

## Chapter 9

# The Bard and the Web: Using Vodcasting to Enhance Teaching of Shakespeare to Pre- Service English Teachers

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### ABSTRACT

*In a multiliterate age we are teaching through technology, even in erstwhile conservative subjects such as English. Once teacher preparation involved only print based texts which preservice teachers read. English has always occupied the territory of the printed word, but is there room for technology in the study of the bard? Multiliteracies involve the mastery of a repertoire of literacy practices, including those deploying technology. This chapter describes a research project, which explores the challenges and concerns preservice teachers face when teaching complex literature such as Shakespeare. The chapter describes and evaluates the effectiveness of preservice students' interactions with a set of digital vodcasts featuring an 'expert teacher' teaching Shakespeare's Hamlet. This is an exploratory study deploying mostly qualitative analysis of survey data and focus group discussions with preservice teachers in their final year of undergraduate study at an Australian university. The use of vodcast resources allowed preservice teachers to effectively access 'expert performance,' to critically problem-solve specific issues around teaching Shakespeare, detailed in the project's design. In deploying this technology, the preservice teachers effectively engage in a 'cognitive apprenticeship' through a repertoire of literacy practices on their way to becoming reflective practitioners.*

### TEACHING HOW TO TEACH SHAKESPEARE: WHICH APPROACH?

Is complex literature such as Shakespearean plays now being taught using technology or does it rely

mostly on the printed word of the original play texts alongside articles about pedagogical approaches? A multiliteracies approach to literature study means that students need to master a 'repertoire of literacy practices', become researchers themselves and to encourage their own students to research texts analytically. The multiliteracies 'four resources model'

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for reading can be applied at tertiary level (Luke & Freebody, 2000) and I will refer to this framework in reviewing the relevant literature on pedagogical approaches to Shakespeare. Each model of English teaching approaches the teaching of Shakespeare in different ways, so some of this literature needs to be canvassed here. The 'cultural heritage' approach was in favour when I was at school and University. This favoured 'cracking the code' of Shakespearean language, through close, heavily glossed study of the written text. As students, we were asked to respond by writing an unseen, expository, literary essay with an audience of one examiner; the teacher. This formulaic approach falls short of how Luke and Freebody (2000) described the reader role of the 'text analyst', even though the final task was analytical in its broadest sense. It was somewhat surprising then that much of the current online content on Shakespeare, especially web sites devised in the United States still has this cultural heritage approach at its heart. Recent online Study Guides such as 'Sparknotes,' (Barnes & Noble, 2006) provide author-centred text guides to canonical texts which do little more than the print based ones do, except perhaps allow greater access to a wider audience. The suggested student assessment in these online environments often takes the form of analytical exposition, with some option for performance or film related tasks (Littauer, 2006). Performance approaches which depend on reading and acting from the original written text before viewing professionals are advocated by some teachers (Kissler, 1997). Performance approaches depend on students 'participating' in the text or 'using' it, in terms of the four reader roles.

More current and relevant approaches both in online and offline environments ask students to study various versions of the play in text, film or performance and to respond in ways which recreate 'known' texts with wider imagined audiences (Davis, 2003; Farabaugh, 2007; Kliman, 2001; Plasse, 2004). These can still work at developing arguments deploying the language of persua-

sion in the same way that a literary exposition can; a feature article or comment can do much the same linguistic work. The latter however, envisage a wider audience and call on students' knowledge of the mediated world in which they live. I take the position that critical literacy and technology must have a place in the classroom if it is to make the canon digestible and relevant (Freesmith, 2006; Jetnikoff, 2006; Kliman, 2001; Snyder, 2008). Some teachers have used online technology such as wikis to establish a discourse community to enhance students' learning about Shakespeare in relation to written assignments (Farabaugh, 2007). There is much research evidence to support the view that Shakespeare must be taught alongside popular and contemporary texts (Hulbert, Wetmore, & York, 2006; Plasse, 2004) to prepare students to operate in a multiliterate world (Franks, Durran, & Burn, 2006). If the clever, satirical animation series, *The Simpsons*, helps students to understand and enjoy *Hamlet*, then why wouldn't we use it? It is certainly part of my students' reading/viewing repertoires.

Reviewing the extant literature reveals a plethora of pedagogical approaches and teachers do their best to update new techniques and teaching strategies on top of their old ones. For instance the critical literacy elements of the current Queensland Syllabus means that students are asked to engage 'critically' with these 'classical' Elizabethan texts, both as literary works and through available contemporary 'readings,' such as film versions (QBSSS, 2002)<sup>1</sup>. This approach assumes that students read Shakespeare through their own historical lenses, and teachers are using combined approaches of performance, cultural heritage elements, in terms of reading the plays as poetry and as narrative, and also through critical literacy, as text which mobilises discourses (Mellor, 1989; Strickland, 1993). The text-based approach is still used, where students read around the class from the text and combine this with filmed modernised film adaptations versions, such as *Ten Things I Hate About You* (Junger, 1999) alongside the text of

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