Reimagining Shakespeare Education

Teaching and Learning through Collaboration

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Digital Reimaginings

Introduction

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Digital Shakespeares are pervasive. As Jim Casey observes, there is 'a multitude of new media and platforms for reimagined Shakespeares' (2019: 112). The diversity of approaches to teaching Shakespeare 'has become even more widespread with the quickening rate of digital proliferation in everyday life and pedagogy' (Bell and Borsuk, 2020: 1).

The chapters here underscore the extent to which digital technologies have opened up frontiers for Shakespeare education, scholarship and performance. Chapter 13 considers digital archives and online resources such as the *Shakespeare Electronic Archive*, *MIT Global Shakespeares*, *HamletWorks*, *Shakespeare Brasil* and the Folger-JSTOR's *Understanding Shakespeare*. The project described in Chapter 14 centres on textual and performative variants of plays and productions using digital tools including Perusall .com and MIT Global Shakespeares. In Chapter 15, Janelle Jenstad illuminates the future of digitised early modern drama via an account of Linked Early Modern Drama Online (LEMDO) and Chapter 16 turns to *Play the Knave*, a digital game using a motion capture interface with animated avatars. As Peter S. Donaldson writes, 'the future of digital Shakespeare might be well served by recalling the ambition of the pioneering pre-Web projects' (Chapter 13, p. 210). We see this forward-planning in LEMDO's ability 'to connect with projects that have not yet been imagined or built' (Chapter 15, p. 243). In exploring the past and present innovations of digital Shakespeare projects, the chapters in this section enable us to 'project' forward to imagine digital futures.

Contexts, Audiences, Relationships

While these collaborative endeavours project into the digital realm, their embeddedness in virtual and real-life contexts varies considerably. Donaldson considers the possibilities of linked archives and online resources; how users can make connections across 'all available media

classes' (p. 210). By contrast, while *Play the Knave* thrives on a 'glitchy' connection (p. 254) between real-life and digital interaction, at its heart the game is driven by embodied learning.

As Jenstad makes clear, her project – like others featured here – serves 'multiple audiences' (p. 245), including teachers, scholars and students. In contrast to most printed editions of Shakespeare which 'address one audience', LEMDO aims to host 'polyvocal editions' that function for different audiences simultaneously. It allows those audiences to self-identify as students, teachers or scholars, creating an opportunity for conscious self-reflection on the means and modes by which we engage with Shakespeare's texts.

A foundational collaborative structure underpins the relationships enabled by these projects. Global collaboration prompted the creation and linking of archives in Chapter 13. The construction of LEMDO relies on students as 'stakeholders and co-creators' (p. 247). At the classroom-level, Alexa Alice Joubin's text-based and video-based pedagogies are designed for collaborative learning, not 'isolated activity' (p. 228). Chapter 16 features scholar–student collaboration in the ideation of *Play the Knave* through to its deployment as an education programme in schools.

Aims, Processes, Structures

The specific interactions of resources, pedagogies, people and sites (digital and physical) build these projects into something greater than the sum of their parts. This is a feature of complex adaptive systems, which are produced by the rich interactions of multiple components and actors (see Introduction).

In embracing a non-linear structure and enabling an openness in the classroom that fosters the unexpected, Joubin's work is complexivist: it is 'rhizomatic', replacing 'the linear, arborescent, grand narrative with the "rhizome" which has no centre and grows in all directions' (p. 227). Her enquiry-based learning 'discovers deep connections among seemingly distinct interpretations' (p. 226). Donaldson similarly connects 'distinct' resources to advance his vision of a 'living variorum', which provides access to the text through 'commentary and performance', 'tools for student-created pathways' via linked collections, and the ability for students to author their own 'cross-media reactions, interpretations, and essays' (p. 210).

The explicit aims of the LEMDO project (p. 239) also speak to a rhizomatic move away from hierarchies and linearity in the desire to 'cut across

the corpus of early English drama' and '*contextualise* Shakespeare afresh' (p. 239) to create 'a networked hub' for early modern drama studies (p. 242).

The structure of Gina Bloom and Amanda Shores' project (Chapter 16) offers a different model of collaboration: they argue that, surprisingly, 'close *connection* is not sufficient or even necessary for *collaboration*', and the turbulent, unstable nature of 'glitchy connections provoke and fuel collaboration' (p. 253–4), demonstrating another facet of complex systems.

Insights, Challenges, Takeaways

In any digital imagining of Shakespeare, access, durability and skill are essential – and sometimes a challenge. The resources described in Chapter 13 are not all open access, with linked materials sometimes requiring users to navigate paywalls or institutional access. While free, *Play the Knave* is not instantly available to teachers. Videos on platforms like YouTube and Vimeo can be 'ephemeral' (Chapter 14, p. 233). Although projects like LEMDO are resolutely open access, Jenstad recognises the challenge of ensuring the 'longevity' and 'preservation' of digital materials (p. 239).

These projects rely on teachers and students navigating web platforms and software programmes, and curating and creating their own materials. Jenstad points to the beneficial skills students develop in working with LEMDO, giving them 'useful knowledge in many professional environments' (p. 248). Teachers are often not all well equipped for implementing digital tools and resources in the classroom and blended learning requires a deft balance between digital resources and 'the liveness that has been central to recent movements in Shakespeare pedagogy' (Carson and Kirwan, 2014: 59). Bloom and Shores highlight the additional 'challenge' of 'timing' and the difficulties presented by the hierarchical structure of our educational systems (p. 258). The absolute necessity of interconnectedness – of digital tools, of students and resources, of online and embodied learning, of ideas and interpretations, and of teachers and pupils – is a key insight in the reimagining of digital Shakespeare education.

The projectors in this section reveal the potential for the digital to empower students and educators as makers, collaborators and researchers in the classroom. Students are 'empowered to claim ownership of Shakespeare' (Chapter 14, p. 236) and become 'stakeholders and co-creators' (Chapter 15, p. 247). Digital Shakespeare is about much more than getting students in front of a computer or iPad, on a webpage or playing a game. The digital reimaginings described here consider their virtual platforms as intertwined with diverse modes of learning: 'global Shakespeares',

after all, 'thrive in hybrid cultural and digital spaces' (Chapter 14, p. 235); and digital Shakespeares embrace 'multiple learning modes – kinaesthetic, visual, auditory' and understand the 'glitchiness' of virtual and real-life collaborations (Chapter 16, p. 259).

If these reimaginings help us picture the future of digital Shakespeare education, it is by no means a future in which we must follow Prospero and drown our books: rather, these projects seek to cross boundaries and build bridges between virtual and real life, Shakespearean and non-Shakespearean texts, archives, systems and habits of thought. There is a movement towards the rhizomatic, a resistance to or working around existing hierarchies, and a prioritisation of adaptable, learner-centred and enquiry-driven pedagogy that positions students as active, skilled co-learners.

References

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