Teaching Shakespeare in the Secondary English Classroom: 
*Engaging the “flat unraisèd spirits”*

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Abstract

Many high school students have negative attitudes toward studying Shakespeare in the English classroom before they even start learning about his life, his poetry, or his plays. In view of this problem, the goal of my research is to discover how a sample of secondary English teachers approach teaching Shakespeare to secondary English students. My research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews with two Shakespearean educators. The findings relate to and support other research on this topic pertaining to methods of increasing student engagement and relevancy, and creative methods of teaching Shakespeare. The findings elaborate on creative methods of assessing Shakespeare and barriers to successful Shakespeare education. This study indicates that students will learn more deeply if the classroom environment is collaborative and creative, and if they have the proper training through professional development or teacher education courses in order to teach Shakespeare effectively.

Key Words: Shakespeare, English, Engagement, Creative, Assessment, Barriers, Relevancy, Understanding, Collaborative, Diversity, Intimidation, Exposure, Poetry
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Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Background Information

In December 2010, The Royal Shakespeare Company sent out a survey to British Council offices around the world. Its goal was to find out where Shakespeare is taught in the world, how much students study Shakespeare, and why teachers believe that Shakespeare is important to include in the curriculum. To attain the information, the offices consulted with the relevant Ministry of Education and other education professionals in each country. Their findings were based on completed surveys from forty-three countries with a wide geographical and socio-political spread (RSC Education, 2011).

This large-scale study found that approximately fifty percent of students across the world are studying Shakespeare at school, and sixty-five percent of countries have Shakespeare as a named author on their curriculum. Countries where Shakespeare is studied by the majority of students in secondary schools include: Australia, Azerbaijan, Canada, China, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, India, Ireland, Italy, Kuwait, Philippines, Poland, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Sudan, Ukraine, USA, UK, Uzbekistan and Vietnam (RSC Education, 2011).

Students study a range of information pertaining to Shakespeare, from a brief introduction to his life and work, to a detailed familiarity with several of the plays. In some countries, including Azerbaijan, Georgia, Jordan and Sudan, an introduction to Shakespeare is included in widely used textbooks for English language courses. In other countries, excerpts or abridged versions of set texts are studied at certain grades. For example, Chinese students study only the trial scene from *The Merchant of Venice* in
Grade 8, and *Romeo and Juliet* and *King Lear* are popular abridged texts in Russia. Outside of the main English-speaking countries, Shakespeare is thriving in countries like Poland and the Czech Republic, which hold annual Shakespeare festivals involving educational programs (RSC Education, 2011).

Seventy percent of teachers included in the research believe in studying Shakespeare because of the intrinsic value of the plays, which include the skillful telling of stories and the universal human values found within the plays. Fifty percent also believe that Shakespeare in the classroom is relevant and useful in helping young people reflect on contemporary issues and dilemmas (RSC Education, 2011).

According to the literature, the most prevalent teaching approaches in the classroom remain the traditional, desk-bound ones that do not actively involve students in exploring Shakespeare (Sheppard & Wade, 2006). Play reading and scene summarizing are the most popular teacher-dominated methods, and students are often placed in a passive role in the classroom (Sheppard & Wade, 2006). As well, the majority of teachers assess students’ work through categorization and memorization (Irish, 2011), because although teaching through drama is often encouraged, it is still imperative for teachers to ‘teach the test’ (Coles, 2003). These methods for presenting Shakespeare leave students bored and uninspired (Haughty, 2012).

### 1.1 The Research Problem

Many high school students have negative attitudes toward studying Shakespeare before they even start learning about his life, his poetry, or his plays (Gibson, 2000). Feeling intimidated or believing that Shakespeare is boring is something that can hinder a
high school student’s ability to learn Shakespeare (Gibson, 2000). Additionally, many students feel dissociated from Shakespeare’s works and are not able to connect with the themes, text, or characters in the plays (Gibson, 2000).

In March 2010, the Centre for Educational Development, Appraisal and Research from the University of Warwick published a report that presented results from a survey measuring 15-16 year old student attitudes toward Shakespeare in 2007 and 2009 in the United Kingdom. Only eighteen percent agreed with the statement “Shakespeare is fun” and fifty percent disagreed with the statement. Almost half agreed with the statements, “Studying Shakespeare is boring” (forty-six percent) and “I find Shakespeare’s plays difficult to understand” (forty-nine percent). Even more discouraging are the responses regarding Shakespeare’s relevance to modern times. A mere thirty-five percent of students agreed with the statement, “It is important to study Shakespeare’s plays”, and only twenty percent agreed to the statement “Shakespeare’s plays help us understand ourselves and others better.” Finally, only seventeen percent said yes to the statement, “I have learnt something about myself by studying Shakespeare” (Strand and Galloway, 2010).

A best-selling Scarborough author named GP Taylor warned that having students study Shakespeare discourages them from reading other literature. Taylor described Shakespeare as "dry" and claims more modern books should be included in the curriculum to ensure pupils develop a love of reading (Parry, 2014). This is also the view of a committee of teachers appointed by the education department of Gauteng, South Africa, which wanted to ban some of the Bard's works from state school reading lists because “the Bard is too boring” (McGreal, 2001, p.1).
As well, teaching Shakespeare in the classroom sometimes contrasts with the lived experiences of both teachers and students from culturally diverse backgrounds: “The legacy of studying Shakespeare is persistent; established as a critical acculturation educational practice in the nineteenth century, the discipline of ‘English’ sought to instil Western values, tastes, and morals in attempt to ‘civilize’ the colonial subjects. Shakespeare, the paragon of English literature, was revered, and the study of his works was mandated in colonial societies because they embodied ‘Englishness’” (Balinska-Ourdeva, Johnston, Mangat, & McKeown, 2013, p. 334). Therefore, teaching Shakespeare to a classroom of students with different backgrounds may be exclusive, and may be more valuable to some students over others.

Often, the only method of assessment for Shakespeare is memorizing passages, plot points, or themes in a play: “The dull business of reading and swotting for exams requires little more than a numbed, passive response...such activities seem to be utterly cut off from any recognizable aspects of real life” (Sedgwick, 2002, p.124). Students who failed to inject their answers with quotations fail to gain more than the lowest marks. Whatever the question, basically the same type of answer is required, and the marking schemes vary only in emphasis (Coles, 2003).

1.2 The Research Goal

In view of this problem, the goal of my research is to discover various, more effective ways to assess Shakespeare, and a successful way to engage the "flat unraisèd spirits" (Shakespeare, 1.1.9) in the classroom so that students discover value and relevancy in Shakespeare’s stories and language. I accomplished this by researching
existing literature on this topic, and learning how specific teachers design lessons that incorporate Shakespeare in meaningful ways, in order to share the practices with the education community. After all, Shakespeare’s original market audience was both kings and illiterate peasants, and the plays were meant to be relatable to everyone. In fact, thousands (perhaps even millions) of performances of William Shakespeare's plays have occurred all over the world since the end of the 16th century. Additionally, more than 420 feature-length film versions of Shakespeare's plays have been produced since the early 20th century, making Shakespeare the most filmed author ever (The Guinness Book of Records, 1999).

1.3 Research Questions

The main research question guiding this paper is, how does a sample of secondary English teachers approach teaching Shakespeare to secondary English students?

Other subsidiary questions include: what instructional approaches and strategies are used to teach Shakespeare effectively? How are these teachers creating opportunities to make Shakespeare relevant to students’ identities and lives? How do these teachers assess student learning of Shakespeare? What are the teacher’s expectations of students during the Shakespeare unit, and how do they assess those expectations? What are some challenges that arise during the teaching of the Shakespeare unit?

1.4 Personal Relevance

Personally, I did not enjoy the way that Shakespeare was taught at the high school level. Although my teacher loved Shakespeare as much as I did, and talked to me
privately about our common interests, the lesson focused primarily on “round robin reading”, and making sense of the language or the plot. The lessons did not focus on creativity, engaging the other students, or finding a way to relate the Shakespearian characters and language to the students in a meaningful way. Additionally, the method of evaluation, specifically applied to the study of Shakespeare, only included memorization; the students had to memorize the characters, plot points, and recognize passages from the text.

I have loved Shakespeare and his plays since I was young, and my mother bought me A Midsummer Night’s Dream; For Kids by Lois Burdett, who is a teacher from Stratford, Ontario. I absolutely loved the hilarious story of the mixed up lovers, faeries, and magic potions, which had been rewritten in rhyming couplets and illustrated by children around my own age. Encouraged by my response, my mother went out and purchased more of the series; even today, I own A Midsummer Nights Dream, Hamlet, The Tempest, Twelfth Night, King Lear, and Macbeth. From this series, I became addicted to Shakespeare, and my mother and grandmother took me to see Shakespearean productions, where I was always the youngest person in the audience. I continued to study Shakespeare throughout university, and then attended an acting program at Shakespeare and Company in Lenox, Massachusetts, the very company where I saw my first live Shakespeare. I have acted in productions of Macbeth and Julius Caesar, as well as performed numerous scene studies from various plays, including Measure for Measure, Twelfth Night, and A Midsummer Night’s Dream. I have also taught Shakespeare at such companies as Shakespeare and Company, and Shakespeare in Action. From these experiences, I have developed a strong interest in Shakespearean
studies and a desire to support and encourage my future English students to engage with Shakespeare in a challenging and exciting way.

1.5 Conclusion

To respond to the research questions that I have posed, I have conducted a qualitative research study using purposeful sampling to interview two English teachers with a focus in Shakespearean education about their instructional strategies for meaningfully integrating and assessing Shakespeare in the classroom. In Chapter Two, I review the literature in the areas of methods of teaching, learning, and assessing Shakespeare. In Chapter Three of this paper, I elaborate on the research design. In Chapter Four, I present my research findings, and finally, in Chapter Five, I discuss these findings and their significance in relation to the literature, and the broad implications for the educational research community, as well as implications for my own practice as a beginning English teacher.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter I review the literature in the areas of early exposure to Shakespeare, actively teaching Shakespeare in the classroom, and assessment strategies for teachers. More specifically, I review themes related to teaching Shakespeare in the primary classroom, teaching Shakespeare in a collaborative, critical, and performance-based way, issues with current methods of assessment of Shakespeare, and various assessment strategies for teachers. I start by reviewing the literature in the areas of benefits of early exposure to Shakespeare, and practical methods and techniques that teachers can use in a primary classroom. Although the focus of this research paper is teaching Shakespeare in a secondary English classroom, reviewing the literature on Shakespeare in the primary classroom is crucial, in order to discover the relationship between students who have been exposed to Shakespeare early in their education, and their comfort level with Shakespeare in high school. Next, I review research on theatrical teaching, teaching in a collaborative way, and inquiry-based approaches to Shakespeare. Finally, I review assessment challenges that teachers face today, and I outline strategies for teachers to use in their classrooms.
2.1 Early Exposure to Shakespeare: “Ignorance is the curse of God; knowledge is the wing wherewith we fly to heaven” (Henry VI, Part 2, 4.7.68-69)

In this section I review the literature on exposing Shakespeare to primary school students, and I examine what age educators should first expose children to Shakespeare and his works, in order to foster a more lasting relationship with the Bard.

2.1.1 Benefits of Early Exposure

The amount of time that teachers teach Shakespeare increases yearly as students enter high school (Batho, 2006). However, childhood is an integral time for literary development (Curtis, 2008). Currently, the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) in England is studying what benefits might be gained when young children are introduced to Shakespeare.

The RSC discovered that Shakespeare should be taught early, as children four or five years old are more “fearless” and “they are used to trying out new languages” (Curtis, 2008, p.1). Shakespeare does not intimidate young children, and many of them become highly engaged with the rich and playful language, the stories, and the complex characters (Curtis, 2008). If children can derive pleasure from Shakespeare when they are young, they are perhaps more likely to develop a love for Shakespeare in the future (Richardson, 1987). Students may approach his plays with more enthusiasm in high school, and spend less time trying to understand the plot, and concentrate more on the poetry and the profundity of Shakespeare’s work (Martin, 1955).
This idea is implemented further by a study performed by George Belliveau at the University of British Columbia. He investigated how the use of specific literacy and drama-based strategies prepared and stimulated young children’s understanding and appreciation of a Shakespeare play. During the data analysis, five strategies emerged as significant learning opportunities for the students: word walls, journals, newspaper articles, reflection letters, and character masks fostered vocabulary development, understanding of plot and character motivations and the ability for the children to rehearse and perform the Shakespeare play (Belliveau, 2012). Most importantly, two years after this study was conducted, some of the students brought their copies of their work, and they re-lived memories including the creation of the set, their costumes, and the collective experience of having performed a Shakespeare play (Belliveau, 2012).

Exposing children to Shakespeare during the primary years might also ensure a broader understanding of the Shakespearean canon (i.e. the 36 plays, poems, and 154 sonnets found in the First Folio) during the high school years. A survey that Martin (1955) conducted to ascertain which Shakespearean plays were taught in high schools indicated limited exposure; only fourteen of the thirty-seven plays were explored, and only four of the fourteen (Julius Caesar, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, and Hamlet) were outstanding in the number of times taught. Exposing children to Shakespeare at an early age might widen the breadth of their knowledge.

In contrast to this line of research, Batho (2006) distributed a questionnaire in England, which showed that a quarter of teachers agreed to some degree that teaching Shakespeare earlier might put pupils off in the future. In fact, forty percent of elementary school teachers thought that Shakespeare should not be compulsory, and should be taken
out of the curriculum, although the reason why is not explicitly stated in the research (Batho, 2006). This raises questions about the benefits of exposing students to Shakespeare at an early age.

2.1.2 Practical Methods and Techniques in A Primary Classroom

One teacher in the UK had her elementary school class perform “Pyramus and Thisbe”, the play that the Mechanicals (i.e. the labourers in the play) perform in A Midsummer Night’s Dream. She familiarized the students with the language through repetitious reading and acting of the scene. As well, she showed the students the BBC version of A Midsummer Night’s Dream to introduce them to the fairy world, and finally brought the students to a live production of the play. The students were fully engaged with these experiences, because they were watching the actors perform parts that they themselves had already tried out, and they identified with the characters they had been acting. The groundwork had been done in the classroom, and so the students were able to make the most of the experience. Hopefully, when these students enter high school, they will not automatically assume that Shakespeare is difficult and irrelevant. Perhaps they will be less resistant to the arts, and they will retain the pleasure of working together to create a play (Styles, 2006).

Teachers TV/UK Department of Education released a video about making Shakespeare engaging to primary school students; it follows Jo Fife, a drama teacher at Wimbledon Park Primary School, and Annabel Gray, a teacher at Queen’s Park school. These two teachers focused on the relationships found in Shakespeare’s plays, understanding Shakespeare’s diverse and unique characters, and collaboratively working
as a classroom to understand Shakespeare’s language. For example, Fife began by showing her class a photograph of Hamlet’s family before Act 1 of the play, to ensure that her students understood the complex relationships and characters. Both teachers stressed that the students are not intimidated by Shakespeare’s language if it is presented to them in chunks; Fife compares her method of teaching to ingredients of a cake, “layer by layer, so we discuss the meaning, then we say the words out loud, get used to the feeling of the words, then we talk about different ways in which we can say the lines, then we think about how we might move to portray the emotion behind those words” (Teachers TV/UK Department of Education, 2010).

The students in Gray’s classroom reinterpreted the words of King Lear’s lines in the storm scene into their own language and meaning (Teachers TV/UK Department of Education, 2010). This method is referred to as ‘dictionary work’ in a professional company, and it aims to make the words of the text clear, but also to see all the different meanings that a word of Shakespearean text can possess.

Other methods for primary school students include in-role discussions, in which children collectively play one character and the teacher another, and games such as “Go, stop, show me” in which children move through the space and are asked to freeze into physical depictions of a character, described in Shakespeare’s words (Winston, 2013). Additionally, one of the exercises to evoke the storm in The Tempest involves the children tossing themselves about through the space of the room, as both the waves and the sailors, following the teacher, periodically stopping and calling out text scraps drawn from the sailors’ shouts at the opening of the play; through these games, the children can physically connect themselves with Shakespeare’s words (Winston, 2013).
2.2 Teaching Shakespeare Actively: “No profit grows where is no pleasure ta’en”
(Taming of the Shrew 1.1.39)

In this section I review the literature on methods of teaching Shakespeare actively, including performance-based teaching, collaborative teaching, and critical approaches. This research will address the question: what instructional approaches and strategies are used to teach Shakespeare effectively?

2.2.1 Dramatic/Theatrical Teaching

William Shakespeare wrote for the theatre, and presumably did not envision dynamic lectures of his plays in the English classroom on iambic pentameter and gender construction. Michael Flachmann, a professor and dramaturg, argued that Shakespeare does not belong in the cerebral, contemplative, tedious classroom (Reynolds, 2012). He noted that learning Shakespeare in an English classroom is both “foreign and invasive”, and cannot be compared to "the high-energy, gut-wrenching, joyful, intense, pressure-filled experience of wrestling with a play so you can perform it on stage" (Reynolds, 2012, p.163-164).

When students use drama in the classroom to explore a play, they stand up, move around, interact, and use language as if they are the characters in a text. By participating in physical and social interactions they are able to project into situations that otherwise would remain inaccessible (Edmiston & McKibbon, 2011). By contrast, readers are required to imagine people and events described in words on a page, which may render
the text intangible, and inaccessible (Reynolds, 2012). One student noted: “Moving and speaking as characters helped the most because it helps you paint a better picture in your mind, because they are right in front of you and you feel how the character feels. You don’t really get the feel[ing] when you’re just reading, because you could think it was not a big deal if you get banished or get turned down by your daughter if you’re just reading, but it is a big deal” (Edmiston & McKibben, 2011, p. 92).

Despite the studies that suggest performance-based learning is beneficial to students, the most popular teaching methods remain the traditional ones that do not actively involve students in exploring Shakespeare (Sheppard & Wade, 2006). Play-reading, literary analysis, and scene summarizing are the most popular teacher-dominated methods, where students are often guided towards the teacher’s own interpretation. Videos are employed in classroom, but students are placed in a passive role, and further interpretations are not encouraged if the director's interpretation is accepted as the dominant view (Sheppard & Wade, 2006).

However, scholarly readings of Shakespeare in the classroom may not be antithetical to Shakespeare in performance. Actors routinely research their roles and plays to achieve historical accuracy or understand the strictly literary elements of the play, with the ultimate goal of accessing the depth and variety of emotion required for the role. There may not be a total disconnect between intellect and affect.

2.2.2 The Relevance Problem

In English classrooms, education is closely linked with the question of relevance. As one eleven year old student said, “... although I know nothing about Shakespeare, I
know he’s boring” (Lighthill, 2011, p. 37). Whitehead questioned: “How many of
[Shakespeare’s] plays really come within the linguistic and emotional range of the young

In contrast with this view, Lighthill (2011) argued that Shakespeare’s body of
work constitutes, “sociological and psychological case studies for students to analyze in
parallel with our own lives” (p. 40). Shakespeare wrote complex characters who all fight
for their individual truths and beliefs, and experience conflict between, “good and bad,
courage and cowardice, fear and security” (Lighthill, 2011, p. 41), and issues that
students can relate to their own lives. The relatable characters, relationships, and
emotions, such as: “love, hate, jealousy, quarrelling, awe, despair, contempt, and
wonder” that students experience constantly may strengthen their identification with
Shakespeare (Lighthill, 2011, p. 41). English teachers might use Shakespeare’s plays to
facilitate discussions on moral issues and to exercise judgment and choices on the various
dilemmas that beset many of the characters.

Performance- oriented study, can be used to create understanding and relevance to
any text. Students may use both relevant prior experiences and their imagined
experiences when they act as if they are characters with their peers in the classroom. Life
experiences are often particularly resonant with literature, and allowing room for
emotions and play to impact study may enable students to realize Shakespeare’s
relevance.

It can be argued that modern, multi-ethnic, multilingual students have little
enthusiasm for or connection with icons of British history (Lighthill, 2011). Although
there are many sources that point to the importance of making Shakespeare relevant to
each individual student, and using a student’s life experience to understand Shakespeare, not a lot of research exists on how educators can specifically connect Shakespeare with culturally, religiously, ethnically, or racially diverse students in the classroom. The participants in one research study commented on how cultural issues posed barriers to their understanding of the plays they studied in class. The findings of this study showed that immigrant students in Alberta were unable to engage fully with the reading and to form meaningful personal interpretations of it (Balinska-Ourdeva, Johnston, Mangat, & McKeown, 2013). The findings also indicated that teachers are indispensable in assisting students with developing meaningful personal connections, and helping students to engage emotionally with Shakespeare’s words, making these words intelligible to them (Balinska-Ourdeva et al., 2013).

2.2.3 The Collaborative Classroom

According to Edmiston and McKibben (2011), “operating as an ensemble is at the core of literacy learning when literacy is not viewed as skill acquisition, but rather conceptualized as accessing and providing students and teachers with tools to transform their reading practices with texts” (p. 88). Teaching and acting are both performative professions, and there are many parallels between the ensemble approach to theatre, and the possibility of creating and experiencing an ideal of participatory democracy in classrooms. The RSC notes that: “the process of rehearsing a play is collaborative. Actors and director make discoveries by working playfully together. As a group they make choices about the plot, characters, themes and language of the play. This process is similar to ... a classroom where teacher and pupil explore a play text together” (Edmiston
& McKibben, 2011, p. 89). Young people and adults may learn from one another when they bring their social and cultural understandings, histories, concerns, and questions to shared activities that center on shared explorations of the meaning and significance of texts.

Teachers are often tempted to disconnect from students as a method of self-protection, to reduce the vulnerability that the "intersection of personal and public life" (Reynolds, 2012, p. 164). It is natural for teachers to fall into the cultural myth of “teacher as expert, as self-made, as sole bearer of power and as a product of experience” (Irish, 2011, p. 8). Many teachers fall into the role of reactionary knowledge-givers, creating an internal tension and anxiety, because students know that teachers cannot possibly know everything (Irish, 2011). If a teacher is occasionally allowed to be uncertain about a subject, students might discover more on their own, thereby creating a more collaborative classroom. For example, Irish observed ‘Kathy’, a teacher who attempted to teach Shakespeare actively in her classroom. Kathy asked a simple question, for which she did not have a preconceived answer: “Who is the most important person in the play?” (Irish, 2011, p. 11). This method of open-ended questioning allowed the students to respond variously to Kathy’s question according to their personal perspectives of the gender and power relationships within the play. Another teacher, ‘Karen’, referenced Rex Gibson who dismissed the term ‘text’ believing it to be associated with “authority, reverence, certainty” whereas “a script declares that it is to be played with, explored actively and imaginatively brought to life” in a collaborative way (Irish, 2011, p. 12). Based on the research, teachers should focus on explorations of the complex
human dilemmas that abound in the world of a Shakespearean play to build ensemble in a classroom and further the student’s knowledge of the text.

2.2.4 Critical Approaches

In an English classroom, students should be encouraged to reflect critically on the nature of the activity in which they are engaged rather than merely engaging in it. Edmiston and McKibbon (2011) used the term ‘inquiry’ to connote: “longer-term and more sustained inquiries focused by questions that are explored from competing viewpoints” (p. 94). Dramatic inquiry promotes pupils’ creation of more complex understanding and extends and deepens the connection with core themes of the play. Engaging with a critical frame shifts pupils’ minds off assumptions of difficulty about the text and allows them to focus on using extracts from the text to find possible answers to an engaging adult problem (Edmiston & McKibbon, 2011). This promotes more complexity of meaning as students ask and explore questions and engage in literacy practices that allow them to analyze and synthesize multiple views and conflicting perspectives.

It also might be suggested that a way of reading which attends to issues of ethnicity, race, gender, and class, has become available to contemporary students (Mellor & Patterson, 2000). The text should not be conceived of as containing a meaning intended by the author at a particular time, which the reader must labor to recover. Instead, the meanings of a text are produced on different occasions by various writers and readers: “A text cannot be limited by or to...the originating moment of its production” or "anchored in the intentionality of its author" (Mellor & Patterson, 2000, p. 510). For
example, “rather than asking, what does this scene mean? Or even, what does this scene mean to you? Teachers should ask complex, open-ended questions such as what are possible readings of this scene? Where could such different readings come from? How might such different readings be constructed? What values might such readings support, or affirm, or oppose?” (Mellor & Patterson, 2000, p. 512). This mode of critical questioning highlights the plurality of a text's meanings and the possibility of multiple readings.

When students are encouraged to see a range of readings assigned to a specific text or character through the lens of their personal experiences, they are able to investigate the differences among interpretations (Mellor & Patterson, 2000). This eliminates the need for Shakespeare to be banned in classrooms, for reasons such as: “Julius Caesar never ha[ving] a chance of making it past the sexism criteria, with the committee condemning the work because it ‘elevates men’ [and] Antony and Cleopatra and the Taming of the Shrew far[ing] little better, both being described as racist” (McGreal, 2001, p.1). Through critical analysis, rather than merely empathizing with or disliking a particular character or play, students can be taught to question how specific readings are produced, and interpret the text based on their experiences and values.
2.3 Assessment: “There is not either good or bad, but thinking makes it so” (Hamlet, 2.2. 234-235)

In this section I review the literature on challenges that teachers face regarding assessment, and practical evaluation strategies for teachers to use in the classroom to appraise student’s knowledge of Shakespearean texts that extend beyond memorization.

2.3.1 Issues with Assessment

Teachers are often caught between striving for a personalized and meaningful engagement for their students, while assessing and validating students’ work through categorization and memorization (Irish, 2011). Many tests construct a particular view of what it is to be a successful reader and offer a distorted model of how a play should be read (Coles, 2003). According to Yandell (2008), almost all 14-year-olds within the English state education sector complete a Standard Assessment Test (SAT) examination paper on Shakespeare. However, students in England are often presented with photocopies of the SATs scenes, and no other part of the play, thus presenting an incomplete view of Shakespeare’s plays and characters (Yandell, 2008). According to Coles, if it is generally accepted that any Shakespeare play offers the reader a complex web of ideas, theatrical possibilities, and historical and ideological perspectives expressed through richly suggestive language, then it is downright perverse to reduce the scope of a 14 year olds understanding to the constraints of a short test.

Additionally, many of the questions on the SAT exam enforce a series of assumptions about the play and about the students’ reading of the play. For example, the
question on Richard III on the 2006 exam—“how does Richard use language to deceive others and to hide his plans to become king?”—asserts that Richard uses language to deceive others, and to hide his plans to become king (Yandell, 2008, p. 74). This type of question does not allow the opportunity for the student to interpret the text or the characters. Similarly ‘dumbed down’, simplistic questions can be found on national testing in England; in 2003, the question worth 20 of the 38 marks available for the Twelfth Night paper asked students for a discursive response to: "How important is what you wear?" (Irish, 2008, p.12). Whatever the question, basically the same type of answer is required and the mark schemes vary only in emphasis (Coles, 2003). Even if teachers attempted to teach Shakespeare actively and collaboratively, they face the immense pressure of public scrutiny on test results and the imperative to ‘teach to the test’ becomes explicit.

2.3.2 Assessment Strategies

Coles (2009) encouraged using drama-based methodology to assess Shakespeare in the classroom. She suggested activities such as improvisation, role-play, small group acting/directing, tableaux, costume making, and hot seating, where one student assumes the role of a character and answers questions from classmates as that character. As Reynolds (2012) noted:

“In one of my favorite assignments, The Performance Project, students are asked to work in groups to create a theatrical staging of one scene. Each student prepares a portfolio detailing his or her interpretation of the scene and justifying specific staging choices. Students’ portfolios include: a log of meeting activities outside of the classroom;
a brief explanation of why they chose their particular scene; their vision for the scene; their assertion of the scene's significance to the play as a whole; and their explanation of design choices and casting preferences. An annotated bibliography of scholarly sources used to inform their analysis of the scene. Students pitch to the class their staging ideas and try to convince the class that their particular staging choices are valid in terms of current scholarship and will also be compelling in performance. I encourage students to perform all or part of the scene during the presentation” (p. 165).

Other than the strategies listed above, little research exists regarding appropriate assessment for Shakespeare studies.

2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review I looked at research on teaching and assessing Shakespeare in the classroom. This review elucidates the extent that attention has been paid to an ensemble-based, performative, critical approach to teaching and assessing Shakespeare, and the benefits of exposing students to Shakespeare at an early age. It also raises questions about how to educate teachers and schools about teaching Shakespeare in an effective way, and appropriate assessment strategies to test students’ knowledge. This literature review points to the need for further research concerning minimizing the gap between assessments that promote rote memorization, and exploring Shakespeare in a critical, relatable, and emotional way. As well, there is surprisingly very little research about how educators are connecting Shakespeare in the classroom in ways that make it relevant to the culturally, racially, ethnically, and religiously diverse students in their secondary classrooms. These are questions that I will address in my interview and
analysis process with a sample of two Shakespearean educators in Chapter Four. This research is important for both English and Drama teachers who do not feel comfortable teaching Shakespeare in their diverse classrooms, and need strategies and guidance in terms of effective Shakespearean teaching and assessment practices. As well, this research may benefit younger learners of Shakespeare, because hopefully teachers will begin Shakespeare education at an earlier age in the classroom. Additionally, high school students who find Shakespeare’s life and poetry dull before they even begin studying him may benefit from this active and relevant way of learning Shakespearean studies.
Chapter Three: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I describe the research methodology; I begin by reviewing the general approach, procedures and instruments of data collection, and then I elaborate on participant sampling and recruitment. I explain the data analysis procedures, and review the ethical considerations pertinent to my study. I identify key limitations and strengths of the research methodology, and finally, I provide a brief summary of key methodological decisions and the rational behind them based on my research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, including a literature review and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Throughout the process of writing this research project, I have continuously researched relevant literature from the field of Shakespearean studies to further my understanding of the topic. In addition to this extensive research, I conducted semi-structured interviews with two Shakespearean educators.

According to Creswell (2013), “qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that make the world visible. […] These practices transform the world into a series of representations, such as field notes, interviews, conversations,
photographs, recordings, and memos to the self. Qualitative research involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world” (p. 43). Qualitative research is “primarily inductive and explorative in its procedures” (Berg, Hiddema, Sol & V’ant Riet, 2001, p. 4), and it is used when a researcher wants to empower individuals to share their personal experiences about a complex issue. As well, qualitative research procedures minimize the power dynamics between researcher and participants (Creswell, 2013). Additionally, qualitative research is useful when a researcher wants to “focus on how people communicate in their own natural environments” (Borisoff & Cheseboro, 2007, p.12) and when quantitative measures may not “fit the problem”; for example, quantitative research may overlook interactions among people, as well as race, religion, and socioeconomic status (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

Given my primary research questions, I felt that a qualitative research approach would be the most suitable method for this study. As Chase et al. (2001) stated, “qualitative research seeks depth over breadth and attempts to learn subtle nuances of life experience” (p. 524). I wanted to explore my research topic by listening to first-hand accounts of practical teaching experiences, practices, and anecdotes from knowledgeable Shakespearean teachers, in order to gain a detailed understanding of effective teaching and assessing Shakespeare in the classroom. As well, a qualitative research approach provides insight into teaching Shakespeare to a variety of students in different circumstances and contexts.
3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

I used a semi-structured interview protocol as the primary instrument of data collection for this research study. Semi-structured interviews are defined as having predetermined questions, but they also allow for follow up questions and elaborations. This style “allows the interviewer to modify the style, pace and ordering of questions to evoke the fullest responses from the interviewee” (Dumay & Qu, 2011, p. 246). This is effective because the interviewer remains open to new or unforeseen information, while also guiding the interview in the direction of the research topic. Additionally, semi-structured interviews allow interviewees to provide responses in their own terms and language about their personal experiences, and allow participants to redirect and elaborate on certain topics that are meaningful to them (Dumay & Qu, 2011). Therefore, this protocol is effective and an “enriching experience for interviewees, who obtain new insights on their research theme” (Dumay & Qu, 2011, p. 243), as well as effective for the interviewer, who is able to understand “the way the interviewees perceive the social world under study” (Dumay & Qu, 2011, p. 246). My specific research protocol spoke back explicitly to my research purpose and questions, and is organized based on my research questions and the themes from the literature review.

Given my research purpose and the questions that I have, this protocol is suitable because the semi-structured interview “has the advantage of being reasonably objective while still permitting a more thorough understanding of the respondents’ opinions and the reason behind them” (Carruthers, 1990, p. 65) as opposed to a survey, questionnaire, or classroom observation. I felt that a firsthand account of practical teaching experience and
practices from qualified educators would provide insight into teaching Shakespeare to a variety of students in different circumstances.

While writing my interview questions (Appendix B), I wanted to groups them into clear categories: background information, beliefs/values, teacher practices, influencing factors, and next steps. I made sure that my interview questions aligned with my research questions, and that they were clear, open-ended, and neutral. I wanted the questions to reflect the strategies, assessment techniques, and personal views of English teachers who were emphasizing Shakespearean relevance in their classrooms. During the interviews, I tried to create “intimacy, reciprocity, and collaborative relationships” (Limerick, Burgess-Limerick, & Grace, 1996, p. 450) with the participants, so that they felt comfortable and safe in the interview environment. As well, I aimed to “minimize the power relationships that often exist between the researcher and participant in a study” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48), by allowing the participant to choose the time and place of the interview, and briefly talking with them in a casual manner before the interview began to put them at ease, so that the answers to the interview questions could be relevant, well thought-out, and motivating. The educators that I interviewed were extremely generous and thorough in their responses; I learned a lot from my dialogue with them.

3.3 Participants

In this section, I review the sampling criteria I established for participant recruitment, and I explore a range of possible avenues for participant recruitment. I have
also included a section wherein I introduce each participant involved in this research study.

3.3.1 Sampling Criteria

The participants in this study were chosen based on certain criteria:

- They must have taught Shakespeare for at least five years
- They must have demonstrated commitment and leadership in the area of teaching Shakespeare, and making Shakespeare relevant for students
- They must be current high school teachers who teach on a Shakespeare unit during the time of the interview

The educators in this research study must have five years of teaching experience because I am interested in looking at a long range of classroom practices in order to gain a broad understanding of various types of classroom dynamics, teaching and assessment strategies, and responses to learning Shakespeare. Teachers must be willing to share their anecdotes and personal attitudes about teaching Shakespeare in the classroom so that they do not feel forced during the interview process, but instead willing and motivated to speak in their own words about their experiences. The participants must demonstrate commitment and leadership in terms of teaching the Shakespeare unit, because I want to interview teachers who recognize the value of Shakespeare and the relevancy of his works. Finally, they must be current
Shakespearean teachers, because I would like to interview educators who are continuously and currently revising and reflecting on their teaching and assessment practices.

3.3.2 Sampling Procedures

I located the participants for my research study through purposeful sampling. This method is suitable for my research study because it allowed me to “select individuals for study because they can purposefully inform an understanding of the research problem and central phenomenon in the study” (Creswell, 2013, p.56). As well, my sample size consists of only two teachers, because that allowed me to “collect extensive detail about each individual studied” (Creswell, 2013, p. 157). To recruit participants, I relied on my existing network of contacts in the Shakespearean field, as well as immersing myself in my community of teacher colleagues. For instance, I drew upon my relationship with a specific mentor from my high school who teaches Shakespeare studies.

One ethical issue that could have arose from this sampling protocol is the educators may feel forced or pressured to participate in my research study, as a result of their desire to help out rather than altruistically wishing to contribute to the research study (Chapman, Francis, James, McConnell-Henry, 2009, p. 7). To prevent this, I stressed to the participants before the interview process that they should only participate if they are entirely comfortable and have a desire to help out with the data in the study.
3.3.3 Participant Biographies

Rachel

Rachel has been teaching at a private Jewish High School for eleven years. She teaches grade 9, grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12 English, as well as Media Studies, Writer’s Craft and Drama. She has felt a connection to Shakespeare and his language from the time she was a student. Rachel’s parents both loved plays, and so she would go see productions of Shakespeare’s works with her family. This interest continued through university, where she continued to take courses specific to Shakespeare, including Shakespeare in film.

Tom

Tom teaches at a public school in the Toronto District School Board. He teaches grade 9, grade 10, grade 11, and grade 12 English, as well as English as a Second Language and Media Studies. His connection to Shakespeare began when his mother took him to see the play *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* when he was a child. He grew up with an appreciation for theatre, and continued to study Shakespeare and his works while in university.
3.4 Data Analysis

I recorded each interview with a digital recorder, and then I transcribed the interviews. After transcribing the two interviews, I read and coded each transcript separately to isolate certain categories of data, using my research questions as an interpretive tool. Coding is a crucial step in the research process, because, “coding is the necessary prerequisite for a systematic comparison of text passages: text segments are retrieved and analyzed in order to discover 'dimensions' which can be used as a basis for comparing different cases” (Glase & Laudel, 2013, p. 18). I completed the preliminary cycle and second cycle coding for my two interviews by marking up a hard copy of my interview with pencil with possible codes. I found descriptive coding, which “assigns basic labels to data to provide an inventory of their topics” (Saldana, 2008, p. 66), in-vivo coding, defined as “keep[ing] the data rooted in the participant’s own language” (Saldana, 2008, p.6), and value coding, “to capture and label subjective perspectives” (Saldana, 2008, p. 7). I then read through my interview transcript a second time to make sure I coded all the information. Next, I consolidated the themes that seemed repetitive, and created a second cycle of coding (Appendix C). Some of my second cycle codes include: natural hooks based on lived experience, pop culture and Shakespeare, and reading vs. understanding.

I then identified specific themes within each category for each interview transcript. Next, I compared the categories and themes from each transcript, and synthesize themes where appropriate. I was mindful of common themes between the transcripts, divergences in the data, as well as null data, “in order to get past the data
record, to a category, and work with all the data segments about the category” (Richards, 2005, p. 86). I then spoke to what is important about the themes, and their meanings in the project (Richards, 2005), given the existing research found in my literature review (Creswell, 2013). The results are in the “Findings” (see Chapter 4) section of this research paper.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Each participant was given a letter of informed consent before completing the interview. The letter was read and signed by each participant, and they were each given a copy. Another copy was retained as part of the records for this study (see Appendix A). Participants must have signed the letter to give consent to be interviewed as well as audio recorded. The consent letter provides an overview of the study, addresses the ethical implications of the study, and specifies the expectations of participation.

Prior to the interview, the participant was given all the necessary information on confidentiality, consent, and content, in order to create complete comfort during the interview process. Participants were told that they had a right to withdraw from the study at any point of the research process. If they chose to participate in this study, the teachers were told that the data (including the audio recording and the transcripts) from the interviews would be stored on a password-protected computer, and destroyed after five years. There are no known risks or benefits to participants for assisting in the project.

Before each interview, I reviewed my research topic for the participant, and highlighted that they were free to decline to answer any specific questions. As well, I
stressed that the participants were free to change their views on any of the questions asked at any point during the interview. The willingness of the participants to have their results included in this research project was confirmed orally before the process began. During the interview, there were no changes or deviations from the procedure that had been discussed. After the interview process, participants were given the option to review the notes, and clarify or retract any information before data analysis.

To protect the participants’ anonymity, pseudonyms are used throughout the research project. All personal and individual-specific information, such as information on their school or students, was modified or removed as necessary to protect the identity of the research participant. My course instructor had access to my assignment work. Each participant was aware that my course instructor would review the data in this research paper.

Ethical considerations have to be taken into account in order to create a supportive, respectful relationship between the researcher and participant, and to establish balanced power dynamics (Creswell, 2013). It is crucial to protect the participants from any risks associated with a study, and to build trust during the research process (Creswell, 2013). Ethical considerations are also in place to preserve the “dignity and privacy of individuals, the avoidance of harm and the confidentiality of research findings” (Dumay & Qu, 2011, p. 252). Qualitative research deals with real people, as opposed to ‘subjects’ who deserve respect as well as ethical treatment (Soltis, 2006).
3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

One limitation of this research study is the small sample size of the participants, as well as the limited scope of the research. Based on the ethical parameters of this research study, I was only able to interview a limited number of teachers. As well, I was not able to conduct interviews with parents or students, which may have presented me with a more complete picture of various attitudes towards Shakespeare studies, as well as effective practices of Shakespeare in the classroom from different perspectives. I was unable to administer surveys, which “reach thousands of people with common characteristics in a short amount of time, despite possibly being separated by great geographic distances” (Wright, 2005, p.2), in order to expand the geographical boundaries of my study in a time efficient manner. Additionally, I was unable to partake in classroom observation, which is, “a key tool for collecting data in qualitative research, [whereby], [I could have] watch[ed] physical settings, participants, activities, interactions, conversations…” (Creswell, 2013, p. 166). Therefore, I was unable to gain a first-hand account of Shakespeare being taught in the natural environment of the classroom. Therefore, this research informs the paper topic, but the experiences of the teachers who were interviewed cannot be generalized in a broader sense in order to create a more complete picture of effective Shakespearean teaching practices in diverse contexts and circumstances. As well, because of the direction of my research, and the time constraints, my interview questions were limited, because I did not explore every area of Shakespearean education, and my research is not generalizable to every classroom or every educator.
Despite these limitations, one strength of this research study is the depth of the information from the teachers who participated in the semi-structured interview process. The personal anecdotes from the educators are far more complex and detailed than data from a survey, or observations from a classroom. These interviews validated teacher voice, and allowed the participants to speak in their own words about their various experience in the classroom, and the areas of importance to them in relation to this topic. As well, the semi-structured interview process allowed teachers to reflect on their current teaching practices, their rational behind these practices, and pedagogical decision-making.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a summary of the methodological decisions used in this study, and the rational behind them, given my research questions and purpose. My research study was conducted using a qualitative research approach, using semi-structured interviews with two Shakespearean teachers. These teachers were chosen based on number of years in the profession, their leadership and commitment to the Shakespeare unit and its relevancy, and their currency in the Shakespearean field. When seeking out participants for the interview process, I relied on my existing contacts and my network of peers. I reviewed the ethical procedures that participants underwent, such as signing a consent form allowing them to be interviewed as well as audio recorded, their ability to withdraw from the study at any point during the research process, and their right to change or remove any information from the transcripts before the data analysis stage.
As well, I provided methodological limitations of the study, such as the limited research scope, and strengths of the study, such as acquiring in depth, detailed, and personal experiences from experienced teachers. Next, in Chapter Four, I report my research findings.
Chapter Four: Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I report and discuss the findings from in-person interviews with two current secondary school English teachers, Rachel and Tom. Upon analyzing the data, I identified three overarching themes, and corresponding subthemes. They include: Strategies that make Shakespeare Relevant and Engaging to Students, Learning Expectations and Assessment Strategies, and Barriers of Shakespearean Education in the English Classroom for Students and Teachers. Additionally, I identified the following subthemes: ‘Natural Hooks’ Based on Lived Experiences to Increase Relevancy, Enthusiasm Breeds Enthusiasm, Diverse Approaches to Engage Students with Shakespeare, Teacher Expectations of Students and Key Considerations of the Shakespeare Unit, Creative Assessment Strategies as Checks for Student Understanding, The Intimidation Factor, and Connecting Shakespeare to a Multicultural Audience.

This chapter is organized using headers and sub-headers, where each theme is a header, and each subtheme is a sub-header. The educators that I interviewed were extremely thorough in their responses, and the information that I obtained from these interviews has been invaluable in providing further insight into instructional approaches and strategies that are being used to teach and assess Shakespeare in an effective, engaging and relevant way.

1 Rachel and Tom are pseudonyms
4.1 Strategies that make Shakespeare Relevant and Engaging to Students

In their interviews, both educators spoke in detail about various strategies and teaching experiences that led to higher levels of student engagement and participation in the classroom with the Shakespeare unit. As well, participants conveyed that these approaches led to students feeling more connected to Shakespeare’s characters and themes. This theme addresses the subsidiary research questions: ‘what range of instructional approaches and strategies are used to teach Shakespeare effectively?’, and ‘how are these teachers creating opportunities to make Shakespeare relevant to students’ identities and lives?’ I discuss three relevant subthemes connected to engaging students with the Shakespeare unit in the English classroom: ‘Natural Hooks’ Based on Lived Experiences to Increase, Enthusiasm Breeds Enthusiasm, and Diverse Approaches to Engage Students with Shakespeare.

4.1.1 ‘Natural Hooks’ Based on Lived Experiences to Increase Relevancy

In order to promote student engagement in the classroom, the educators that I interviewed made an effort to connect the central themes in Shakespeare’s plays to students’ lived experiences, and encouraged the students to observe the relevancy of Shakespeare to their lives. As Rachel noted, “some of those ideas have a lot of relevance with our kids, so there’s less trying to hook them, than almost they’re naturally hooked by these stories”.
Both teachers agreed that the main themes in Shakespearean works are so comprehensive, that instead of connecting with the over-the-top, archetypical characters, each student can connect to a universal theme, and relate it to their own lives: “they share the humanity and understanding of where the characters of coming from, [and they] make connections”. According to Tom, students in his classroom connect Shakespearean plays to their own lives, because they are about “human interaction, human feelings, and the human experience, and it’s interesting to see how there are a lot of things that are still the same”. Tom encourages his students to make connections to their lives, the outside world, or another text with Shakespeare’s works, to give them the ability to think about how they feel or connect to it in a way that makes it real. Rachel creates opportunities for her students to make connections to Shakespeare by using various popular culture resources that have drawn upon Shakespeare’s work, including excerpts from *Game of Thrones* and *The Simpsons*. Additionally, connections to Shakespeare are created by listening to the song ‘What a Piece of Work is Man’ from the musical *Hair*, because it draws on text from *Hamlet*. Rachel comments that, “Shakespeare’s stories are the basis of so much of our culture now, […] it’s all rooted back to the ideas that Shakespeare had in his plays”. This supports Lighthill’s (2011) idea that Shakespeare wrote complex characters who experience common conflicts and issues that students can easily relate to and analyze in correspondence with their own experiences. Students who believe that Shakespeare is dull or irrelevant may benefit greatly from the teaching strategy of making connections between themes in Shakespeare’s works and their own lives, as well as partaking in discussions centered around moral issues, character motivations, and the scope of human emotion.
There are many specific themes that relate to high school students in Shakespeare’s numerous plays, such as *Julius Caesar, Macbeth, and Hamlet*. For example, Tom commented that, “Macbeth goes to great lengths because of pressure from somebody, so it’s a perfect time to talk about peer pressure and manipulation”. *Hamlet* connects to struggles that students might be going through, such as divorce and loss. As well, Rachel remarked that teaching *The Merchant of Venice* in a Jewish high school generates an inherent interest because of the students’ frame of reference for the character Shylock:

Shakespeare has a Jewish character, seen as ‘the other, seen as ‘the buffoon’, and I think that is a great way to make it relevant to these students, because they all either associate with it, they have that experience, or their parents or grandparents have had that.

Drawing on these specific themes and students’ current knowledge about the world grounds these classics texts in something they understand. As is previously stated in the literature review, life experiences are often resonant with literature, and may enable students to appreciate Shakespeare’s relevance.

4.1.2 Enthusiasm Breeds Enthusiasm

Both educators recognized the importance of exuding passion and enthusiasm while teaching the Shakespeare unit. They agreed that the students will engage if the
teacher really loves Shakespeare; as Tom noted “there’s this weird emotional transference you have with the kids, where if you’re passionate, they can’t help but […] latch on to that”. For instance, Tom purchases foam swords for his classroom to use in his Shakespeare lessons, and noted that:

The way that it’s presented, and the person that presents it, it really changes the way they learn. I know these other teachers that do the same lessons that I do, but they don’t like the kids moving or breathing, so it’s interesting stuff, but the kids are too afraid to ask questions, or interact.

In her interview, Rachel added that in her experience, if the teacher loves a text, the kids tend to fall in love with it too.

Additionally, Tom and Rachel agreed that making Shakespeare lessons fun and enjoyable is a major component of engaging their students. In Rachel’s professional experience,

When it is seen as a boring, dusty text that we have to do, the kids feel that, and if you can make fresh, vibrant, and exciting for the kids… I find when I have my coffee, and I go into class and literally tap dance around the room, playing with different accents, it gets them engaged. When you’re having fun, the kids are having fun.
This method of teaching has largely positive outcomes for students. Tom mentioned that he could not count the number of students that came up to him and told him, “I’ve never enjoyed Shakespeare that much in my entire life!”. This subtheme connects back to Irish (2011), who claimed that teachers typically distance themselves from students, and usually fall into the role of detached knowledge-givers in the classroom. According to the teachers that I interviewed, enthusiastic and passionate teachers who make the learning process fun and interactive observe positive outcomes and higher level of engagement in the classroom.

4.1.3 Diverse Approaches to Engage Students with Shakespeare

The teachers that I interviewed both mentioned that the Ontario curriculum allows them to be flexible and creative with their teaching of the Shakespeare unit, as well as choose the works that they prefer to teach. For example, Tom said: “you can do whatever with [the students], as long as you know the curriculum connections, there’s a lot of ways you can get there. There are few limitations and I can be creative with Shakespeare”.

According to the participants, there are multiple ways to effectively introduce the Shakespeare unit to students. Tom believes that the students engage with information on Shakespeare himself, as well as his era: “how he lived, like with the Black Plague, having access to people’s lives at court… I want them to understand his motivations, and how he grew up”. Rachel does not use this particular strategy to introduce the Shakespeare unit in her classroom: “I find that it almost doesn’t really matter, because to understand the author is one route, and to understand the plays is another”. Ultimately, the teachers are
in agreement that whichever strategies engage the students should be used in the classroom, such as highlighting favorite or meaningful lines, or emphasizing Shakespeare’s contribution to the English language. As well, their teaching methods coincide in terms of being aware of specific class needs. For example, Rachel noted:

I think you really have to read the class, and read the group, cuz some groups may be in the younger grades where the boys can’t sit still, and then you use that to your advantage to have them acting out the play a lot more. Whereas some of the older grades, where they can sit, you can really get to explore the text in much more detail, maybe not as much movement, because they have the ability to sit and concentrate. So I think you really have to judge the individual class, and the individual student needs.

This instructional approach also applies to each specific class; for example, if the students are not responding to one strategy, the teacher should choose another tactic based on the energy of the classroom.

One of the most important teaching strategies that both educators stressed in their interviews is learning as a group in the classroom, as opposed to self-learning outside of the school environment. Tom stated that, “I read it together with them, I never assign it as homework, because I think it’s better to engage with it in person, because it’s a play, to have them read it might be boring”. Rachel added, “they have a good understanding because we go over everything in class, and we’re always discussing and talking about the characters, the conflicts, and the issues that come up”. This strategy allows for
students to engage with the text, and focus on the characters, themes, and storylines, without feeling overwhelmed by the complexity of the language. As well, when the majority of the learning is done in class, the teachers have the opportunity to differentiate the instruction, so that all students can understand the text using their strongest abilities. This approach also encourages student bonding, because the students can look at each other, and interact with each other while exploring the text. This idea connects to Edmiston and McKibben’s (2011) research, which stated that the process of rehearsing a play is similar to a classroom setting where the teacher and students analyze a play together. Students and teachers can learn from each other when they bring their cultural backgrounds, experiences, interests, and questions to shared activities that center on explorations of the meaning and significance of texts.

The second strategy that both educators emphasized is engaging with performative resources, such as films and theatrical productions of Shakespearean plays. Rachel noted that,

If you can show [the students] a good movie, or a special Shakespearean actor saying the line the way they’re supposed to be heard, I think it makes a world of difference for the kids. It just sounds so beautiful that the kids can engage on different levels

Tom uses these films as a means of comparison with the written play, so that students generate their own understanding of the play, and then watch the director’s interpretation of the same text. This method opposes Sheppard and Wade’s (2006) research, which
suggested that when students watch videos in the classroom, they are placed in a passive role, and they are not encouraged to construct their own interpretation of the text, but rather accept the director’s interpretation. Both teachers also take their students to live theatre when it is possible, at companies such as Hart House, Stratford, and Classical Theatre Project, which allows the students to engage with the texts as plays that are meant to be seen.

One strategy identified by the participants that I did not observe in the literature is using Shakespeare across the curriculum. For example, Tom uses *Macbeth* to inspire a media unit on peer pressure and manipulation; he draws the parallel between the character Macbeth, who goes to great lengths because of pressure and influence from his wife, and the media manipulating the public: “we do a media unit where we talk about how the media manipulates messages, information, and uh, to be a more critical thinker, you have to be able to detect the manipulation or they’re going to get you subconsciously”.

Similarly, Rachel uses *Julius Caesar* to motivate a media unit on advertisements, propaganda and different perspectives:

We look at different posters, whether from World War II, to even modern day advertisements, and how they manipulate the audience, and see things in different ways. We look at the speeches of Brutus, and Antony, and how they manipulate people, and how when Brutus speaks, everyone follows Brutus and then Antony speaks second, and then he’s able to manipulate everyone.
According to the participants, these methods of creative and flexible teaching of the Shakespeare unit visibly boost student interest, participation, and confidence in the classroom.

4.2 Learning Expectations and Assessment Strategies

In this section, I cover various strategies that help support student understanding of the pertinent information in the unit, and various assessment tools that teachers use to check for understanding. As well, I discuss the appropriate age to begin studying Shakespeare. This theme covers the research questions: ‘How do these teachers assess student engagement with Shakespeare?’ and, ‘what are the teacher’s expectations of students during the Shakespeare unit, and how do they assess those expectations?’ I examine two significant subthemes concerning the assessment of the Shakespeare unit: Teacher Expectations of Students and Key Considerations of the Shakespeare Unit, and Creative Assessment Strategies as Checks for Student Understanding.

4.2.1 Teacher Expectations of Students and Key Considerations of the Shakespeare Unit

When discussing the goals of the Shakespeare unit, both teachers stressed that it is crucial to have realistic expectations of the students. Tom noted that it is nearly impossible to engage every student in the class all of the time: “in my class it’s not a bunch of English majors, I’m looking at teenagers, and kids, and I try to root myself in that reality”. He also differentiates his instruction based on the age of the students; for example, he does not teach King Lear and Hamlet to grade nine and ten, because the themes within the plays may be too complex for the younger audience.
Rachel believes that it is possible to teach Shakespeare too early; however, certain parents want their young children to learn Shakespeare’s stories because they are associated with prestige: “if you push too early sometimes, the kids will just get intimidated, and then move away from it”. Interestingly, despite their views, both educators were exposed to and enjoyed Shakespeare at an early age. Rachel said “my parents would take us when we were kids to see productions so it was part of my family structure and culture”. Tom’s mother introduced him to Shakespeare through a production of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* for children, which “blew [his] mind”. Although both teachers agree that younger students cannot handle the more complex plays, they were both exposed to these stories at a young age, and enjoyed them immensely. As well, research by Curtis (2008) stated that when four or five-year-old children are exposed to Shakespeare, they do not feel intimidated by the language, and they engage with the vibrant characters and brilliant stories. Richardson (1987) furthered this research, by writing that if children can connect to Shakespeare’s works at a young age, they are more likely to develop a love for Shakespeare as adults. Shakespeare does not necessarily have to correlate with ‘prestige’; students can have fun learning about Shakespeare through a myriad of games and exercises that focus on physically connecting them to different plays, such as “Go, Stop, Show me” (Winston, 2003).

The first major learning goal for the Shakespeare unit that Rachel and Tom emphasized was the recognition of the beauty and specificity of Shakespeare’s language. Rachel remarked: “In our current society of using social media, there is such a disregard for choosing words and being specific in language, and Shakespeare’s language is so beautiful and there’s a melody to it. There is actual beauty in his language”. The teachers
agreed that, ultimately, their second major learning goal is wanting the plays to provoke students’ thoughts and feelings, and to promote genuine appreciation of Shakespeare, his language and his works. This connects back to research concerning the merits of early exposure to Shakespeare. Martin (1955) stated that if students learn Shakespeare at a young age, they do not have to concentrate on the unfamiliar language in high school; rather, they can focus on the depth of the works, and the rich language—the ultimate learning goals of Rachel and Tom.

4.2.2 Creative Assessment Strategies as Checks for Student Understanding

There is very little research on creative assessment techniques for the Shakespeare unit, and research by Irish (2011) suggested that many English teachers continue to check for student understanding using dull tactics, such as memorization, tests, and essays. Rachel and Tom do not give tests to assess their students’ understanding of this unit, because it is a boring means of assessment that promotes regurgitation of the material, instead of more complex, critical thinking about the plays. Tom stated, “it’s about having them not be afraid of it, and not be afraid to try to understand it, not because they’re going to be tested on it, but because there is some amazing stuff in there that’s worth actually understanding”. Rachel furthered this point, by saying that when a teacher adds a test to the stress of deconstructing Shakespeare’s language, students become increasingly anxious about the unit, and do not enjoy or engage with the plays.

Both teachers offered a myriad of alternative strategies to creatively assess the Shakespeare unit, including performative assessment, creative writing, and media-related
assessment. Tom stressed: “you gotta act it out! I’ve done things before where they can either do it conventionally, or do an interpretation of it, in a different context”. Rachel encourages lots of movement and theatrical techniques in her class,

I try really hard to make it an environment where we act out scenes, where we play with voices, sometimes I’ll have the kids reread a line with more enthusiasm, more anger, screaming, or whatever it is to get them out of their shell, out of their comfort zone.

According to these educators, the students enjoy this kind of assessment, and their understanding of the characters and the text becomes clear. This provides support to the research by Edmiston and McKibbon (2011), which asserted that when students use drama in the classroom to explore a Shakespearean play as if they are the characters, they engage with the text on a personal level and the text becomes increasingly accessible and comprehensible to them.

Other examples of creative assessment from Rachel and Tom include journals entries as various characters, acrostic poems to describe the characters, and magazine articles on topics based on the relevant themes in the plays. For instance, when the students in Rachel’s classroom study *The Merchant of Venice*, they may write an advice column for Portia, advertisements for Portia’s law firm, or Shylock’s gold emporium, and personality quizzes with Portia’s different suitors. Rachel noted that she can, “really understand who really thinks about the characters, and the conflicts, to get to the heart of the ideas, and it’s a really fun evaluation for them” based on this assessment. While
studying *Hamlet*, the students in Tom’s classroom created posters of Hamlet’s mind, using artifacts, drawings, lyrics, music, lines from the play, and other materials. Tom remarked, “it showed me that they got the depth that I was aiming for, they actually got what I was teaching them, with the loss, and the identity crisis”. According to the two educators, this method of assessment increases participation in the classroom, and prompts a more thorough understanding of the plays. Additionally, creative assessment leads to a decrease in student stress levels having to do with the perceived complexity of the Shakespeare unit, and their grades: “they’re so engaged with it that they’re not worried about that mark”. This relates to Mellor and Patterson’s (2000) research, which encouraged looking at multiple interpretations of the text to promote complexity of meaning, and not merely memorizing ‘the correct answer’. The literature had little insight on creative assessment as a tool to check student understanding, but the participants that I interviewed provided numerous strategies and examples on this topic.

### 4.3 Barriers of Shakespearean Education in the English Classroom for Students and Teachers

In this section, I examine the outcomes of considering Shakespeare a daunting unit, and the importance of making Shakespeare accessible within a diverse environment. I cover the following research questions: ‘how are these teachers creating opportunities to make Shakespeare relevant to students’ identities and lives?’, and ‘what are some challenges that arise during the teaching of the Shakespeare Unit?’. As well, I identify two subthemes relating to the obstacles that continue to exist for teachers and students
with Shakespeare in the classroom: The Intimidation Factor and Connecting Shakespeare to a Multicultural Audience.

4.3.1 The Intimidation Factor

The majority of the literature on this topic cited students’ intimidation of the complex language and themes in Shakespeare’s works as barriers to learning. For example, Gibson (2000) wrote that feeling intimidated by Shakespeare can directly affect a student’s ability and desire to learn about him and his works. Tom mentioned,

Shakespeare strikes fear in people, and it comes loaded with emotions, so I think for me that’s one of the biggest challenges, is presenting it in a way that isn’t so intimidating. I want them to think how accessible it could be if they give it a little bit of attention and patience.

However, referring back to the effectiveness of early exposure to Shakespeare in section 4.2.1 (‘Teacher Expectations of Students and Key Considerations of the Shakespeare Unit’), and the research by the UK department of Education that suggested that students are not intimidated by Shakespeare’s language if it is presented in chunks, it is clear that students have the ability to overcome their intimidation levels. In fact, it is often not the students that are intimidated by Shakespeare, but the English teachers who are afraid to teach the plays, and may find his works incomprehensible. The outcome of teacher intimidation is a general ‘dumbing down’ of Shakespeare, and employing strategies such
as converting the text to modern English, or using social media as a teaching platform. As Rachel notes:

Some teachers use twitter, where you write as a character… and I just don’t want to dumb down Shakespeare. I don’t want to continue lessening our language, which I think is a really big issue. I want to raise the kids, and their understanding of language

This supports Coles’ (2003) research, which discussed ‘dumbed down’ questions on Shakespeare’s plays on national tests in England. As well, referring back to section 4.1.2 (‘Enthusiasm Breeds Enthusiasm’), if a teacher is not engaged with or knowledgeable about a play, the students will tend not to be excited about the text.

The two participants that I interviewed did not find Shakespeare an intimidating subject to teach, but emphasized their concerns regarding colleagues being intimidated by the unit. Tom provided one strategy during his interview to help teachers overcome their fear of Shakespeare: “if I’m going to teach a Shakespeare play, I analyze the hell out of it, so I can know it enough to teach it properly. So it does take work and it does take time”. Although the participants conveyed that the Shakespeare unit is labour intensive to teach, they did not express feeling intimidated. This may be a result of each participant’s early exposure to Shakespeare and his stories, as discussed in section 4.2.1 (‘Teacher Expectations of Students and Key Considerations of the Shakespeare Unit’). However, the research indicates that many teachers do feel intimidated by the Shakespeare unit. Neither of the educators mentioned accessible resources or knowledge of practical
strategies that are available to help their colleagues decrease their fear of teaching Shakespeare. This finding suggests that appropriate preparation and ongoing professional development for educators teaching Shakespeare might be beneficial. In the future, I would like to further elucidate this important topic with additional research and interviews, and discover practical strategies for teachers so they do not feel overly intimidated by teaching Shakespeare.

4.3.2 Connecting Shakespeare to a Multicultural Audience

According to research by Lighthill (2011), modern, multi-ethnic, multilingual students may have trouble connecting to and showing enthusiasm for Shakespeare’s works. Not a lot of research exists on how educators can engage ethnically, culturally, or racially diverse students in the English classroom. Although Rachel teaches students who have a common ethnicity and religion, she mentioned the desire to include a multicultural Shakespeare text such as Othello in the curriculum. She believes that it would be beneficial to use Shakespeare’s works as a tool to introduce and explore other cultures with her students. Tom also recognized the issue in his multicultural class, “I think when people picture the ethnicity of a lot of the characters, they think white English people”. Tom raised the concern about teaching Shakespeare to a multicultural class of students, who have “less empathy for rich, white, upper class people”. Both teachers are in favor of and see the value in making Shakespeare accessible to students with various life perspectives.
Although Tom mentioned that, “students need guidance, and somebody to steer their perspective towards how we can all relate to him”, neither of the participants spoke to the subtleties or practical suggestions of how to accomplish this goal. Tom proposed including newer plays with relevant themes such as gender identity, but did not directly address the issue of making Shakespeare’s plays more accessible to a diverse audience. Making Shakespeare more relevant to a wider array of ethnicities, cultures, and races is a topic that I would like to explore further in any future research.

4.4 Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed the results of my interviews with two current high school English teachers, Rachel and Tom, who have a specific interest in Shakespeare studies, in terms of three main themes.

The first of these themes is Strategies that make Shakespeare Relevant and Engaging to Students; under this theme, I examined the natural hooks or entry points into Shakespeare’s works that promote student engagement, passionate and committed teachers that inspire their students, and creative methods of teaching the Shakespeare unit to capture student interest. Specific strategies that engage students with the Shakespeare unit include connecting Shakespeare’s themes to the students’ lives, experiences, and environments, as well as exploring the plays as a group in class and across the curriculum.

The second theme is Learning Expectations and Assessment Strategies; within this theme, I discussed certain considerations that teachers have to be mindful of when
teaching the Shakespeare unit, such as having realistic expectations of students, and tailoring the unit to various age groups. As well, I examined the specific learning goals that teachers have for students in the Shakespeare unit, including developing an appreciation of Shakespeare’s works, his beautiful language, and his contribution to English literature. I also introduced creative assessment strategies to check for student understanding, such as performative assessment, writing from different character perspectives, and artistic projects.

Finally, the third theme that I identified is Barriers of Shakespearean Education in the English Classroom for Students and Teachers; the subcategories of this theme included student and teacher intimidation of Shakespeare’s language and plays, and the issue of engaging students with diverse backgrounds. The participants did not speak about specific information, practical techniques, and resources that are available to them in terms of decreasing their intimidation of teaching Shakespeare, as well as the challenge of ensuring equity to all students in the class.

In Chapter Five, I will speak to the significance of my findings for beginning teachers, and for the educational community more broadly. I will also identify areas for further research given my analysis, and make recommendations based on my findings to the Ministry of Education concerning professional development and teacher education.
Chapter Five: Implications

5.0 Introduction

The present study was designed to learn more about how a sample of secondary English teachers approach teaching Shakespeare to secondary English students. In this chapter, I summarize my findings, and I discuss how the findings relate to and support other research as reported in my literature review, pertaining to methods of increasing student engagement and creative methods of teaching Shakespeare. Specifically, my findings expand on creative methods of assessing Shakespeare, and barriers to successful Shakespeare education. I speak to the significance of my findings for both myself as a beginning teacher and researcher, and for the educational research community more broadly. I also provide recommendations for teachers and The Ministry of Education concerning professional development and teacher education. I also examine areas of further research. The headings and sub-headings of this chapter include:

1. Overview of Key Findings and Significance
2. Implications
   - Broad Implications
   - Narrow Implications
3. Recommendations
4. Areas for Further Research
5.1 Overview of Key Findings and Significance

Following interviews with two educators, a rigorous analysis revealed three important themes and various corresponding subthemes. In this section, each theme acts as a subheading; I will review and summarize each of the themes and subthemes, and I will connect my data with other researchers’ ideas and studies.

5.1.1 Strategies that make Shakespeare Relevant and Engaging to Students

Under the first theme that I identified in Chapter Four, I discussed various strategies that two educators use to promote student engagement in the classroom, including connecting Shakespeare’s characters and themes to the lived experiences and current knowledge of students, creating an exciting and lively atmosphere while teaching the Shakespeare unit, and using creative teaching methods such as group learning and dramatic techniques to engage students. This theme relates to research by Lighthill (2011), which discussed the idea that Shakespeare wrote complicated characters who experience everyday concerns that students can easily relate to and recognize in their own lives. As well, the data supports Edmiston and McKibben’s (2011) research, which stated that students and teachers can learn from each other when they explore the significance of a text through the lens of their backgrounds and experiences.
5.1.2 Learning Expectations and Assessment Strategies

Within my second theme, I discovered that the prevalent learning goals among educators for the Shakespeare unit are that students recognize the beauty of Shakespeare’s poetic language, and that students appreciate the genius of Shakespeare’s works. I also explored creative assessment strategies that educators use to check for student understanding, including formative assessment and creative writing. These strategies enforce understanding of the material, as opposed to merely memorizing the ‘correct answer’ and regurgitating the information. Unfortunately, Irish (2011) noted that tests and essays continue to be the most popular methods of assessment for the Shakespeare unit, even though the research clearly indicates that creative assessment promotes deeper thinking and higher learning.

5.1.3 Barriers of Shakespeare Education in the English Classroom for Students and Teachers

My third theme focused on Shakespeare as an intimidating subject for students to learn, and for teachers to teach. As Gibson (2000) stated, when students feel intimidated by Shakespeare, it can impede their desire and capacity to learn about his works. The outcome of teacher intimidation of Shakespeare is a ‘dumbing down’ of the subject matter, which tends to lead to a less rich exploration of his plays for students (Coles 2003). As well, I explored the issue of making Shakespeare accessible to a multicultural
classroom under this theme, because according to research by Lighthill (2011), modern, multi-ethnic, multilingual students may have trouble connecting to Shakespeare’s works.

5.2 Implications

The present study has important implications for educational reform. In this section, I discuss the significance of my research both in a broad way, as it relates to the educational research community, and a narrow way, as it relates to my professional identity and practice.

5.2.1 Broad Implications: The Educational Research Community

In broad strokes, this study should serve as a reminder to teachers that Shakespeare is an important subject that may require additional attention in the classroom. As Gibson (2000) noted, students may have a preconceived notion of the difficulty of Shakespeare’s works prior to entering the classroom, and their engagement levels may decrease; teachers need to be aware of this phenomenon, and create a classroom environment that portrays Shakespeare as a highly relevant and engaging subject. Students should learn Shakespeare in a creative, low-stress, and collaborative setting, so that they can focus on understanding and critically thinking about the texts. If this does not occur, students may continue to believe that Shakespeare is too difficult to learn and not relevant to their lives.
As well, teacher education programs and The Ministry of Education should take heed that teacher candidates and practicing teachers may feel overwhelmed with teaching Shakespeare, and may “teach the test” and encourage memorization instead of conducting open discussion or posing inquiry questions as a result (Irish, 2011). If teachers continue to feel intimidated by teaching Shakespeare, students may also feel that Shakespeare is beyond their intellectual capabilities. Therefore, it may be beneficial for teacher education programs and professional development courses to focus on Shakespeare education and training to support English teachers.

5.2.2 Narrow Implications: My Professional Identity and Practice

The research that I have conducted for this paper has helped me understand how to bring Shakespeare into the classroom in an engaging, relevant, and thoughtful way. I have been exposed to various strategies of creatively teaching Shakespeare that make the subject captivating, and I have become aware of assessment techniques that stress the understanding of Shakespeare, rather than rote memorization, that may increase student interest.

This area of research has already benefitted my work as an educator. I have successfully taught a Shakespeare unit in both grade four and grade eight during various practicum placements, and I have had the opportunity to bring my research into the classroom. For example, I used various creative methods to assess my Shakespeare unit, such as comic strips of each act of *Romeo and Juliet*, which then lined the walls to portray the whole play. I also used *tableaux* and in-role journals to engage the students
with Shakespeare. I have received overwhelmingly positive feedback from my Associate Teachers concerning my implementation of the Shakespeare unit, and I have observed student understanding and appreciation of Shakespeare. I have also learned about the range of challenges that I have to be cognizant of when teaching Shakespeare to a diverse classroom; for example, I feel underprepared to teach Shakespeare to culturally diverse students, who may feel disconnected and unenthusiastic about the unit. This relates to research by Balinska-Ourdeva et al. (2013), which suggests that cultural diversity may act as a barrier of students’ understanding of Shakespeare’s texts.

I plan to continue exploring this area of interest by conducting additional research, including hands-on research through various workshops and classes. As well, I would like to continue teaching Shakespeare in both formal settings, such as classrooms, and informal settings, such as theatre companies, to learn more about the complexities of teaching this exciting subject to students.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the results of the current study, I recommend that The Ministry of Education create a Professional Development course on Shakespeare education for teachers, to ensure that all English teachers feel comfortable and knowledgeable while teaching the Shakespeare unit in the classroom. There are many theatre companies and professionals that specialize in Shakespeare education, and I believe that the Ministry should be taking advantage of these resources. Furthermore, it is imperative that practicing teachers recognize the intimidation they feel towards Shakespeare and his
plays, and actively seek out this professional development course to improve the unit, because Shakespeare’s works are so universal, relevant, and poetic.

As well, although my teachable subject is English, there were no classes devoted to Shakespeare. This was surprising to me, because Shakespeare is a unit that is taught in the English classroom over at least three years of high school, and a subject that many educators feel uncomfortable teaching. I feel that it would be beneficial for future teachers to experience at least a few classes on Shakespeare education during their schooling.

Finally, perhaps Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) need to be implemented in various secondary schools in order to provide teachers with support from their peers, and the opportunity to work collaboratively and share decision-making for the Shakespeare unit. PLC meetings occur regularly and include processes for reviewing current student information and progress, setting goals, determining whether identified actions and interventions are making a difference, studying and discussing new ideas and strategies, and identifying other professional learning needed to support success. I believe that incorporating PLCs into secondary schools for the Shakespeare unit would be beneficial, and would provide teachers with the support they need in order to teach the Shakespeare unit with confidence.

5.4 Areas for Further Research

Inasmuch as the present study has served to expand upon the extant literature, it has also highlighted the need for further study. Based on my findings in this paper, I have
discovered two main topics that require further research. The first area that the current research did not adequately cover is practical strategies and accessible resources for teachers to help them decrease the intimidation they feel about teaching Shakespeare’s works. This research is important because if students engage if the teacher loves Shakespeare, as seen in section 4.1.2 (‘Enthusiasm Breeds Enthusiasm’), they may not be motivated to learn if the teacher is intimidated by Shakespeare. There should be resources available so that teachers can plan and facilitate the Shakespeare unit comfortably and confidently, and so that students have a role model that does not view Shakespeare as an intimidating playwright.

As well, educational research scholars should direct their attention to investigating practical techniques that make Shakespeare’s plays more accessible to a diverse classroom. This future research is important because existing studies show that when students can connect to a text on a personal level, they are able to more fully engage with the text and enjoy the learning process. Students with various cultures, ethnicities, and religions may not recognize themselves within Shakespeare’s works, and therefore they may not connect to the plays or show enthusiasm during the unit. In the future, I would like to further elucidate these important topics with additional research and interviews, and make Shakespeare unintimidating to every teacher, and relevant to every student.
5.5 Concluding Comments

The present study is significant because it supports the existing literature pertaining to the need for creative teaching and assessment of the Shakespeare unit to increase student engagement, relevancy, understanding, and critical thinking. As well, this study elaborates on barriers to Shakespeare education, such as teacher intimidation towards the unit, and the need for further research regarding the obstacles that multicultural students face when learning Shakespeare. Broadly, this study should serve as a reminder to teachers that students will learn more deeply if the classroom environment is collaborative and creative, and if they have the proper training through professional development or teacher education courses in order to teach Shakespeare effectively. This research will inform my practice as a beginning teacher, so that “I am able to instruct or teach” (Henry VI, Part 1, 4.1.159).
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Appendix A
Letter of Consent for Interview

Date: ___________________

Dear ___________________,

I am a graduate student at OISE, University of Toronto, and am currently enrolled as a Master of Teaching candidate. I am studying ‘Shakespeare Education and Assessment’ for the purposes of investigating an educational topic as a major assignment for our program. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

I am writing a report on this study as a requirement of the Master of Teaching Program. My course instructor who is providing support for the process this year is Dr. Angela MacDonald. The purpose of this requirement is to allow us to become familiar with a variety of ways to do research. My data collection consists of a 45-60 minute interview that will be audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient to you.

My research purpose is to discover various effective ways to teach and assess Shakespeare, and my main research question is, how does a sample of secondary English teachers approach teaching Shakespeare to secondary English students?

Other subsidiary questions include: what instructional approaches and strategies are used to teach Shakespeare effectively? How are these teachers creating opportunities to make Shakespeare relevant to students’ identities and lives? How do these teachers assess student learning of Shakespeare? What are the teacher’s expectations of students during the Shakespeare unit, and how do they assess those expectations? What are some challenges that arise during the teaching of the Shakespeare unit?

The participants in this study were chosen based on certain criteria:

- They must have taught Shakespeare for at least five years
- They must have demonstrated commitment and leadership in the area of teaching Shakespeare, and making Shakespeare relevant for students
- They must be current high school teachers who teach a Shakespeare unit during the time of the interview
The contents of this interview will be used for my assignment, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates and/or potentially at a conference or publication. Pseudonyms will be used throughout the written work to protect your anonymity, and all personal and individual-specific information, such as information on your school or students, will be modified or removed as necessary to protect your identity. This information remains confidential. The only people who will have access to my assignment work to review the data will be my research supervisor and my course instructor. You are free to change your views on any of the questions asked at any point during the interview and you have a right to withdraw from the study at any point of the research process. You are free to decline to answer any specific questions. I will destroy the audio recording on my password-protected computer after the paper has been presented and/or published which may take up to five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks or benefits to you for assisting in the project, and I will share with you a copy of my notes; you may clarify or retract any information before the data analysis phase.

Please sign the attached form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. Thank you very much for your help.

Sincerely,

Researcher name:________________________________________

Phone number, email: ______________________________________

Instructor’s Name: ___________________________ Email: _______________________

Phone number: ___________________ Email: _______________________

Research Supervisor’s Name: ___________________________ Email: _______________________

Phone #: ___________________ Email: _______________________

Consent Form

I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by _________________________(name of researcher) and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to having the interview audio-recorded.
Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study! This research aims to learn about various effective ways to teach and assess Shakespeare, and my main research question is, what range of instructional approaches and strategies are being used by a sample of secondary English teachers to teach Shakespeare? The interview should last approximately 45-60 minutes. I will ask you questions about your personal background information, some of your practices in the classroom, your beliefs and values on the topic, the factors that influence you during the Shakespeare unit, and some questions concerning the ‘next steps’ of Shakespeare education. I want to remind you of your right to choose to not answer any questions, or to modify your opinion at any time. Do you have any questions before we begin?

Qualitative Interview Questions

Background Information
1. Can you state your name for the recorder?
2. How many years have you worked as a teacher?
3. Can you tell me more about the school (i.e. size, demographics, program priorities)
4. What grades and subject areas do you teach/ have you taught?
5. As you are aware, I am interested in learning about your approach to teaching Shakespeare. To begin, can you tell me how you developed an interest in Shakespeare? (i.e. schooling, undergraduate degree, English teachable) What is your personal relationship to Shakespeare?

Beliefs/ Values: Why?
6. Why do you believe that it is important for students to learn Shakespeare?
7. Why do you believe that Shakespeare is still relevant in the 21st century?
8. In your experience, how is Shakespeare traditionally approached in schools?
9. What is your impression of the English Language Arts curriculum in its attention to Shakespeare? What do you believe are some of the benefits to how it is approached in the curriculum? What are some of the limitations?
10. In your view, what are some key considerations when introducing Shakespearean work to students?
11. In your experience, how do students respond to Shakespeare?
12. In your experience, in what ways, if at all, do students relate to Shakespeare’s characters?

Teacher Practices: What/ How?
13. Can you describe for me what instructional approaches and strategies you take when teaching a unit on Shakespeare and why?
   a. Generally speaking, what are your learning goals?
   b. What methods do you find to be the most effective?
   c. How do you assess these units? What do you assess?
d. What outcomes do you observe from students?

14. More specifically now, can you tell me which Shakespearean works you teach in which grade, and why?

15. Can you choose one of those works and give me an example of how you have approached teaching it to students?
   a. In which grade did you teach this work?
   b. What were your learning goals? What were some of the core themes that you explored with students and why?
   c. How did you assess student work? What did you assess and why?

16. Approximately how much instructional time would you say that you spend on Shakespeare in a single school year in your English classes?

17. Can you give me an example of how you have purposefully made an effort to make Shakespeare relevant to the identities and interests of your students?

Influencing Factors: Who?

18. What are some obstacles that you face while teaching the Shakespeare unit? How do you respond to those challenges?

19. What range of factors and resources support your ability to teach Shakespeare the way that you do?

Next Steps

20. What advice, if any, do you have for a beginning teacher committed to teaching Shakespeare?
## Appendix C

Tabled Outline of Data Analysis Genesis

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<th>PRELIMINARY CODES</th>
<th>SECOND CYCLE CODES</th>
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<td>Teaching Shakespeare too early</td>
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<td>Technology in the class</td>
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<td>Science/ Math priority</td>
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<td>Shylock- tragic/ comic character?</td>
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<td>Stasis</td>
<td>Enthusiasm/ passion</td>
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<td>“2-3 month long unit”</td>
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<td>Divorce theme</td>
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<td>Love of Shakespeare</td>
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<td>Participation in the class</td>
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<td>Tv shows</td>
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<td>Angst/ Inner turmoil</td>
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<td>“Family structure and culture”</td>
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<td>Leadership theme</td>
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<td>“Spur of the moment” teaching</td>
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<td>Student Interaction</td>
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<td>Important words in soliliquys</td>
<td>Reading vs. understanding</td>
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<td>Sight passages</td>
<td>Standard Assessment</td>
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<td>Movies/audio</td>
<td>Shakespeare and pop culture</td>
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<td>Students who don’t love Shakespeare</td>
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<td>Dictionary work</td>
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<td>High marks</td>
<td>“What do I need to know for the exam?”</td>
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<td>Shakespeare courses</td>
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<td>Tests/ essays</td>
<td>Standard Assessment</td>
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<td>Will Shakespeare introduction</td>
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<td>Group dynamics</td>
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<td>Movement</td>
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<td>“Means to an end”</td>
<td>“What do I need to know for the exam?”</td>
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<td>Memorization/ Regurgitation</td>
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<td>Main categories: i.e. conflict, character</td>
<td>Learning Goals</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual experiences</td>
<td>Natural hooks based on lived experience</td>
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<td>Reading aloud</td>
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<td>Making meaning</td>
<td>Reading vs. understanding</td>
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<td>Watching a play</td>
<td>Watching a play</td>
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<td>“it should be seen, it’s a play!”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“you push too early sometimes”</td>
<td>Teaching Shakespeare too early</td>
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<td>“We only teach it 3 years”</td>
<td>“We only teach it 3 years”</td>
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<td>Immersion in the history of the plays</td>
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<td>Drawing on current knowledge</td>
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<td>Positive reactions to Shakespeare</td>
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<td>To understand the author is one route</td>
<td>Understanding the author</td>
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<td>Character motivations</td>
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<td>Student complaints about Shakespeare</td>
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<td>Connections to Shakespeare</td>
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<tr>
<td>Circle vs. rows seating</td>
<td>Student engagement</td>
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<td>“What do I need to know for the exam?”</td>
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<td>Class environment</td>
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<td>Part of a group</td>
<td>Student interaction in the classroom</td>
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<td>Bonding experiences</td>
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<td>Student confidence on the exam</td>
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<td>Student engagement in the classroom</td>
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<td>Thinking outside of the box</td>
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<tr>
<td>“All the different kids are engaged and using”</td>
<td>“All the different kids are engaged and using”</td>
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<td>using their abilities”</td>
<td>their abilities”</td>
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<tr>
<td>“an activity that helped them with their writing without them even knowing”</td>
<td>“an activity that helped them with their writing without them even knowing”</td>
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