1 Digital Tools, Shakespeare, and Ambitious Teaching

My father was a systems analyst, which helps explain why he was an early adopter of devices and gadgets that predated the home computer. He was forever tinkering with electronic components and imagining his workload automated while I was elsewhere, probably reading. Yet when I became a (US) high school teacher, I too embraced new technologies (and became locally infamous when three adolescents used my scanner – then a very cool new tool for the yearbook staff – to reproduce *Playboy* centrefolds). My enthusiasm for technology for teaching and learning led me to vote against mandating Shakespeare for every student in their senior year. Despite my love for British literature, I believed we needed more space in the curriculum for media classes, and something had to go. The department vote pitched visual literacies and student creativity against the seriousness and college preparation represented by Shakespeare. Shakespeare won.

To my mind, supporting new media meant offering unenthusiastic literature students a way to meet requirements using the tools and content that interested them; my colleagues saw a vote for Shakespeare as a vote for maintaining high expectations for secondary education. Neither side was wrong.

In a kind of Zen koan, the education of advanced learners (15–20 years old) is often perplexing: Do you teach the subject? Or teach the students? The work of promoting serious academic engagement without ignoring the learning interests, preferences, and needs of young adults has been called many things, including impossible. A more helpful framework that has emerged in formal research on classrooms is *ambitious teaching*. Learners are found to thrive in ambitious classrooms because there they experience authentic academic tasks, social learning, and meaningful assessments. Ambitious teaching strategies, as discussed in this Element, enable students to gain academic knowledge without sublimating their identities to unquestioned norms: instead, students are nurtured as critical thinkers. To teach Shakespeare ambitiously requires both an expansive knowledge of complex texts and a commitment to students puzzling out meanings for themselves through the means they are inclined to use. And so: interactive digital editions of Shakespeare.

This Element presents three case studies of interactive digital editions of Shakespeare incorporated into classroom teaching at the high school and university level. Each interactive edition combines the text of a Shakespeare play with a performance to be viewed or heard. The reader/viewer enjoys many navigational affordances, entering or accessing information without a prescribed sequence, just as one might utilize a critical print edition (choosing when to read supplementary essays, check footnotes, consult references). The central text is organized by acts and scenes, but additional notes, commentary, and most importantly performances offer digressions, elaborations, and alternative pathways through the play. The case studies in this Element include examples of the glosses, translations, synopses, character guides, notes, supplemental information, and study-guide-like questions (and answers) that students can access.

Each case study considers whether and how the interactive Shakespeare edition supports ambitious teaching. Support is evidenced in multiple ways. Does the edition take over some of the foundational work that a teacher often must provide when assigning a Shakespeare play? Not the close reading, but the initial reading: the necessary familiarity with characters and situations that sometimes teachers treat as an end in itself. It appears that with an interactive edition students can make meaning from a text on their own, choosing textual tools and consulting their peers, rather than depending passively on a teacher's explanations. Does the digital edition expand and complicate the reader/viewer's thinking about a Shakespeare play? The more typical approach may be to reduce and simplify a play, helping students to know 'the gist'. But to what purpose? The three case studies analyse the ways that the interactive editions promote critical thinking about the designs and decisions required for creating an edition of a text and presenting a performance. As detailed in Section 1.1, what's *ambitious* about ambitious teaching is that students are expected to engage in authentic academic tasks, experience social learning (dialogic rather than didactic), and demonstrate their new knowledge through meaningful assessments and assignments.

These case studies interrogate how interactive editions make Shakespeare accessible for learners who have a wide range of abilities. The case studies also note where the embedded Shakespeare production

represents identities as diverse as the students, and thus helps make the play relevant to contemporary classrooms. In our time of pandemic and considerable public contention over equity and justice, ambitious teaching further requires attention to the whole selves of students – their psychological and social development as well as their intellectual attainment. This Element examines the opportunities that interactive digital editions give teachers, software developers, and scholars to connect Shakespeare's works to twenty-first-century students.

1.1 Research on Ambitious Teaching

1.1.1 Authentic Academic Tasks

Multidisciplinary educational research has worked to delineate the combination of teacher knowledge and teaching skills that underlies ambitious practices. These practices result in instructional designs (in classroom environments, teaching strategies, and curricular choices) that make student learning the priority: the central ambition is that *all* students learn. Students experience ambitious teaching when class activities and assignments offer multiple paths to gain academic knowledge, especially the terminology of a subject, and the tools of the discipline. Magdalene Lampert and colleagues explain that to do this, students need to acquire the basic skills of a discipline while they encounter more complicated ideas within it (2013, p. 226). Students develop knowledge about a subject through taking on authentic tasks: as Lampert and Filippo Graziani report, students doing so become more sophisticated in the academic language they use to communicate their ideas (2009, p. 492). In studying literature, for instance, students might learn to use literary terms such as metaphor or synecdoche to make sense of how Iago persuades Othello to his ruin.

1.1.2 Social Learning

Ambitious teaching taps into the power of social learning: students engage as group members in activities that take advantage of their heterogeneity. According to Lorrie Shepard, shared assignments draw on different kinds of talents, making room for collaborating across different ability levels (Shepard 2021, p. 29). Authentic teaching means managing authentic

group work, accepting what Lampert and colleagues describe as social risks for teachers and for their students (2011, p. 228). The teacher must be willing to risk following student interests rather than a lockstep curriculum. Mark Windschitl and colleagues find that students are enabled to take risks and feel stretched by new ideas when they experience a relational space in a classroom for role playing, group work, and other social learning (2011, p. 1312).

The social learning analysed in this Element potentially happens in theatre-based classroom instruction, despite the digital nature of the editions. Teaching Shakespeare through dramatic pedagogies, teachers and theatre artists create physical and emotional space that allows embodied experimentation with a play text: these cases consider whether such enactments are still possible and useful when students use interactive editions. With theatre-based classroom activities students enact text for the discovery of wonderful ideas, as Lisa Schneier (2021) describes, through 'playfulness, fun, choice, action, and movement' (p. 72). Theatre-based classroom practices also offer opportunities for opening up classroom discussions on student identity as well as artistic expression,[1] as discussed in Section 2.1.

1.1.3 Assessments That Gauge Learning that Matters

Lorrie Shepard's work on assessment emphasizes that ambitious teaching values the learning of 'all kinds of students' (2021, p. 28). Rather than reducing content acquisition to right or wrong answers, authentic tasks and exercises capture complex learning. Ambitious teaching uses the results of such assessments formatively, as Jessica Thompson and colleagues explain, enabling the teacher to adjust and modify plans and activities to boost student progress (2013, p. 574). Consequently, teachers need substantial knowledge of, and the capacity to access resources for, alternative pathways for students to gain understanding: according to Deborah Loewernberg Ball and Francesca M. Forzani, ambitious teaching does not simply repeat or water down material for students to succeed on a test (2009, p. 500). The central goal of socially and intellectually ambitious teaching is student sense-making.

[1] See Ayanna Thompson and Laura Turchi, *Teaching Shakespeare with Purpose* chapter 4, 'Embodiement: What Is It (Not)?'

The success of a teaching unit built around a Shakespeare play would not be measured by student regurgitation of characters and plot points.

Instead, ambitiously teaching Shakespeare with an interactive digital edition should mean that students make sense of the play independently and with their peers. They access glosses, lexicons, and dictionaries to expand their understanding of the words, perhaps creating a shared edition that clarifies and represents what matters most to their interpretation. Students view performances and related artefacts that enable them to see the work as drama and have a window into the making of theatre. They work together to enact the text, deepening their familiarity with the language as they pronounce the words, imagining, and embodying the emotion and movement suggested. Through activities and facilitated discussions students could consider the cultural context of the play at its writing and through history, while finding and investigating resonances in their own lives. With ambitious teaching and an interactive digital edition, the sense students make of a Shakespeare work would be grounded in who they are, stretching them to imagine the other lives, other voices represented in the play, as well as those that are not (and students could be encouraged to think about *why*).

If this seems like a lot, it is. Isolated individuals taking on ambitious teaching requires what Magdalene Lampert and colleagues decry as a 'herculean and idiosyncratic' archetype of teachers (2013, p. 17). Jessica Thompson and colleagues note that student teachers are understandably dismayed at the prospect of ambitiously teaching on their own (2019, p. 3). In no way is 'ambitious' meant here to be an evaluative measure of teacher practices. Instead, this Element systematically considers whether and how interactive digital editions of Shakespeare plays can support the high academic expectations and deep student engagement characteristic of ambitious teaching.

1.2 Teaching the Whole Selves of Students

Gail Richmond and colleagues have raised concerns that ambitious teaching's focus on student acquisition of academic knowledge and the tools of a discipline may not 'sufficiently value the cultural backgrounds of learners' nor 'highlight culturally bound lived experiences' (2017, p. 432). They call

for culturally sustaining pedagogies (citing Django Paris) to make ambi-
tious teaching truly inclusive. Paris's point, in urging educators beyond
culturally relevant or responsive practices, is to promote schooling that
embraces linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism (2012, p. 93). Student
identities and homes, their communities, the whole selves that they bring to
our classrooms, must be part of how and why they acquire academic
knowledge and skills.

If a classroom means to nurture the whole selves of individual students,
ambitious teaching can make no assumption – spoken or otherwise – that
students all share experiences that lead them to trust authority, for instance.
There needs to be room for students who experience food or housing
insecurity to express dissatisfaction with characters whose privileged lives
give them immunity from the consequences of impulsive choices. Students
may want to raise religious objections to witches or demons, or too much
make-believe. They may not share expectations about parental authority or
the importance of obedience. They may bring experiences with mental
illness or dementia that will be deeply relevant to their literary interpreta-
tions. Students may have strong opinions about biracial marriage or
LGBTQ relationships. The lived experiences and perspectives of students
are important to how they respond to literature and make sense of it.

Each of the interactive editions discussed here embeds productions in
which students can see different races and ethnicities represented. The cases
that follow identify where the editions directly support teachers in high-
lighting colour-blind, or perhaps colour-rich, casting decisions. The sections
that follow further indicate places where such classroom dialogue could arise,
and where editions do or could include prompts or starting places for such
discussions. As Ayanna Thompson and I argue, the key is to interrogate
students' preconceived ideas about what Shakespeare characters look and
sound like (2016, p. 78). Such interrogations are a part of ambitious teaching.

Students have academic identities as well, and teachers may only know
them through the limited perspective of their interest and ability with
schoolwork. There are teachers who believe that Shakespeare is 'for every-
body', and yet their ideas about Shakespeare teaching may need to be
questioned. When teachers say that students love *Romeo and Juliet*, it is
worth asking *which* students they mean – the honours students, the 'good

readers'? One literacy coach interviewed about schools that had – and had not – adopted one of the interactive editions explained that some English departments in the district decided that Shakespeare plays were not worth the effort required to teach them, that there was too much resistance from students who 'only need to watch the movie'.

In my experiences of many US English language arts classrooms, teaching Shakespeare can mean a classroom of students who passively listen, following along the play text as recorded by actors. Reaching the end of a scene, a teacher will ask, 'Any questions?' or 'What just happened?' and get back little. Often the teacher then tells the class what they have heard, and they move on. Or students read scenes aloud, without preparation or guidance for pronunciation (just a teacher's frequent corrections), and most students (especially those who don't volunteer to read) literally do not know what is being said. Teachers who provide *NoFear Shakespeare* editions or other modern translations may claim that 'just getting students to read' is challenge enough. Students need teachers who are more ambitious for their learning. Increasing opportunities for more students to encounter and understand Shakespeare plays is social justice. This is not about what Shakespeare per se can do for students, but what students gain when they have confidence that they are capable of reading and thinking about complex ideas.

1.3 Why Combining Text and Performance Matters

The interactivity of the editions discussed in these cases may matter most because students have increased agency, have choices among the features or buttons that intrigue them, as they figure out what is going on in a play and why. The cases in this Element further examine the evidence for how interactive digital editions might help students recognize the *intentionality* of theatre arts through critical thinking about productions. Each of the interactive editions includes cast lists, production credits, and other features that might remind students of the collaborative work of theatre and film. The embedded productions should enable them to consider the endless series of choices and decisions by directors, designers, actors, crew, and more that culminate in a Shakespeare production. Paying attention to the making of art should also help a student untangle a particular production

from the play's text. Many teachers have read student papers about Romeo and Juliet in a swimming pool and Tybalt shooting Mercutio, conflating Baz Luhrmann's *Romeo + Juliet* with 'the play'. Ambitious teaching can guide students to articulate their reactions to performances, analysing interpretations by comparing productions.

Mary Ellen Dakin's *Reading Shakespeare Film First* is a useful place for English teachers to find advice and ideas for teaching students to recognize camera angles and other cinematographic strategies that make filmmaking an art in its own right (2012, p. 28). She presents activities that help students see that reading a film requires learning a new language and unlocking 'a medium that deliberately effaces itself' (2012, p. 31). Students can learn to recognize the craft, the intentionality, of a multitude of performance choices. Each of the interactive editions addressed in this Element involves all those choices, from camera placement to sound capture, lighting and costumes, settings and more. Ambitious teaching encourages students to ask many questions of these choices: How is the eye being told what is most important to look at? When and how does a production show the characters, and how closely do we see them? What is the impact?

With ambitious teaching, students might consider too the work of designing and developing a software platform to become an interactive edition, one that allows navigation of the play text, performance, and all the supporting materials. Students can think about and perhaps try their hands at the substantial textual work of writing synopses, choosing what to gloss, and other responsibilities of an editor. Not every English class will talk about the 'behind the scenes' work, but it is good citizenship to acknowledge labour (and the computing and design work that might be interesting to some students). Ambitious teaching builds the academic habit of critical thinking: an interactive digital edition of Shakespeare represents almost endless points of decision making about the text and the performance.

1.4 Why 'Editions'?

Noam Lior's work suggests that the 'depth and breadth of scholarly undertaking, and in particular a level of bibliographic competence and discipline' are what define a Shakespeare edition (2019, p. 17). He acknowledges that

there is no 'industry standard' for naming digital objects that combine text and performance. Lior is hesitant to call the embedded audio and video recordings *performances* at all, based on their not being live, but he offers a useful discussion of artists 'working at the intersection of theatre performance and digital technologies' and all the ways that mediation is decidedly not the same as live theatre (2019, p. 19). In Lior's analysis, which looks at two of the interactive editions discussed in this Element, some such editions may not be appropriate for more sophisticated readers because extensive scholarship is not part of their design. In the context of supporting ambitious teaching, however, 'edition' usefully refers to the software platform, including the text, the performance, and the auxiliary materials. Advanced edition learners who are new to taking Shakespeare seriously can hear the word *edition* as a reminder of the specialized work involved in preparing all these dimensions. Looking closely at the many decisions made in creating an interactive digital edition can enable advanced learners to consider the evolution of Shakespeare texts from the working scripts of Shakespeare the playwright to the authoritative editions today.

Anyone who writes about web pages, software platforms, and other digital interactive texts will recognize the challenge of describing all the links and non-linear progressions that are encompassed in these interactive Shakespeare editions. But the complexities of describing a Shakespeare text as printed and performed are already acknowledged by scholars. Jonathan Hope describes the 'three-dimensional networks of interdependent connections and recursive loops' of Shakespeare's grammar (2003, p. 3). Steven Orgel argues that the 1929 Cranach Press illustrated *Hamlet* edition with its representations of dramatic moments 'reconceives the book of the play as a performance and completes the play as a book' (2007, p. 310). Brett D. Hirsch and colleagues commiserate with performance critics who seek to use text to represent 'a rich and dynamic interplay of audio and visual stimuli, [and] a display of motion and emotion (ephemeral in the case of theatrical performance)' (2017, p. 1). Sonia Massai argues that a truly complete Shakespeare edition would need to be a 'Play(book)', potentially including the text of the play as performed and then printed, the revisions made to scripts and in reprints, and what she calls the 'textual network' that provides interpretive context (2017, p. 56). For this Element, an *interactive*

Video 1 The access page for the plays available in *WordPlay Shakespeare*. Video file is available at www.cambridge.org/turchi

Video 2 The access page for the plays available in *PerformancePlus*. Video file is available at www.cambridge.org/turchi