



**RSC Associate Schools programme  
Case Study**

**NAME:** Amy Walker

**SCHOOL:** Uxbridge High School

**REGIONAL THEATRE PARTNER** (if applicable): Intermission Youth

**1. What evidence do you have of the impact of Shakespeare's work combined with rehearsal room pedagogies on the achievements, aspirations, attitudes and lives of young people: in your school; in your associate schools; and in the wider community?**

My evidence starts with a reflection on the Associate School events of July 2018. This was in effect, a month of events that celebrated the achievements of Uxbridge High School and its Associate Schools. As part of the Playmaking Festival, seven schools brought together twenty-one students to create the Middlesex Shakespeare Company that performed Macbeth at the Other Place at Stratford-upon-Avon to a sold-out audience. Then, just a week later, eight schools brought short performances of Shakespeare to a festival hosted at Uxbridge High School. 124 students took part in the performances that included scenes from 6 of Shakespeare's plays.

This was a free event, attended by parents and family members, students and teachers from different schools, creating a 200-strong audience across the evening, all supportively gripped by the performances, celebrating with the performers and mixing and chatting with the other audience members when there was a break in the line-up.

One of the key memories for me was the supportive and celebratory nature of the relationships between the students from all the Associate Schools. Driving home from a rehearsal for the playmaking festival one day, I saw a group of four students walking home in four different uniforms and chatting and laughing. The project had created new and exciting friendships that would not have existed without it. The rehearsals had focused on building an ensemble and using rehearsal room pedagogies to develop student ideas for the production of Macbeth. Not only had the project developed confidence and an unashamedly proud performance of a Shakespeare play, but also a chance for collaboration in the community that I had not yet seen be achieved so successfully.

The community of teachers that have used the rehearsal room approaches is growing. Each year Uxbridge High has hosted CPD delivered by the RSC that relates to the performance project that we are working towards as a group. As the time has gone on, the schools have chosen different teachers to attend, this has increased the number of teachers that have

received training and experienced of rehearsal room approaches within the programme. Whitehall Junior School have managed this thoughtfully, with each year having another teacher attending the CPD and running the performance project. The Assistant Head teacher told me that they were so pleased all the Year 6 team has received the training and can understand the impact it can have with their own classes in a very real way. This has also meant that more staff every year attend Associate School events, as all enjoy being a part of it. The number of teachers that have received training as part of the Associate School programme is being added to every year, which, even when teachers move on to new posts, increases the number of students that learn Shakespeare's plays in an active way with confident teachers.

Within the classroom, students have also benefited from the rehearsal room pedagogies in Uxbridge High School. As a Drama teacher, and Head of Drama, I have been able to ensure the pedagogy has been a staple of drama lessons for all Key Stages for many years. In the last academic year, Year 7 and 8 were introduced to them through the study of Romeo and Juliet, Year 9 studied Othello and Year 10 explored The Comedy of Errors. We are fortunate that as a team of drama teachers, we have a wealth of experience of rehearsal room pedagogy. We are confident in applying our experience to developing new schemes of learning that link to the opportunities of our students to see the play live at the theatre. In 2017, we hosted performances of First Encounters: The Tempest, and wrote a scheme of learning for Year 9 that accompanied the chance to see the production of the play in their own school. Last year, we were able to take the Year 9 cohort to see 'Ring of Envy', the Tenyear-anniversary production by Intermission Youth, and therefore, developed lessons and resources to accompany this experience. I am proud of our ability to adapt and develop work that inspires students and is made relevant by the opportunity to see live performances. This has been an aim of mine as I agree with the principles of the RSC's manifesto of 'Do It on Your Feet, See It Live, Start It Earlier' and I have been made aware of the monotonous nature of the selection of Shakespeare's plays that are taught in schools, often only exposing young people to the same three plays; Macbeth, Romeo and Juliet and A Midsummer Night's Dream. Our involvement in the Associate School programme has broadened our student's experience of more of Shakespeare's plays.

English GCSE results have a big impact on the way our school is judged in the league tables, by OFSTED and by our wider community. As Uxbridge High School has previously had low attainment in English GCSE, there was a lot of pressure on the English department and school leadership to improve this. Leadership of the English department was handed to Nicola Marsh, who has previously been a lead teacher in the LPN, and an expert with rehearsal room pedagogy. She insisted the RSC's approaches be included in the English classroom, where they have not been fully embedded before. After the first year of this new Leadership, English results improved, including Literature results. Further analysis showed

that Paper 2, the paper where the Shakespeare questions feature, was the highest scoring paper for the majority of students. This is a trend that continued into the 2018 cohort results. As 'Outcomes for Pupils' is a section the school gets judged on in an OFSTED inspection, these results helped the school achieve a 'Good' rating in our March 2018 inspection, both in 'Outcomes for Pupils' and as a judgement overall.

## **2. What have you learned about leading the programme as a school and/or as an individual lead teacher?**

The role of lead teacher in the Associate Schools programme is a challenging but fulfilling one. I have been the lead teacher at Uxbridge High School for the first two years of the programme, and this was a development from leading the Learning and Performance Network at the school from 2013 to 2016. I have learned innumerable skills in the process.

The Associate Schools programme puts the schools that have committed to work together in the driving seat of how their programme runs. The RSC provide options and opportunities, but as a lead teacher, I had to facilitate bringing the schools together and asking them to sit around the table and discuss what we want to achieve for our young people and how these projects and opportunities could work for us and how it can fit into our community. This was initially a daunting prospect but one that has become more and more comfortable and exciting with experience.

The first meeting of the programme comprised of a group of teachers that had a mixture of experience of the project and the rehearsal room pedagogies. I asked the teachers to reflect on successes we experienced with the LPN and also the improvements we wanted to make and contribute to the 'vision' we wanted to make as a group. This was not that successful, and I ended up taking a strong lead, rather than achieving a collaboration of ideas. On reflection, it was expecting too much from such a newly formed group – they wanted leadership and a chance to gel and learn. The meetings of the teachers at the end of the two years were different, ideas flowed as their confidence had grown, and we all appreciated what each school could bring to the project. I feel I have nurtured this, by being prepared to take on that strong hold of the project at the start, plan out the key aims and events, organising and structuring and being endlessly positive and willing to work hard to include schools and challenge them.

I believe I have learned the balance between control and trust when leading Associate Schools in the programme, as I previously would have said I liked to lead by having complete control. The first year I planned out and told the schools of the events and how the year would run, whereas the second year was collaboratively planned. This was a combination of Associate School teachers developing confidence and me also developing confidence in them. This was demonstrated in some of the arrangements for the playmaking festival,



where I organised the performance of Macbeth that involved 21 students from seven different schools. I asked the schools to choose and cast the students from their schools who were to be involved. I asked them to arrange their transport, and in the case of the primary schools, supervision on the days of rehearsal. I also asked them to arrange their own transport to Stratford-upon-Avon for the performance, and any audience they wanted to invite. The days running up to the performance, I received two phone calls about issues with transport from two different schools. With both I attempted to help, but also allowed the teachers to sort out the problems themselves, which both schools did – within a very short time!

The festival we hosted at the end of the two years was a definite success of delegation and schools working both collaboratively and independently. This evening comprised of seven schools sharing performances that they had worked on in their school, either as part of a class within the curriculum, an extra-curricular club, or a specific group of students that had been chosen to have extra time focusing on Shakespeare. The festival was then finished with a reprise performance of Macbeth, the group made up of students from each school. The evening was a successful celebration of the work each Associate School had completed individually and what we had achieved as a group.

As the RSC's Associate School programme has been successful for Uxbridge High School and its group of Associate Schools it is obvious it would be something that we, as a collective, want to continue. Going into the third year of the project, six of our Associate Schools signed up to continue the work and we hope to recruit more. I feel that this longevity is beneficial to the schools and the wider community – embedding practice, developing an expectation of excellent teaching and exploration of a range of Shakespeare's plays, and reaching more students with this work. Therefore, the leadership of the Associate Schools needs to last also. It occurred to me within the last year that the way I lead the project may mean that if I did not lead it, it may not happen. I discussed the opportunity of the leadership being transferred to another school in an Associate School meeting in February 2018. There were no takers. Within Uxbridge High School, this idea of the responsibilities of the programme lying solely at my door was discussed and evaluated, before and after our annual review. We have now recruited a Lead Practitioner in English where lead teacher responsibility is with the job description. The possibility that the programme can be shared is not only an excellent idea in terms of balancing workload, but I am also passionate about having the opportunities spread more thinly around the school, not just focused on the drama department. This could mean that students that are not regulars at drama club or have opted to study drama could get the same experiences and be more open and excited about the study of Shakespeare.

**3. How has engagement with other partners in the programme (the RSC, Regional Theatre Partners where appropriate, other Associate Schools) affected your work and the school?**

As has been noted before, we have had tremendous success with the partnership with Intermission Youth. We work with Intermission in a few ways; attending their productions annually, hosting their outreach productions for UHS and Associate School audiences and Intermission have helped with some rehearsals for regional performances. Some of the most disengaged students at Uxbridge High School have been inspired and motivated by the work Intermission does with young people. There are some key examples to demonstrate this. Four students of Uxbridge High School now attend Intermission Youth and all but one had been struggling with school, been on our safeguarding registers and were at risk of offending. Two students joined in 2016 and another in two in 2018, inspired to apply by seeing our former students performing in the annual youth theatre production. The Youth Theatre has given them a chance to not only have opportunities in the arts to explore Shakespeare, but also to have one-on-one mentoring and a group of young people who share similar experiences and pressures.

The effect of our students watching Intermission Youth performances is immeasurable, as the productions are incredibly successful at engaging young audiences with Shakespeare's unmistakable themes and characters by blending the original text in with 'street slang'. The students undoubtedly enjoy watching the live performances, and can see Shakespeare as relevant, exciting and an easy fit into their world. One black UHS student last year commented on the number of BAME young people in Intermission's cast and said, 'I didn't know black people could act like that.' This experience gave him more than just an experience of Shakespeare, he saw black people being represented, valued and celebrated as talented Shakespearean actors, a career option he now feels he can consider more than before.