



RSC Associate Schools programme Case Study

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As a school and an Associate Schools cluster our initial interest in working with the RSC and Hull Truck Theatre came from our desire to:

- Overcome educational barriers to the teaching of Shakespeare – especially for SEN and EAL students.
- Improve the teaching and learning of Shakespeare and raise engagement with Shakespeare.
- Overcome social barriers to the study of Shakespeare as the cluster is located in an area of high social deprivation. Also, many students and families demonstrated the belief that Shakespeare is elitist and therefore students were very defeatist when faced with Shakespeare's texts.

We therefore had clear aims for the teaching of Shakespeare and these aims became a key developmental priority due to the demands of the GCSE exams: exams that require students to demonstrate sophisticated reading skills which enable them to analyse patterns of language; comment on writers' methods; comment on depiction of character and theme and also link texts to context.

In order to develop a skill-set that will allow students to access these exams it became imperative for students to have the opportunity to play with the text, learn to question the text and have the confidence to trust their own independent interpretations of the text. It quickly became apparent that the rehearsal room pedagogies provide students with the opportunity to engage positively with the texts and develop a deep understanding of them. The rehearsal room pedagogies allow students the opportunity to become Lady Macbeth; to become the director directing a performance of *Macbeth* and to become the audience responding to Lady Macbeth. Therefore, students develop views and opinions about characters, interpretations and Shakespeare's methods all of which are crucial to succeed in GCSE English Literature.

The use of rehearsal room pedagogies has supported us not only to develop our students' understanding of Shakespeare, but also their literacy skills which can then be employed across the curriculum. The rehearsal room pedagogies have supported students to develop strategies that can be employed when encountering new vocabulary and developed the



resilience necessary when dealing with sophisticated texts independently. Our work with the RSC is central to the success we have achieved with the new GCSE exams and also for supporting students within the cluster to achieve strong SATS results.

In addition to developing our students' reading skills the RSC's rehearsal techniques have also developed our students' writing skills. Using the rehearsal room pedagogies provides us, as teachers, with the opportunity to give our students the experience of a shipwreck during a storm; of being lost in a forest; of being a soldier seeing the ghost of a dead king and of being the murderer of a friend. This is particularly important when working with students from disadvantaged backgrounds as these students often haven't had the opportunity to visit the places that we often ask them to write about. Providing students with these experiences, using the rehearsal room techniques, provides them with a first-hand sensory experience which gives their writing much greater depth and enables them to write in a way which is creative and convincing.

In addition to seeing benefits within our own students' writing, other primary schools within our cluster have also seen significant benefits with one of our primaries commenting that all of the writing that formed part of their Y6 students' writing portfolio focused on *The Tempest* as a stimulus for writing. A number of teachers have also stated that without the rehearsal room pedagogies their students' performance would have been poorer. In addition, many schools, including ourselves, have noted a significant improvement in the performance of EAL students due to the use of rehearsal room pedagogies. The use of Shakespeare in the classroom appears to act as a leveller and provides EAL students with the opportunity to see fluent English speakers struggling with language and having to employ a range of strategies to deal with sophisticated and unfamiliar vocabulary. This therefore opens up the conversation and allows both fluent and EAL English speakers to explore the strategies they have employed to make sense of the text. Additionally, several teachers have noted observing EAL speakers explain to fluent English speakers the strategies they employ to develop meaning when dealing with new vocabulary thus developing their confidence. As a result, we have many success stories that demonstrate the extent to which the use of the rehearsal room pedagogies has supported our EAL students. In our current Y11 we have one young man who in Year 9 was in our lowest ability English set (set 7 of 7). During Y9 he developed a strong interest in the use of the rehearsal room pedagogies and at the end of the academic year he played Bottom in our production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and has since moved to a middle ability group (set 4 of 7) and achieved a grade 4 in his English Language GCSE which he sat at the end of Y10. In addition to this, the gap between the performance of EAL and non-EAL students at the end of Y11 is very narrow and our EAL students who achieved Grade 5 and above in English and Maths last summer was only 1% behind our non-EAL students.

The use of the rehearsal room pedagogies hasn't just supported the progress of our EAL students but has supported students from all key cohorts to make strong progress in GCSE



English Literature. Comparison of our GCSE English Literature results in comparison to national performance demonstrates that our students outperform the nation average by 4% in the Shakespeare element of their GCSE English Literature. In addition, we have embedded the principles of the rehearsal room pedagogies into the teaching of other areas of the GCSE English Literature and this also has led our students to experience significant success in other areas of the GCSE and they have outperformed the national average in all areas of the GCSE.

Furthermore, the use of the rehearsal room pedagogies has enabled our students to excel and make progress in many ways other than external examinations. Our student voice demonstrates that the Shakespeare element of the English Literature examinations is the element that students feel most confident with. However, this increased engagement and positive attitude towards Shakespeare is also documented within pupil voice questionnaires across the year groups. These pupil voice questionnaires demonstrate that since the introduction of the rehearsal room pedagogies student attitude towards Shakespeare and enjoyment of Shakespeare texts has increased significantly.

Through the work with the RSC, Hull Truck Theatre and a range of schools across the cluster, it is clear that the Associate Schools programme provides teachers with the opportunity to explore their teaching. Additionally, the Associate Schools programme also provides teachers with the space and time to reflect on their teaching style outside of the school environment. The inset provided by the RSC focusing on the exploration of rehearsal room pedagogies has provided me with the only training, subsequent to my training year, that actively encouraged reflection both during the training and also on-going over the next academic year. This opportunity to reflect on my pedagogy and on-going requirement to reflect and therefore refine the implementation of a new approach has not only developed my teaching but also provided the confidence and opportunity to develop as a curriculum leader.

Acting as a lead for the Associate Schools Programme has required me to run and deliver effective inset to schools in our local cluster, provide individual support and also demonstrate understanding of the individual circumstances of a range of schools and departments. This has therefore required me as a teacher to consider exactly how I can support local schools to develop and deliver outstanding teaching and learning. The opportunity to lead on the teaching of Shakespeare both within my school and within a number of schools locally has provided me with the confidence to develop as a leader; to critically examine what I believe are the key features of an outstanding curriculum and to refine my vision of education. All of which are integral to my ability to effectively complete my current role and which were key to providing me with the confidence and experience to move to departmental leadership.

Working in partnership with the RSC and our local theatre partner, Hull Truck Theatre, has been key to us successfully implementing the rehearsal room pedagogies across the Lead Associate School but also within schools across the cluster. The partnership has ensured that



we as an Associate School cluster are able to access support on a timely and frequent basis. However, the benefit of working with our partners in this programme has far exceed the initial aims of the Associate Schools programme.

The partnership enables us as a cluster to support students not only to develop their engagement and insight regarding the writing of Shakespeare, but the nature of the partnership supports young people to engage with the arts in a range of ways. The on-going partnership and also support provided allows students to engage with the arts through participating in performances, providing the opportunity for them to watch a range of arts events and also enabling them to see routes into careers in the arts through the opportunity to work closely and along-side those that work within the arts industry. The quality of this industry experience provided by this partnership model is far superior to any advice or experience that individual schools and teachers would be able to provide. Consequently, the partnership continually raises student aspirations as it enables them to view their interest in the arts as a potential future career.