster should chime in with the RSC's yearly plan, which they are sent annually. He is, however, in favour of this new, looser structure. The heads now meet at the venue of their local theatre partner to discuss their yearly plan and he sees it as vital that the focus is on teaching and learning and not just on Shakespeare and performance. Both the Head and the lead teacher think the ASP will help with sustainability and longevity, but the Head emphasised that, for it to work successfully, it demands time and commitment from all the schools. Schools commit initially for two years and he believes evidence of impact on teaching and learning is essential if they are to continue. He is confident about finding this evidence, however.

Evidence from the Headteacher of the school in the north west also suggests that the transition has had beneficial effects as the ASP asks teachers to do more for themselves. The fact that the local theatre administers the finances she sees as a key contributory factor towards sustainability. The theatre offers a large subsidy to schools for the use of their premises for performances and in-service work.

For the head of English in London, who has been involved long-term in the LPN and now in the ASP, there is a distinct difference in that, 'We have more ownership. With the LPN there was a timeline, but with the ASP you're left more to your own devices.' This has led to an increased sense of autonomy and the ability to work at their own pace, fitting in with local priorities and circumstances.

The head of English and RSC lead teacher at her school in north Kent was very positive about the move from the LPN to the ASP:

*'The LPN worked really well. One of our members doing an MA did her dissertation on the benefits of the LPN and we learned quite a bit from it, mainly on communication issues'.*

*'The difference between the LPN and the ASP is that the LPN was a bit more "stabilisers on" and the Associate Programme is more "stabilisers off".'*

*'It allows us more scope, now that we have a deeper understanding of the value of it all, we're more upskilled. Not just the practice but the pedagogy. It allows us to get more schools involved. And we want to get more action research going, so we tag these on to our network meeting where they're asked to present evidence, anecdote or images. We're also trying to get our schools to network more widely, without it necessarily being hub-led, sharing particular areas of expertise. Our role [as hub] is more facilitating...'*

At the school in the North-East teachers again noted the greater degree of flexibility and autonomy that the ASP allowed them. The RSC Coordinator and head teacher both noted that they had checked in with the RSC a lot more during the LPN and felt more freedom now in working with the other schools in their cluster (e.g. putting in place new structures, such as charging schools for training etc.). However, they attributed this greater sense of freedom to the experience and confidence that have built up within the team at the school, rather than any particular differences between the LPN and ASP: 'It's evolved as a kind of programme. It hasn't been prescriptive from the beginning. It's moved seamlessly.'

## Appendix 1: Schools contributing to the research

Hub/Cluster	Researcher	Region	Staff	Students
Hub	DL	North East	Chair of Governors, Headteacher, RSC Lead teacher, Two class teachers	No observation or interview
Hub	AF	London	Two teachers Head of English, Lead English Teacher	Year 9 focus group Year 12, two student focus group
Hub	AF	South East	Head of English, lead teacher, telephone interview	No observation or interview
Cluster	AF	London	Year 6 teacher	Year 6 focus group
Hub	JW	North West	Headteacher, lead teacher, two class teachers	Short lesson observation, brief interviews with students
Hub	JW	Midlands	Headteacher, Two lead teachers Two class teachers	Years 5 & 6 focus group, observed two lessons