

‘A Muse of Fire’: An investigation of the extent to which personalised learning about Shakespeare can be promoted through active, ensemble-based teaching methods that provoke empathy.

LEIGH SYKES - HOBSONVILLE POINT SECONDARY SCHOOL

Abstract

This paper investigates active, ensemble-based teaching methods and the ways in which these can prompt the personalisation of learning to occur, before examining the extent to which application of these teaching methods has an impact on Year 9 and 10 students. The paper will argue that collaborative, co-construction of meaning creates the connectedness and empathy necessary to personalise learning, by examining cases where students provide evidence in their own words. The paper will also suggest that the examination and construction of both theoretical and practical inputs must be carefully managed in identifying the extent to which personalisation of learning takes place when prompted by the application of active teaching methods.

Biography



LEIGH SYKES moved to New Zealand from the UK in 2009. She was Teacher in Charge of Drama at Rutherford College in West Auckland from 2009 to 2015, and became Learning Area Leader for Performing Arts at Hobsonville Point Secondary School in 2016. She trained at the University of Durham and recently completed a Master of Arts (with Distinction) in the Advanced Teaching of Shakespeare with the University of Warwick. Leigh's research interests are focused on active teaching methods and developing the cultural value of Shakespeare for New Zealand students. She is keen to create and enhance the understanding of Shakespeare through performance.

Introduction

Hobsonville Point Secondary School (HPSS) serves the growing community of Hobsonville Point in the North-West of Auckland, and has now completed its third year of operation. The School's mission is to 'Innovate through personalised learning, Engage through powerful partnerships and Inspire through deep challenge and inquiry'. Teaching and learning is designed to support this mission and the creation and support of personalised learning is seen as crucial to its delivery.

I have chosen to teach a 400-year old English playwright's work to Year 9 and 10 students in a three-year old New Zealand school, because Shakespeare is my personal 'Muse of Fire.' Shakespeare's works, and especially the language within them, are the bright and powerful beacons that inspired me to become a Drama teacher, and these works represent my personal cultural capital. I also believe that that all students are entitled to be exposed to Shakespeare and his works, making the teaching of Shakespeare a culturally responsive activity for me. Macfarlane (2004) believes that one of the central requisites of a culturally responsive classroom which helps to engage and promote achievement for Māori and Pasifika students is the 'passion and enthusiasm' (p. 97) of the teacher. I therefore seek to share my passion for Shakespeare with all students, and in doing so, to provide an opportunity for personalised learning to occur. In an environment where students are meeting a new body of knowledge, they are able to learn with and from me and each other – a process which then promotes Ako:

The concept of ako describes a teaching and learning relationship, where the educator is also learning from the student and where educators' practices are informed by the latest research and are both deliberate and reflective. Ako is grounded in the principle of reciprocity. (MoE, 2013, p. 23)

Leadbeater (2005) defines personalised learning as a "highly interactive process of learning [which] comes through interaction in which the learner discovers for themselves" (p. 8), while Bolstad and Gilbert et al (2012) suggest that personalised learning takes places when "learning activities and the curriculum/knowledge content they engage with are shaped in ways that reflect the input and interests of students, as well as what teachers know to be important knowledge". (p. 19)

The active, ensemble-based teaching methods that form the basis for this research seem entirely consistent with the concepts of both Ako and personalised learning, since these methods support a collaborative, inquiry-based experience that enables students to learn with and from each other. When investigating a Shakespeare play, all learners feel equally concerned about dealing with the language, and Winston (2015) notes that

at all levels of education, the very strangeness of his [Shakespeare's] language can act potentially as a great leveller, as all children will be challenged by it, be they first or additional language users. (p. 33)

Teaching a Shakespeare play therefore seems to be an effective way of challenging students to create their own learning from and about material that is unfamiliar.

Project Aims and Literature Review

Through this project I aim to test my own belief in the efficacy of active, ensemble-based methods in the teaching of Shakespeare against a growing belief that personalised learning is necessary to prepare learners for the increasingly complex world that awaits them after school. Although much has been written about active teaching methods, little research has been carried out on the extent to which this specific method for teaching Shakespeare can stimulate personalised learning and so this project seeks to begin that conversation.

My definition of active teaching methods is based on the similar viewpoints on pedagogy taken by those such as Gibson (1998), Stredder (2009) and Neelands (2009). Gibson (1998) argues that the popularity of Shakespeare's plays stems from "their infinite capacity for adaptation" in both performance and educational contexts, and he is clear in his belief that "Shakespeare was a man of the theatre who intended his words to be spoken and acted out on stage". (p. xii) This belief in the theatricality of Shakespeare's work leads Gibson to conclude that approaching the plays as scripts, using active methods that "release students' imagination and involve them in speaking and acting" (p. xii) allows those students to make their own personal responses and connections with Shakespeare that are "both critical and appreciative". (p. xiii)

Stredder (2009) recognises that active methods offer a collaborative approach, creating experiences for students that are "creative, stimulating, participatory, offering ownership" (p. 14), and that collaboration is a powerful tool in ensuring inclusivity and success for participants, since "Active Shakespeare means that all participants are active. Shakespeare is shared". (p. 10-11) Neelands (2009) suggests that active methods create a social or collaborative response to Shakespeare where "The principles of the ensemble...require ... a mutual respect amongst the players, a shared commitment to truth...a shared absorption in the artistic process of dialogic and social meaning making". (p. 183) The power of social collaboration is one of the aspects that aligns these methods very closely to the Māori concept of *Ako*, as mentioned previously.

While the literature relating to active, ensemble-based methods has a long tradition, discussions about personalisation became much more prevalent in the approach to the 21st Century. Early on in my research it became apparent that the literature discussing active, ensemble-based methods and literature discussing personalisation share very similar terminology. In many cases, without context, it could be assumed that the same topic is being discussed. When Stredder (2009) describes students as "personally involved, enmeshed even, in a learning matrix in which they must actively manipulate resources and make individual decisions" (p. 15) and Leadbeater (2005) suggests that "Learning should be a deeply personal experience" (p. 8), the connections between the two topics seem clear.

However, such compatibility of terminology is not always the case when personalised learning is being discussed. Littky and Allen's (1999) view of personalisation focuses strongly on knowing the student and family well enough to make decisions that make learning relevant and exciting for the student. They start from the view that the student's interests and abilities must be at the centre of the curriculum and that these interests should be used to help students to identify learning and experiences that "spark the natural learning process, starting with the student's interests then building in new information that is meaningful to each individual learner". (p. 5-6) The natural conclusion of putting the student at the heart of the learning experience is "organizing a school around the student, not the subject matter". (p. 6).

Leadbeater compares learners and their parents to investors in education and describes learning as a series of transactions. He sees personalisation as being a "larger productive system that creates learning" (p. 5) and notes that personalised learning "is not just about giving learners more choice" (p. 8), but that it in fact "puts the emphasis on learning through interaction and co-creation" (p. 23).

This individual aspect of personalised learning is the one that most closely intersects with the concepts of active, ensemble-based methods, and this aspect is further explored by Bolstad and Gilbert *et al.* (2012) in their report to the NZ Ministry of Education. They develop Leadbeater's (2005) concepts of personalisation within education when they identify "deep and shallow expressions of personalisation" (p. 19) where

In deep expressions of practice, students' learning activities and the curriculum/knowledge content they engage with are shaped in ways that reflect the input and interests of students, as well as what teachers know

to be important knowledge (p. 19),

while “*In shallow expressions of practice, the curriculum content is still determined by the teacher, and students’ input is limited to more shallow choices about which activity(ies) they will undertake*”. (p. 19) They suggest that inspiring these deep expressions of practice will require schools to encourage “*multiplicity, diversity and difference*” (p. 25) by arranging the school experiences around “*exploring the connections—or spaces—between people, things and ideas, and what can happen there”.* (p. 26) As well as exploring the importance of making connections in learning, Bolstad and Gilbert *et al.* recognise that “*Experiences are critical to learning. Just as learners need knowledge to think with, they also need experiences to think with*”. (p. 15) They suggest that the experiences students have through their learning should develop and enhance the connections that they make with their world, thus building their ability to learn and function within that world.

However, if we wish to claim that active methods could improve assessment outcomes for students, we must address the fact that formal assessment is generally applied to an individual. This raises the question of whether the benefit of a collaborative experience can be identified for an individual, or whether individual achievement that is the result of a collaborative process can be identified and measured. Since *personalised learning* (my emphasis) implies individual learning, this creates a dichotomy between the generally collaborative nature of active methods and the individual nature of personalisation.

This apparent tension between the social and collaborative aspects of active methods and the benefit to the individual finds some resolution when Campbell and Robinson *et al.* (2007) describe personalisation as “*a collective activity, not an individualised one*” (p. 151), noting that “*the collective frame leads to the individual developing her/his learning*” (p. 151), while Leadbeater (2006) describes personalisation as “*participation and co-creation of value*” (p. 106) and Hartley (2008) suggests that “*Individual personalisation - somewhat paradoxically - requires for its accomplishment new collectives, new collaborations*”. (p. 371) These descriptions all suggest that a collaborative, group approach is necessary for personalisation to occur. Leadbeater (2005) also suggests that “*Learning should be a deeply personal experience*” (p. 8) and that personalised learning “*means engaging learners in a highly interactive process of learning... Learning comes through interaction in which the learner discovers for themselves, reflects on what they have learned and how*” (p. 8), while Littky and Allen note that “*students are encouraged to look to their personal experiences of the world to discover what knowledge really matters*”. (p. 6)

Taking these varying definitions, and the tensions between them into account, prompted me to be very clear about my own view of personalisation and to create my own definition for this project as ***‘learning that creates personal connections for students, and where collaborative experience is a critical aspect of creating these connections’***. This reflects a constructivist approach to learning, whereby students create their own knowledge within a structure created for them by the teacher. This being the case, I agree with Campbell and Robinson *et al.* (2009) that individual learning can be created through the collaborative process, and so the tension between the social and the individual can be resolved.

Research Methodology

This project is set very firmly within the sphere of drama education, however, in more precise terms, this project is about investigating whether an identifiable effect can be created by a particular cause. It could therefore be suggested that the intended action of this project is to bring about change. However, the true aim of this project is not so much about implementing a specific pedagogy to bring about different (and therefore implicitly ‘better’) learning outcomes for this specific group of students, but rather to investigate the extent to which this specific pedagogy has the ability to stimulate a different way of learning. The main area of interest for this research is therefore to understand the experience, ideas, beliefs and values in my research group. It is about investigating

people and their responses to certain situations and stimuli, and it is the type, or quality, of the experiences that interests me.

Opie (2004) recognises this as an anti-positivistic approach, which “*seeks to obtain softer facts, and insights into how an individual creates, modifies and interprets the world in which they find themselves*” (p. 8), and goes on to suggest that the most appropriate way of approaching such research is via qualitative techniques, where “*interviews and participant-observation would predominate.*” (p. 9). Fleming et al. (2004) suggest that qualitative methods are a natural fit for research that touches on artistic pursuits, since “*The arts are more at home with narratives than numbers. Such approaches are more equipped to explore process and to deal with the ambiguities and complexities found in the arts.*” (p. 178). It therefore seems that a qualitative approach to the research is the most appropriate way to address my research question.

Having established that qualitative research best fits my research question, it is necessary to investigate the many different ways of designing the research methodology within the qualitative framework, in order to generate the most appropriate data for my research question.

I am particularly attracted to the concept of knowledge that is generated and stored in the body (literally embodied), and so this informs my research position. In carrying out research, O’Toole (2006) suggests that we should “*take note of David Dreschler’s comment: ‘What we decide to research and the way we conduct our research is a political statement about who and what is important to us’.*” (p. 16) What is important to me in this research is testing a pedagogy I find persuasive (active, ensemble-based methods) against the perceived requirements of future-focused learning, and so it is important that my methodology has the ability to capture aspects of human behaviour and understanding.

One qualitative method that seems to provide a framework for viewing data on “*shared patterns of behaviour, beliefs, and language*” (Cresswell, 2007, p. 68) is ethnography. O’Toole (2006) describes ethnography as building an understanding of “*how a group of people construct and experience their world*” (p. 40) and suggests that the ethnographic field worker is “*an engaged co-participant who builds relationships with people within a social and political context*”. (p. 40) This description resonates very strongly with my position with the students I am investigating for this project. Working in an active, ensemble-based way requires collaboration between teacher and student so that knowledge and meaning are co-constructed. I therefore believe that there is an ethnographic aspect to this project.

O’Toole belief that “*case study honours the agency of the participants and positions them as experts rather than merely a source of data for analysis*” (p. 46) speaks to the importance of the experience and participation of the research subjects. Since I am most interested in their views, attitudes and experiences, this persuades me that case study can shed light on the type of inquiry I am engaged in.

Although I have determined that this study is qualitative in nature, the data generated by the teaching activities have some quantitative characteristics that should be acknowledged. Some interrogation of statistical trends within these data gives a fuller picture within which to place the outcomes of the research, as well as allowing me to identify themes and generate suppositions. Therefore this study can best be described as mixed-methods, due to the use of a combination of different methodologies in the gathering and investigation of a range of data.

Research Design

Having established that a qualitative inquiry was the best fit for addressing the questions I was investigating, I designed learning sequences and data collection tools that would enable me to gather and analyse data that could illuminate those questions.

In order to gather opinions and attitudes, I conducted a survey prior to the beginning of teaching, so that I could identify aspects the students were looking forward to, their concerns about the module and their general views about Shakespeare. Results of the initial survey showed that 84% of respondents identified the language of the plays as one of their concerns about studying Shakespeare, giving reasons ranging from *“the vocabulary is very different and hard to get used to”* to *“the dialogue is quite complicated”*. (Sykes, 2016a, p. 1) However, when asked what they were most interested in learning more about during the module, 15% of respondents also identified language. Interestingly, when asked what they thought would be a helpful lesson about Shakespeare, 38% of respondents identified an aspect of performing, acting or *“Hands on activities”*. (Sykes, 2016a, p. 2)

This data prompted me to plan teaching sequences that focused first on language activities, in order to address these concerns. I delivered the teaching sequences using two different types of data collection: observation via video recording and documentation. The recorded teaching sessions were reviewed and specific instances of learning were identified and coded. This coding related to my research question by identifying instances of responses that required some active engagement from the students, for example collaboration in generating meaning or empathy with characters or situations in the text, as well as identifying instances of personal connection. Documentation was in the form of individual student blog posts that responded to specific questions posed at the end of a teaching session.

The sequences focused mainly on Romeo and Juliet, as participants had the opportunity to see a production of the play at the Pop-Up Globe in Auckland, but I also chose to deliver one session based on King Lear as a contrast. Following the teaching sequences, a further interview was carried out with a subset of those who had responded to the initial survey and who had also published blog posts in response to some or all of the teaching sequences. This interview was recorded. The questions in this interview were designed to access the respondents' views about the level of personal connection they had experienced during the teaching sequences.

Since the aim of my research question is to investigate the extent to which active, ensemble-based teaching methods promote an effect, it was important to ensure that I collected data from a range of active and less active participants in the teaching sequences. Therefore, in order to generate data that might reflect different viewpoints or contradict data collected from the students who had responded to most activities, I also conducted interviews with students who had not responded to the survey, or published blog posts. The questions in this interview were designed to establish the views and attitudes of these students towards the teaching sequences, as well as on their more general engagement in other modules.

Finally, I kept a personal research journal recording activities and outcomes as they occurred. This allowed me to reflect on any learning points immediately and to ensure that I captured any pertinent points or learning outside of the teaching activities included in this research project.

Ethical Considerations

All participants self-selected the module, based on a description that emphasised Shakespeare's skills in investigating humanity alongside an invitation to investigate how Shakespeare is relevant to students' lives in 2016. The students were then approached individually and given information about the nature of the research, the research methods to be used and the eventual outcome of the research process. They were informed that their personal data would be treated as confidential with the only identifying factor being a number, their school year level and gender. They were also informed that all of their contributions would be anonymised in the final research report.

Since I am both Teacher and Researcher for these students, it was very important that

they understood that their participation in the research was not in any way linked to any assessment that was part of the teaching sequence. This was included as part of the initial discussion about the project.

Teaching Activities

As already discussed, teaching sequences were created to fit within a framework of inquiry-led teaching, where students were offered activities that introduced them to aspects of Shakespeare’s work in general and to the plays Romeo and Juliet and King Lear in particular.

All active sessions began with warm up activities designed to encourage collaboration and a sense of ensemble. They included movement activities such as ‘Stop, Go, Jump, Clap’, where students must move through the space and respond as quickly as possible to the four instructions given, and ‘Person to Person’, where students move through the space until stopped by the teacher. They then work with the person closest to them to physically connect as instructed by the teacher, e.g. hand to hand, foot to foot, until the phrase ‘person to person’ signals them to move away to find a new partner. These warm up activities aimed to create an environment where students felt able to participate and contribute, and grow comfortable with their peers and the physicality and energy of the sessions.

The first two active sessions used activities that explored Shakespeare’s language. Focusing on the Queen Mab speech from Act 1, Scene 4 of Romeo and Juliet, the first session included activities such as using movement (e.g. galloping) to explore and sound out the rhythm of iambic pentameter, creating new lines of iambic pentameter and speaking iambic pentameter lines chorally and individually. Students then worked in groups to create freeze frames of specific sections of the speech (see Figure 1)

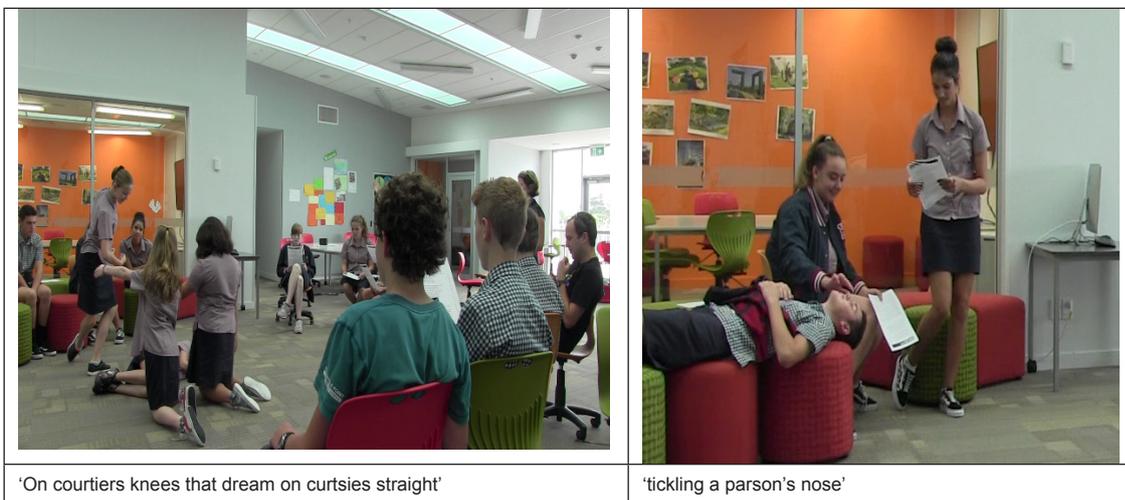


Figure 1: Freeze frames of sections of the Queen Mab speech:

Finally, all groups performed their section of the speech chorally as they demonstrated their freeze frames. In this way, the whole speech was performed vocally and visually. Following the session, students were asked to create a blog post answering questions on their own and others’ freeze frames, their understanding of the character of Mercutio and their discoveries about Shakespeare’s work writing

The second session focused on Juliet’s O Serpent Heart speech from Act 3, scene 2. In this session students explored language through movement by reading the speech from punctuation point to punctuation point as a group, then reading individually while moving and changing direction at each punctuation point. They explored antithesis through creating images of antithetical statements in the speech e.g. ‘beautiful tyrant’;

'fiend angelical'; 'dove-feathered raven' and then explored Juliet's situation by working in groups to have two students deliver the positive and negative aspects of the speech to a Juliet placed in the middle. Following the session, students were asked to create a blog post answering questions about the language of the speech and their understanding of Juliet's character and situation at this point in the play.

The next two sessions focused on making performative choices about aspects of the play, using the Capulets' party in Act 1 Scene 5 and the conflict between Juliet and her parents in Act 3 Scene 5. In the session relating to Juliet's conflict, students were asked to identify issues that they might disagree with their parents about, before working in small groups to identify examples of Capulet threatening or showing concern for Juliet. The groups then delivered these phrases to their Juliet, before undertaking an exercise where they used movement within a space to respond to what Juliet's parents say to her, for example moving closer to Lady Capulet when she tried to comfort Juliet. They also had the opportunity to provide Spoken Thoughts for any of the characters, before discussing the factors that contributed to their movement choices and Spoken Thoughts in the scene.

The session focused on Act 1, scene 5 allowed students to take on different characters attending the party at the Capulets' house, with one small group acting as directors. The groups enacted the scene as their different characters, refining the action after each attempt (see Figure 2).



Student demonstrating how servants would carry trays



Servants carrying out tasks



Romeo enters the party



Capulets and guests arrive at the party

Figure 2: Staging Act 1, scene 5

The final session focused on Act 1, scene 1 of *King Lear*. Students were first taken through a textual analysis of the scene before receiving information about specific characters. They were asked to place the characters on a range of continua, such as 'who is most loyal to Lear' and give their reasons for their placement. They then created freeze frames of characters such as *three siblings; master and servant; the politicians;* and then for themes such as *'madness; loyalty; deceiving an important person'* (see Figure 3). Students then worked together to refine one of the images, based on their perceptions of the characters in it. Finally they discussed what they had discovered about this play.



Who is most honest?

Figure 3: Constructing a continuum of characters in Act 1, scene 1 of *King Lear*

Following these active sessions, students chose the topics and formats of their individual inquiries about Shakespeare and his work, based on their own interests and curiosity.

Outcomes: Language focus (Queen Mab and O Serpent Heart)

These activities aimed to address the results of the initial survey, where respondents identified language as one aspect of studying Shakespeare that they felt could be difficult. These first sessions therefore allowed students to explore Shakespeare's poetic language using physical embodiment to promote understanding of the form and structure of the language.

The outcomes of the first session (Queen Mab) included clear examples of language deconstruction, as students used their new understanding of Shakespeare's language to create their own line of iambic pentameter. The second session (O Serpent Heart) generated examples of students describing a physical sensation they had experienced as part of the work in the session. There were also examples of empathy, which demonstrated students' ability to place themselves in a character's shoes due to an understanding of the way that language is used. For example, following the Punctuation Shift exercise, Student I showed clear empathy as she suggested that at the conclusion

of the speech being considered, Juliet would feel *"Not just tired, but you don't want to carry on"* (Sykes, 2016d, p. 2), while Student L1 noted that Juliet is *"Feeling stuck, stuck in a certain situation"* (Sykes, 2016d, p. 2). The quality of individual responses in these sessions is apparent when students show personal connections to the Echoing exercise, where positive and negative aspects of the speech are identified and spoken to 'Juliet', with Student L describing the experience as *"like what happens when you're trying to decide between good and bad. It's like having those two on your shoulders"* (Sykes, 2016d, p. 3), and student L1 recognising that *"It's your conscience"*. (Sykes, 2016d, p. 3) This student also makes a very important connection to another section of the play, purely through the way that language is used when she notes that *"I kind of find a similarity between the line that says 'a damned saint, an honourable villain' to the fight scene, when Romeo and Mercutio are talking about 'o brawling love, o loving hate'"*. (Sykes, 2016d, p. 2)

Only six of 20 students published individual blogs in response to questions based on these sessions, which could suggest that a majority of students did not engage sufficiently with the learning in the session. However, the collaborative work used to create meaning and the high level of empathetic responses to exercises such as Punctuation Shift seem to have informed the blogs that were published. For example, Student I demonstrated her ability to interpret the text when describing her view of Mercutio (based on the Queen Mab speech) as *"very descriptive, and contradictory of himself ... he uses opposite words a lot in his speeches. He has an imagination, and can make up characters to portray his feelings or explain something"*. This student also shows a clear understanding of the use and effect of language and its ability to create individual connections, when she suggests that

Shakespeare uses adjectives and similes/metaphors in his writing to make the audience connect with the actor and feel their emotions, which is why when people go to see good plays/movies they end up crying or changing their mood depending on ... the entertainment they are watching. His writing also references how we all feel and think at different times, and that makes us relate and sympathise with the character.

Student M notes that *"the text ... made me feel quite confused as the text was consistently going back and forth with opposites for example: "A damned saint an honorable villain", "O serpent heart hid by flowering face"*, which I believe suggests a response that is empathetic (*"made me feel quite confused"*) as well as analytical based on a physical experience. He goes on to note that:

Juliet is highly confused and second guessing every choice that she has made for example wondering if marrying Romeo was a good idea in the long run let alone if he is villain or her hero. The language in the text suggests Juliet is highly confused with her relationship and desperate for the truth.

The quality of this analysis suggests to me that the student connected with the experience of exploring the verse using the Punctuation Shift exercise. Student L1's ability to empathise is also noticeable in her written responses, such as her work following the Serpent Heart session:

the speeches made me feel saddened by the realizations of Juliet as she mourns for the loss of Tybalt and the banishment of her husband, Romeo. I noticed that the way that the speech is said and the rhythm about it shows us that Juliet is confused, and Shakespeare truly embodies this when the rhythm of the words comes into effect, as some lines don't add up. At this point in the play, Juliet is confused and conflicted as to the true identity of Romeo. The language helps you understand how Juliet is feeling.

Her use of the word 'embodies' in this response is fascinating and suggests to me an instinctive understanding that the physical sensation she experienced has had a direct impact on her thinking about the character and the situation she is in, which has informed her written, individual response. I believe that the quality of individual work from a range of different students show connections with the language and the plays that are personal, and thus are demonstrations of personalised learning taking place.

Outcomes: Performative choices focus (Staging Act 3 Scene 5 and Act 1 Scene 5)

By this stage in the module, students were working on inquiries into an aspect of Shakespeare's life or works. They had identified questions that they wanted to answer and were researching information to assist with answering these questions. They had all been given a number of options for sharing the outcome of their inquiries, which included a presentation or the performance of a scene. This phase of the teaching sequence was therefore designed to support students in investigating performance aspects of Shakespeare's work by exposing them to ways in which meaning is created through making performative decisions about characters or aspects of staging the plays.

The two sessions generated a high number of quality individual responses, for example, in the Act 3 Scene 5 session, Student L1 connects personally to the topic of arguing with parents, noting that the outcome of arguments *"can be emotionally scarring, depending on what you're fighting about"* (Sykes, 2016e, p. 1) and then displays empathy when she recognises that Juliet's feeling at the end of the scene is one of *"Abandonment, because that's basically what happens"*. (Sykes, 2016e, p. 2) Other students also display empathy with Juliet, when they respond *"I'm worried about what's happening"* (Sykes, 2016b, p. 2), *"I'm scared"* (Sykes, 2016b, p. 2) and *"I'm confused"* (Sykes, 2016b, p. 2), and with Lady Capulet, with comments such as *"I don't understand why she doesn't want to marry him"* (Sykes, 2016b, p. 2) and *"I'm about to lose my temper with her"*. (Sykes, 2016b, p. 2) In making decisions about characters or staging, students showed clear understanding of the way that these performative decisions make meaning, exemplified by Student I working with students playing teenagers at the ball and directing them with *"You're going to spy them from across the room, and you're gonna whisper"* (Sykes, 2016f, p. 3), as well as explaining why particular staging decisions were made, by observing that *"If you had them just in an empty room, it wouldn't be as 'Oh my god, they've found each other'"*. (Sykes, 2016f, p. 4).

Student S is just as clear in his suggestions for how the scene should begin when he tells the students in the guests and workers group *"I think there were a bit too many people crowding around the table...instead of just crowding around the table, move around talking to each other and then wait for them to come around and hand out drinks"*. (Sykes, 2016f, p. 2) He also shows clear evidence of taking the audience into account in his staging choices when he tells a student playing a guard to *"Stand there and face the audience"*. (Sykes, 2016f, p. 2) Student L1 demonstrates clear understanding of the effect of performative choices when she suggests that Romeo and Juliet meet in the middle of a public event in order to *"show the fact that they've come together when everyone else is sort of like in a group, so they're separated and they've come together"* (Sykes, 2016F, p. 3) while Student M also gives clear directions to other students playing the guests: *"I'd like you to enter over there [pointing to stage left] and wander around the room. Both of you will arrive at the same time"*. (Sykes, 2016f, p. 1) This student also makes performative choices for a student who has described his character as lazy: *"Act like you're falling asleep and then wake up when something happens"*. (Sykes, 2016f, p. 2). The clarity of these responses demonstrates students who have clearly connected to the events and characters.

Although students were not required to answer questions relating to these sessions, Student I chose to publish an individual response. She shows a deep level of understanding of how staging creates and informs our understanding of character,

responding to the question of why Shakespeare chose to have Romeo and Juliet meet for the first time at a public event with “*Because this shows how Romeo and Juliet saw each other across a room of laughing, moving people. They had eyes only for each other*”. The student goes on to suggest how the scene should be staged:

Romeo and Juliet should be placed across the room from each other, each unaware of the other. Interactions can happen between party guests to show how many other conversations Romeo and Juliet could have taken part in, to emphasise the fact that they had eyes only for each other. Romeo and Juliet may float a little closer together before spying each other, tiptoeing to look over the crowd and get another glance at the other, to show that their attention was immediately caught from just one glimpse of their lover to-be.

Her final response demonstrates her clear understanding of Shakespeare as a playwright when she observes that the scene is written in this way

So that Romeo and Juliet's first interactions are simple and they are unawares (sic) of the tragedy that would ensue due to their love. This makes the audience feel sorrowful, and wish that it could have stayed like that. That fact that their meeting was caused by Romeo and co.'s mischief makes the audience sigh, for the tragedy could have so easily been avoided. But perhaps Shakespeare wrote the scene in an innocent way to lull the audience into a fake sense of security, before throwing them into a confused tragedy.

The quality of these responses suggests the student has made a strong connection to the way in which meaning is made through staging, as well as displaying, I believe, a deep level of empathy with the characters. This demonstrates that these sessions have been successful in allowing students to connect to the play and create personal responses from that connection.

Outcomes: applying active teaching methods to a new play (King Lear) and the presentation of inquiries

The final phase of the teaching sequence exposed students to a new play, enabling them to test their ability to analyse and connect with an unfamiliar Shakespeare play. There were clear examples of making meaning about character or through staging, such as Student L1 interacting with a tableau created by other students and deciding “*I’m gonna move [Student I] back a little bit just because she needs to be a bit further away from her father, so that you can see that he doesn’t really want to listen to her*”. (Sykes, 2016g, p. 2) Student C2 then suggests “*I would move Lear back and kind of make him look over his shoulder at Cordelia*” (Sykes, 2016g, p. 2) and Student E2 decides “*I would have you guys [‘Goneril’ and ‘Regan’] with your arms crossed and be really snooty, like ha!*” (Sykes, 2016g, p. 2)

There is an impressive example of connecting the worlds of different plays when Student L1 notes “*I’m sort of thinking, and this is referencing what Juliet’s Mum says to her, but I’m sort of thinking Lear’s probably got the same attitude as Juliet’s Mum, saying ‘Do as thou wilt for I have done with thee’*”. (Sykes, 2016g, p. 3) There are also clear examples of empathy showing students putting themselves in the characters’ positions, for example Student I noting that “*Cordelia’s kind of like questioning. She doesn’t understand why he’s not just accepting this*” (Sykes, 2016g, p. 3), while Student E2 suggests that “*Goneril and Regan would be thinking she’s, Cordelia’s, screwed up, we get more of the kingdom and I’m really happy*”. (Sykes, 2016g, p. 2) Student L1 then describes Cordelia as “*kind of re-evaluating her life after being kicked out*” (Sykes, 2016g, p. 3).

The empathy shown by Student L1 in this session contrasts strongly with her work on analysing the scene as a text in the session immediately before. In this analysis

she identifies factual and narrative aspects of the scene, making only one reference to Cordelia's feelings, as shown in figure 4 below. I suggest that this is a clear indication of the way that students are stimulated to move from understanding text to empathising, by embodying the character's experiences. I propose that the collaborative co-construction of meaning in the active session allows students to physically experience a character's situation, thereby prompting empathy, and that this aspect of the active methods approach is the one that makes the greatest contribution to personalising learning.

from ACT 1 scene 1.
King Lear's palace.

Enter KING LEAR, CORNWALL, ALBANY, GONERIL, REGAN, CORDELIA, and Attendants

KING LEAR
Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
in three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
To shake all cares and business from our age;
Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
Unburthen'd crawl toward death. Our son of Cornwall,
And you, our no less loving son of Albany,
We have this hour a constant will to publish
Our daughters' several dowers, that future strife
May be prevented now. The princes, France and Burgundy,
Great rivals in our youngest daughter's love,
Long in our court have made their amorous sojourn,
And here are to be answer'd. Tell me, my daughters,—
Since now we will divest us both of rule,
Interest of territory, cares of state,—

Which of you shall we say doth love us most?
That we our largest bounty may extend
Where nature doth with merit challenge. Goneril,
Our eldest-born, speak first.

GONERIL
Sir, I love you more than words can wield the matter;
Dearer than eye-sight, space, and liberty;
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare;
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honour;
As much as child e'er loved, or father found;
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable;
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA
What shall Cordelia do?
Love, and be silent.

LEAR
Of all these bounds, even from this line to this,
With shadowy forests and with champains rich'd,
With plenteous rivers and wide-skirted meads,
We make thee lady; to thine and Albany's issue
Be this perpetual. What says our second daughter,
Our dearest Regan, wife to Cornwall? Speak.

REGAN
Sir, I am made
Of the self-same metal that my sister is,
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart
I find she names my very deed of love;
only she comes too short; that I profess
Myself an enemy to all other joys,
Which the most precious square of sense possesses;
And find I am alone felicitate
in your dear highness' love.

CORDELIA
Then poor Cordelia!
And yet not so; since I am sure, my love's
More richer than my tongue.

→ Why divide
between 3?
Why not give
to one daughter

→ What about
younger siblings?

→ Don't
Disobey me

→ Cordelia feels
differently about
getting land
of her father

→ Lear thinks
Cordelia doesn't
care, and loves
him less.

Figure 4: Student L1's text analysis.

Once again, a majority of students chose not to publish blogs following this session, and this lack of engagement with written work is an aspect of the project that requires further investigation. The three students who did choose to publish blogs showed impressive individual connections. Student M displays a very clear sense of connection to the characters and an ability to make performative choices:

I felt like I can connect to the Fool. This is because he is an honest person and he can manipulate King Lear through the use of irony, sarcasm and humour, by doing this the Fool is releasing the truth out of Lear and is allowing himself to moderate the behaviour of Lear. King Lear is currently feeling betrayed, ashamed and disappointed that his daughter Cordelia is rejecting his offer, which tells how much she loves him and in return she will get a bigger third of his kingdom than her sisters do. King Lear is also feeling shocked that his favourite daughter is saying the things that she is saying...the dialogue helps support my reasoning on why he feels this way. If I were to play this scene I would be showing facial expressions that represent, Betrayal, shamefulness disappointment, and my body movement would somehow show disgust.

I find the student's statement that "*the Fool is releasing the truth out of Lear and is allowing himself to moderate the behaviour of Lear*" particularly insightful, and I suggest that the student would not have reached this conclusion without the clear sense of empathy he displays when stating "*I felt like I can connect to the Fool*". It would be fascinating to explore the ways in which the student recognises himself in the Fool, but even without this, the evidence displays a connection that typifies empathy inspired by active engagement in the tasks.

Following the active methods sessions, students completed their inquiries and shared the outcomes of them. The formats chosen for this sharing suggest that students built on the active methods sessions, since 13 of the 20 students chose to perform as a character or use performative methods. Student I originally worked with a partner to create "*An interview with me ... pretending to be Shakespeare and answering questions (both answers and question will be scripted)*". The student performed a live interview as Shakespeare where she responded to questions such as "*Did you bend your ideas to what was popular at the time?*" with responses developed from knowledge of the plays: "*This above all: to thine own self be true, it must follow, as night does day, thou canst not then be false to any man*" and responding "*The theme that be mine to love most reflects on the horror of love, and the violence that ensues in the face of love. These violent delights have violent ends, / And in their triumph die, like fire and powder*" when asked "*What themes were your favourite to pop in here and there?*"

Student S and Student L1 both chose to represent their inquiries by creating performances. Student S created a film with a group of four other students, in which he plays the role of Shakespeare, who has been kidnapped and brought forward in time to help the other students with their homework (very reminiscent of Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure). As Shakespeare, the student attempts to create some Shakespearean language, exclaiming "*Where art I? Who are thee before me?*" when he awakes following his kidnapping; responding to items such as an iPhone with the exclamation "*What is this witchcraft?*" and describing a t-shirt as "*more of a tragedy than Romeo and Juliet*". Student L1 created an enacted scene with two other students, with the Weird Sisters from Macbeth as the main characters. In a blog post once the inquiry was underway, this student notes that:

the group that I am in decided that we were going to look in to the so called curse and myths surrounding the Scottish Play. We decided on this because it was the subject ... that most interested us, as we wanted to know more about why everyone says that the play is cursed ... So far we have actually found that most people are blaming the curse on the fact that Shakespeare used so called actual Black Magic spells in the three sister's incantations.

From here, the group created a scene that imagined the sisters discussing the effects of their 'curse' and trying to decide what they should do about it:

The Macbeth Curse

Carmen's taking a nap. Persephone's drawing. Scarlett storms in with newspaper in hand.

Persephone: *Where hast thou been sister?*

Scarlett (angrily): *What hath thou done! *holds up newspaper* You have taken this too far!*

Persephone: *But sister, we have done nothing*

Scarlett: *You have done nothing you say *whacks Carmen with newspaper* Look what is said. What hath thou done?'*

I believe both of these examples show personalisation of learning by performing as a character, based on students working collaboratively and displaying empathy. I propose that students would not have felt compelled to display their learning performatively without the stimulus of the active methods session.

In the end of module interview Student E1 suggests that personalisation is learning *"in a way that you understand it, in a way that you almost enjoy it more"* (Sykes, 2016h, p. 6) while Student E2 defines personalisation as being able to *"Take something that many people have done before and make it special to you, so take something and just kind of make it your own. Put your own personal brand on something that's been done many times before"*. (Sykes, 2016h, p. 6) These students have both shown evidence of enjoying their learning, as well as providing responses that suggest they have made personal connections and choices about their learning. I would also suggest that Student L1's responses and the work she has produced also demonstrate the creation of new understanding and knowledge, since working collaboratively to research information on the 'Macbeth curse', then crafting the research evidence into a new piece of drama shows an ability to make connections and construct meaning that is a clear example of my own definition of personalisation.

However, the most impressive example of work that meets my definition of personalisation came from Student I. Having already shown the ability to interrogate the plays for examples of Shakespeare's possible beliefs in her interview as Shakespeare, she also chose to create an entire series of blogposts written from Shakespeare's point of view, including explanations of why she had written each post and the information she had used in order to create it. This demonstrates a powerful level of empathy and creativity, exemplified by the following post where the student considers Shakespeare's possible response to the death of his son Hamnet:

*A Sonnet I have here writ, in grief of my son I lost:
What god hath chose to take I question not,
But I ask why one so young must be took.
By angel's skill this sweet child hath been wrought,
And it is only now that I close look,
To notice what I had not seen before,
The beauty of the child who is now gone.
Sweet and pure as roses and much more,
Once lovely cheeks are now so pale and wan,
Upon the face of one that we so love.
I see such good as past times did not show,
Ne'er this thought can I truly be free of,
The thought the child I love can never know,
That I have always loved him and still do,
E'en though that precious child, he never knew.
I wrote this sonnet as a variation from my normal post, as well as to see how well I could write a sonnet/how hard it is.*

Why is this post necessary?

To give an idea of what Shakespeare might have gone through.

What does it convey?

What Shakespeare may have gone through when his son died.

Does it contain fiction? If so, Why?

Yes, it does. The majority of the text is fiction, the only fact in there is the backbone to the whole sonnet, the fact that Shakespeare's son Hamnet died at the age of 11. The fiction is needed to give the reader an idea of the situation and describe in rich detail how the character starring in the selected text felt.

This post is an extremely strong example of Student E2's definition of personalisation as taking "something that many people have done before and make it special to you, ...take something and just kind of make it your own. Put your own personal brand on something that's been done many times before" (Sykes, 2016h, p. 6), and along with the work created by Student L1, it epitomises for me my own definition of personalisation as 'learning that creates personal connections for students, where collaborative experience is a critical aspect of creating these connections'. Although the existence of two separate events (active teaching sessions and the personalisation of learning for this student) does not prove a causal link, I propose that this student's decision to create a blog as Shakespeare suggests that experiencing Shakespeare's language and making meaning through staging scenes has influenced her to choose empathy as the best way to demonstrate the deep connections she appears to have made to Shakespeare and the work he created.

I believe these outcomes present examples of learning that fit with Bolstad *et al.*'s (2012) view of personalisation as being about "knowledge-building" ... in ways that draw on the strengths and knowledge of [teachers and students] in order to best support learning" (p. 42), and in my conclusion, I will seek to identify how far the evidence I have generated and analysed suggests that students have built knowledge based on the connections they made due to the active teaching methods, as well as considering further questions that the project has raised.

Outcomes: Analysis of Generated Data

Although I have identified qualitative methodologies as most appropriate for this research, the data generated by the teaching activities contains some quantitative elements. Thus, interrogating these data gives a fuller picture within which to place the outcomes of the research. First I attempted to establish the extent to which students had participated in the active methods session (Figure 5)

20 students in cohort	Year 9 Students		Year 10 Students		Totals:
	Male	Female	Male	Female	
5 or less (no.)	1	2	3	2	8
5 or less (%)	5%	10%	15%	10%	40%
6 – 15 (no.)	1	4	1	2	8
6 – 15 (%)	5%	20%	5%	10%	40%
16+ (no.)	1	2	0	1	4
16+ (%)	5%	10%	0%	5%	20%

Figure 5: Students who contributed during active sessions (by name in coded evidence): NB ALL students contributed at least once. Categories are based on 5 recorded and transcribed sessions, therefore 5 responses is considered an average of one response per session.

Detailed interrogation of this data shows that 100% of students in the group of 20 made at least one individually identified response during the active methods sessions.

Of the 8 students with the lowest number of individual responses, only 3 failed to publish any individual blogs, which suggests that the remaining 5 students with low response levels did produce evidence of interaction with the learning in the module, despite a lack of documented responses during recorded sessions. Interestingly, 1 of these students was in a group of only 6 students who published at 3 or more of the 4 blogs required during the module. Of the 12 students with 6 or more documented responses, only 2 failed to publish any individual blogs, and 5 of the remaining 10 published 3 or more of the 4 blogs required during the module. This could suggest that in general, students who gave more individual responses during the teaching sessions were more likely to produce evidence of their learning than those who made fewer responses.

Teaching sequences were designed to fit within a framework of inquiry-led teaching, where students chose the topics and formats of their individual inquiries about Shakespeare and his work. Students had the choice of working individually or in groups, with the outcome that 19 of the 20 students chose to work in groups of between 2 and 5 students. The student who chose to work individually on one inquiry also worked with one other student on a different inquiry. In investigating the data generated by the teaching sessions, I sought to identify indicators that students were personalising their learning, according to my definition stated above. This meant that I was most interested in examples of personal connection, making meaning and empathy in relation to the characters and situations in the plays studied. It should be noted at this point that although the teaching sequences were deliberately designed to provoke and promote particular types of response, in analysing the data generated by these teaching activities, I tried to establish whether the type of response that is prompted by the activity was then carried on into other pieces of work.

I identified 251 specific instances of verbal and visual student responses that I categorised as either Collaborative (the result of a group of students working together) or Individual in the data (figure 6 below) that was generated from five specific active methods teaching sessions.

The examples of collaborative responses that are categorised as Observed are mainly visual in nature, and could not be accurately attributed to one individual student. For the specific responses identified, I then further categorised these into different types, based either on the learning intention of the lesson; for example *'To help students enjoy Shakespeare's language and understand how poetic technique creates meaning'*; or on my own interpretation of the responses students could make. Interrogating this data provided the outcomes detailed in figure 6 below, where 205 of the 251 responses were categorised as Individual, while 46 were categorised as Collaborative (a response that was made by an identified individual, but generated directly as a result of a group working together).

251 identified responses	Year 9		Year 10		Student not recorded or Observed (Group)	Totals:
	Male	Female	Male	Female		
Individual comment or question	6	14	2	14	0	36
Individual making a connection	6	13	3	7	0	29
Individual display of empathy	0	9	0	11	7	27
Collaborative making meaning – character decisions	0	0	0	0	7	7
Individual making meaning – character decisions	3	15	2	15	2	37
Collaborative making meaning – staging decisions	12	10	6	0	11	39
Individual making meaning – staging decisions	0	6	0	7	6	19
Individual experience	3	4	1	2	1	11
Individual imagination	1	1	0	1	0	3
Individual language deconstruction	1	11	0	4	0	16
Individual language knowledge	2	3	0	5	0	10
Individual textual analysis	4	3	2	8	0	17
Total responses:	38	89	16	74	34	251

Figure 6: Identified examples of different types of Collaborative and Personal responses from five of the six active methods teaching sequences, by type. (Sykes, 2016)

With 205 (82%) of all responses categorised as Individual, this might suggest that students are making individualised connections, which I believe are an integral aspect of demonstrating that personalisation of learning is occurring. 29 (12%) of these Individual responses exemplified a specific connection being made in relation to personal circumstances: *“It was like what happens when you’re trying to decide between good and bad. It’s like having those two on your shoulders”* (Sykes, 2016e, p. 3)

It is also notable that 27 (11%) of these responses display empathy, for example *“Lear’s thinking how can my favourite child not love me as much as my other daughters”*. (Sykes, 2016g, p. 2) I therefore suggest that students displaying empathy are demonstrating the creation of individualised connections to the plays and especially the characters within them.

Conclusion

This project aimed to investigate whether active, ensemble-based teaching methods might stimulate personalisation of learning in a particular group of students, with differing views of personalisation reflected in the responses given to the question ‘what does personalisation mean to you’ by my research subjects during the end of module interview. Student S describes personalisation as *‘Getting to choose the way you want to work, and how you do it’*, which reflects ‘shallow’ personalisation, while student E2 describes it as the ability to *‘Take something that many people have done before and make it special to you, so take something and just kind of make it your own.’*, which reflects ‘deep’ personalisation. 2 of the 8 students interviewed defined personalisation in terms of having a choice while 6 of the 8 defined it in terms of customization or individualization. As a teacher in a future-focused school, where the aim is to *‘innovate through personalised learning’* in order to prepare students for their futures, I find this a very pleasing response,

The data generated by the project suggest that the students with the greatest number of interactions in the teaching sessions displayed the highest indicators of personalisation. 3 of the 4 students with the highest number of responses (ranging from 19 to 54 responses) produced many items of work that displayed clear examples of personal connection and 3 of the 4 students chose to perform as a character or used performance aspects in the outcome of their first inquiry. I believe that this finding shows evidence of these students interacting within the sessions and making meaning for themselves through performative choices that was then used to create meaning in a performative way in the outcome of the inquiries. This chain of events is supportive of Campbell et al.’s (2007) view of personalisation as a *“collective frame”* that *“leads to the individual developing her/his learning”* (p. 151), since these students also engaged in collaboration during the active methods sessions, and experienced events that allowed them to become part of the world of the play. This in turn allowed them use that experience to further develop the personal connections they had gained in order to produce new, personal knowledge.

It was also noticeable that for these students with higher levels of responses, the number of responses steadily increased over the number of sessions. Student M, for example, made 4 responses in the first recorded session, rising to 12 in the fourth session, while Student N made no responses in the first two sessions, then made two responses in the third session rising to six in the fourth session. This steady rise in interaction could suggest that the group of students was gaining in confidence with each other, with the teaching methods or with the subject matter, but the upshot is that the quality of connections evident in the work also rose. I believe that the quality of the connections created by those students and of the work produced as a result makes it a viable suggestion that the impact of the active methods session has been noticeable.

The data also suggests that the students who showed the highest number of examples of empathy in their responses were more likely to achieve above the expected level when Learning Objectives were assessed. Since the ability to empathise is considered

the highest order of thinking within the 'Make Sense' LO at HPSS, it seems reasonable to suggest that the opportunities to engage in this higher order thinking also allowed students to demonstrate achievement at higher levels of the curriculum through creating personal and innovative meaning. 11 students showed at least one example of empathy during the recorded sessions, 4 of whom showed more than one example. 7 of the former and all of the latter were assessed as above their expected level in at least one LO. I propose that this outcome is linked to the way that these students used empathy to gain experience and understanding of the plays or characters in order to create knowledge that had specific meaning for them as individuals. The most interesting aspect of this data for me is the evidence that 13 of the 20 students (65%), chose to demonstrate empathy by performing as a character, or using other performative methods, in the outcome of their inquiries. Given the range of choices available for students to demonstrate their learning about their inquiry, 65% choosing this method suggests that exposure to active methods could have predisposed the students towards this type of demonstration. This being the case, I suggest that active methods could be applied in a wide variety of shared modules (English, Social Studies, the Arts) and so the potential to deliver personalised learning using these methods in my current environment could be substantial.

Since it is important in my context for students to create personalised learning, I believe that the outcomes of this project identify a valuable pedagogy for promoting this learning which works well alongside the inquiry-led learning that is a preferred way of providing deep challenge for all students. Indeed, since many students feel challenged by the idea of studying Shakespeare, both the teaching method and subject could be deemed to promote deep challenge. I feel confident that as a small first step towards understanding whether active methods can stimulate personalised learning, this project has achieved its goal by demonstrating that personalisation has certainly occurred for the students investigated in these case outcomes.

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