“Oh no not that boring old dead English guy with all his stupid boring plays…”

- Teaching approaches to Shakespeare in upper secondary schools

  – Att undervisa ämnet Shakespeare i Engelska på gymnasienivå

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Preface

The following dissertation was written collaboratively by Tina Nilsson and Gregory McGee, however, some sections were influence more by one author. The sections more influenced by Tina are: preface and abstract, method section, approaches of the result section and the cultural- and personal growth model of the discussion section. The sections more influenced by Gregory are: introduction section, background, purpose and material/media in the result section as well as the language-based model in the discussion section. We would, however, like to emphasize that this dissertation was a joint effort in which each of us played an equal part.

Abstract

This dissertation seeks to explore the approaches used by teachers of English in upper secondary schools when teaching literature. According to the national syllabus for English literature is an element that must be included in the English courses B and C. More specifically, covering literature from different time periods is a requirement. Further requirements connected to the teaching of literature involve dealing with the cultural- and historical aspects of English speaking countries. For the purpose of this dissertation we chose Shakespeare as an example of one of many eligible authors. Shakespeare’s works embody this category by providing all three aforementioned elements stipulated in the syllabus in connection with teaching literature. The focus of this paper was the approaches utilized by the teachers who have chosen to cover the topic of Shakespeare. Suitable candidates were, therefore, selected to provide us with our findings through the qualitative method of interview. Our findings include all informants making reference to the same passage in the syllabus when justifying their choice of teaching Shakespeare. It was also ascertained that all interviewees consider establishing relevance of a topic essential in order to motivate their students to learn. Our conclusion is that most of the teachers involved in this study prefer a learner-centred, activity-based approach. When teaching Shakespeare the key according to our informants is variation.

Key words: Shakespeare, Teaching approaches, Teaching literature
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Introduction

“Oh no not that boring old dead English guy with all his stupid boring plays…”

(Alice, actual quote from one of her students)

When introducing the topic of Shakespeare the reactions you receive from the students may vary. Even though the above quote may, or may not, be recognized by all teachers of English, most would probably agree that some topics are more difficult to approach than others. This is subject to various reasons. Two such factors relate to making the students realize the relevance in what is being taught and getting them motivated enough to participate. These are important elements when deciding what to teach in an English upper-secondary classroom.

According to the syllabus for English, literature from different periods of time has to be dealt with in the courses B and C at upper secondary level. This implies working with material that is several hundred years old, which can be problematic, not least from a language perspective. We have chosen Shakespeare and his works as being representative of such literature. We have investigated and presented approaches employed by teachers covering this topic. Our intention was to explore which approaches teachers considered successful, or unsuccessful.

The idea for writing a dissertation about teaching approaches to Shakespeare presented itself during our VFT, when we were given an opportunity to teach the topic ourselves. We found the task challenging and the idea of investigating how other teachers approached the same topic developed.

The relevance of our research lies within the practicality of our findings, which we believe will be beneficial to ourselves as future teachers. Also, when writing this dissertation we discovered a lack of previous research in the area of teaching Shakespeare in the ESL classroom.

In this dissertation we mention “the topic of Shakespeare” and “Shakespeare” many times. By this we refer to both the author and his works. The words “approach” and “method” in the following text function as synonyms and are used to describe the procedure of teaching.

In the following pages we will present our method and subsequently our results. These will
be followed by a discussion in which our results are structured and placed into three models, namely the cultural model, the language-based model and the personal growth model.

**Previous Research**

The task of choosing relevant prior studies as a basis to our own research was a challenging one. For the purpose of this research paper the following reference literature dating from 1987 onwards was selected:

*Teaching English*, edited by Susan Brindley and first published in 1994, deals directly with debates in English teaching. The reader is invited to engage in the ideas and opinions of teaching English in this book. *Teaching English* consists of five parts, which cover the development of English as a subject. Chapter three containing the subtext *Teaching Shakespeare in Schools* by Rex Gibson is of particular interest for this research paper. This book deals with teaching literature to native speakers of English. It deals specifically with the topic of Shakespeare and was therefore helpful to our investigation.

*Literature and Language Teaching*, written by Gillian Lazar for the benefit of teacher and instructors who wish to include literature in the English classroom. It provides the reader with practical ideas and activities while at the same time discussing the advantages and disadvantages of the three models mentioned above. It has therefore been used as a compliment to explain the structure of the three models provided by Long & Carter.

*Literature in the Language Classroom – a resource book of ideas and activities* by Joanne Collie and Stephen Slater divided up into three sections functions as a practical guide to integrating literature with language teaching. This book was beneficial to our research and subsequently our results because it addresses the fundamental questions as to ‘why?’, ‘what?’ and ‘how?’ literature is taught.

*Teaching Literature*, authored by Michael N. Long and Ronald Carter deals with different approaches to teaching literature. The book presents activities for learners of all levels of English and demonstrates how literature can be related to the students’ own experiences. The authors also categorize different approaches to literature into three models of teaching. This book provided us with a structure in which to place our findings.

In the book *Teaching Literature*, they explain three models that are used to describe the main reasons for teaching literature. These are the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model.
The cultural model is described as being more teacher-centred, placing emphasis on information that leads to a deeper understanding of dissimilar cultures and ideologies. For an ESL student the reading of literature from different periods of time is a way of acquiring knowledge of what society was like in a particular country during a particular time. According to Long and Carter, the cultural model stresses”the values of literature in encapsulating the accumulated wisdom, the best that has been thought and felt within a culture” (1991, p. 2). By the best the authors mean that:

Literature expresses the most significant ideas and sentiments of human beings and teaching literature represents a means by which students can be put in touch with a range of expression - often of universal value and validity – over an historical period or periods (1991, p. 2).

The language model focuses on enriching various features of the written language such as sentence structure, ways of connecting ideas and expressing English idiomatically. Through reading literature the students develop a general idea of how to use the target language creatively. This particular aspect of the model is teacher-centred, encouraging the student to make connections between linguistic form and meaning in a text. Long and Carter explain that one of the main objectives behind this model ”is to demonstrate what ’oft was thought but ne’er so well expressed’, that is, to put students in touch with some of the more subtle and varied creative uses of the language” (1991,p. 2). The other aspect of this model is learner-centred and activity-based. This aspect involves students playing with language through different activities such as role-play and word games.

Similar to the language model, the personal growth model is a more student-centred approach. The focal point of this model is "to motivate the student to read by relating the themes and topics depicted in a literary text to his or her own personal experience” (1991, p. 9). This model encourages students to reflect on what they have read, to be drawn into the text and to make the text their own. Long and Carter explain that the engagement that the student develops with literary texts is not something that can be measured through examination. They state that success is calculated in the extent in which the pleasure involved in engaging with literature is carried further than the classroom to become a lifelong fulfilment.
Connecting Shakespeare to the steering documents

Teachers of English are required to motivate their teaching by connecting the subject matter to the syllabus for English. For example if a teacher was dealing with social issues presented in Shakespeare’s plays, he or she could make reference to the following “goal to aim for” in English at upper secondary school: “develop their ability to communicate and interact in English in a variety of contexts concerning different issues and in different situations” (skolverket, 2009).

Similarly a teacher may connect teaching Shakespeare to the following goal to aim for in relation to language and creativity where the students are supposed to “refine their ability to express themselves in writing in different contexts, as well as develop their awareness of language and creativity” (skolverket, 2009). After all, few surpass Shakespeare in regards to vocabulary and creative writing.

The aims laid out for the teaching of the various levels of English by the Swedish Ministry for Education are open to interpretation. However the aims outlined for the levels of English B and C are somewhat more specific in regards to the teaching of literature. The objectives for English B state the following:

Have basic orientation of literature in English from different periods of time. Have knowledge of social conditions, history and culture in the countries where English is spoken (translation our own) (skolverket, 2009).

The literature objective for English course C is described as follows:

Be able to read fiction from different periods of time and within different genres as well as, in connection with the reading, reflect on content and form from different perspectives (translation our own)(skolverket, 2009).
Purpose statement

One of the objectives included in the syllabus for English is the teaching of literature representative of different periods of time. Although there is a multitude of such texts there are a few more obvious choices for the English language teacher. An example of such literature is Shakespeare, which could be considered common for English course B. The purpose of this dissertation is to investigate and present what approaches teachers of English in upper secondary schools choose to apply when teaching Shakespeare. We aim to unravel some of the different possibilities to teaching Shakespeare in ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms in Sweden.

Research Questions

• What approaches are favoured by teachers of English when teaching Shakespeare in an ESL classroom?
• How do teachers of English make the topic of Shakespeare relevant to ESL students?
Method

For the following dissertation the manner of which the data has been collected is of a qualitative variety. The qualitative method was chosen due to the nature of the study, which is concerned with the thoughts and feelings of educational practitioners in reference to the subject of teaching Shakespeare. The difference between quantitative and qualitative data collection is that quantitative, simply put, is more concerned with numbers and statistics. Qualitative data is more in tuned to the nuances and emotional responses that can be gathered from a number of different data collection methods. The qualitative method chosen for this study is the interview. According to J. Amos Hatch qualitative method can be described as follows:

Qualitative methods provide means whereby social contexts can be systematically examined as a whole, without breaking them down into isolated, incomplete, and disconnected variables. Qualitative data are objects, pictures, or detailed descriptions that cannot be reduced to numbers without distorting the essence of the social meanings they represent (Hatch, 2002, p. 9).

Selection

The six informants chosen for this dissertation are qualified upper-secondary English teachers from municipalities around the Malmo area. In order to gain as wide a range of teacher perspectives as possible the teachers, deriving from different upper-secondary schools, were contacted with the purpose of establishing a selection of teachers appropriate for the interview.

The previous research selected as reference material was chosen based on the similarity of the questions dealt with in our interviews.
Data collection strategy

In order to obtain different teachers’ perspectives, interviews were conducted with each pedagogue separately. The type of interview outcome that this study aims to collect is of a reconstructive variety that mainly explains the past experiences and events described by the informants (Hatch, 2002).

The questions employed in the interviews were mainly open-ended and can be found as an attachment to this dissertation. The goal of the interviews was to establish first that the informant had taught or had found it relevant to teach the subject of Shakespeare previously. Secondly, we wanted to establish that the teacher had developed an approach or approaches as to how the topic was introduced to the students. The teacher was asked to evaluate his/her teaching process with regards to this subject and to answer whether or not the approaches used were believed to be successful or not. Included in the interview were observations the teacher had made of the students in the class.

The teacher’s attitude towards Shakespeare is of great importance and was therefore one of the initial questions asked. A central question was whether or not the teacher considered his/her students to be easily motivated in the classroom. The task of the interviewer was to try to listen for key words that connected the informants together and created sufficient data to be studied. This is all in accordance with Hatch that states the following:

Qualitative interviewers create a special kind of speech event during which they ask open-ended questions, encourage informants to explain their unique perspectives on the issues at hand, and listen intently for special language and other clues that reveal meaning structures informants use to understand their worlds (Mishler, 1986; Seidman, 1998; Spradley, 1979). Interviewers enter interview settings with questions in mind but generate questions during the interview in response to informants’ responses, the social contexts being discussed, and the degree of rapport established (Hatch, 2002, p. 23).
Procedure

In order to select appropriate teachers nine upper-secondary schools located in Malmo and surrounding areas were contacted and asked to participate in a study regarding the topic of Shakespeare. We contacted the majority of the teachers by physically going to the schools and seeking the teachers of English. After initial contact we obtained the email addresses of the potential interview candidates. We then sent out a proposal including our dissertation purpose and suggestions for possible interview dates. Once we agreed upon a time for interview a copy with our interview questions was sent prior to our meetings. The reason why we visited the schools in person was to increase the likelihood of obtaining interviewees – a method that proved successful compared to communication by email and phone calls. Our instinct was that an email is easily disregarded and a meeting in person is harder to ignore.

The critical question at this preliminary stage was to establish whether or not the selected teachers dealt with Shakespeare as a topic and subsequently whether or not they were to be included in the study.

The interviews took place in the selected teacher’s school environment and were tape-recorded for the purpose of transcribing at a later stage. Special attention was given to the actual room for the interviews to ensure privacy and that the informants felt comfortable in answering all types of questions without risking anyone overhearing. The room was also important with regards to the Dictaphone, i.e. the interviewer and informant had to be seated fairly close together and at an equal distance from the microphone to enhance the sound quality.

Prior to the actual interview the candidates selected were informed of the questions that they would be asked. However, many questions during the actual interviews were of a follow-up nature encouraging the teachers to stay with their train of thought. The interviewers’ aim was to cover all the essential main questions while at the same time allowing the informants to take their time in explaining past procedures and experiences.

In order for us to collect data as reliable as possible we chose to carry out the interviews in a similar fashion on every occasion. This meant one of us asked the questions while the other was responsible for the Dictaphone and note taking. In doing this we aimed to expose all interviewees to the same procedures. However, the first interview did deviate from the procedure in that more than one candidate was interviewed.

For our first interview, on November 12th 2009, we questioned two teachers simultaneously. The focus was therefore on both subjects answering all questions, our aim being to obtain the
same result as a separate interview would have. The downside to interviewing two subjects at
the same time, we realised, was that there were several instances when the teachers were both
talking at once. There was also a risk of the interviewees influencing each others answers.
The two teachers had very different qualities since one was a little older with only three years
of teaching experience while the other was a little younger but with eleven years of
experience. For the purpose of this dissertation these teachers will be referred to as Laura and
Evelyn.

On the same day as our first meeting with Laura and Evelyn we met with yet another
potential participant at a school in Malmo. However, this teacher failed to respond to
subsequent emails. This we feel is important to reveal since it demonstrates the obstacles we
had in obtaining five successful interviews.

Our second interview, on November 13th 2009, was with a teacher from Vellinge. This
teacher, who we have given the pseudonym Alaska, is a young woman with two year’s
teaching experience.

The third interview, on November 19th 2009, was with a female teacher, referred to here as
Hanna, at another school in Malmo. This interview was the quickest since we had the
opportunity to meet and interview her on the same day.

In between the third and fourth interviews we tried to establish cont
act with yet another
school and with a particular teacher recommended to us by our third interviewee. However,
this candidate also failed to respond to any further communication.

The fourth interview, on November 20th 2009, was with another female teacher, Beth, at a
school in Lund. This candidate also had several years of experience teaching and was very
accommodating. The interview was scheduled ahead of time and was one of the longest.

A professor at Lund University suggested the sixth interviewee, Alice, to us. She was
interviewed on the 23 of November 2009 and is an upper secondary school teacher in Ystad.

Research ethical questions
In the course of writing this dissertation all steps were taken to ensure that the teachers
involved were aware of the purpose of the research. The interviewees were informed that their
identities would not be disclosed and the information stored safely and confidentially.
Emphasis was placed on the importance of the teacher’s contribution. They were also made
aware that they were free to refrain from participating at any stage. The audio files were
transcribed for the purpose of the dissertation but were later destroyed. All participants were
informed that they would be allowed to read the dissertation upon its completion.

The results of the study

The results of this study have been divided into four subcategories, namely background, purpose, approach and material and media. This provided an overview of the results gathered from the interviews with six teachers. The interview questions were used as a foundation when creating the categories. Each category presents the answers to the corresponding questions supported by quotes from the interviewees.

Background

Description of students, course and local plans

When asked in what courses the topic of Shakespeare was included all teachers responded English B and sometimes, although very rarely, when teaching English C. They were all in agreement about not introducing Shakespeare too early since many students might feel overwhelmed by the difficulty of the material. The national board of education describes English course B as follows:

English B builds on English A and corresponds to stage 6. The course has a more analytical focus. The perspective is further broadened to cover the use of language in varying and complicated situations. Familiarity with English-speaking cultures is developed. English B is a course common to the Arts, Natural Science, Social Science and Technology Programmes [sic] (skolverket, 2009).

Even though literature is not mentioned in the description it is mentioned in the syllabus for the same course.

The question was posed: ‘how would you describe the students in your class?’ to which a minority answered that they had the entire spectra of students giving examples such as, “nice, sloppy, lazy, generally rather immature” (Alice). The majority, however, described their students as motivated, ambitious and accommodating.

None of the schools had their own local plan including the teaching of Shakespeare. However, when examining a student due to special circumstances (särskild prövning) one of
the schools had included Shakespeare as an obligatory part of the testing.

Relating Shakespeare to the syllabus

Our findings indicate that it is considered general knowledge among teachers that the Swedish syllabus for English is open to interpretation. How one chooses to interpret is subjective and also relates to the training and experience of the teacher in question. When asked how the different interviewees related teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus we received general answers such as:

> It says in the syllabus that we need to cover different periods of history when it comes to literature, so the students are required to read excerpts from different periods and that’s how it [Shakespeare] comes in (Beth).

Even though no names of authors or playwrights are stated in the syllabus some of our informants thought that the topic of Shakespeare was an obvious one that could by no means be left out of the English courses. When interviewing Evelyn we got the following response regarding the relationship between the topic of Shakespeare and the Swedish syllabus:

> It’s very open isn’t it? The Swedish syllabus and the criteria, everything is very open and that’s why it’s so difficult […] Even though its not stated, you cannot leave Shakespeare [out], can you? (Evelyn)

Another informant, Alaska, chose to interpret the syllabus as a framework from which she deduces that the teacher is free to choose what to teach. However, for some teachers dealing with Shakespeare is a must. One of our interviewees, Hanna, who also teaches psychology, gave the following response:

> I also teach psychology; so disregarding Shakespeare is a little bit like not mentioning Freud. You don’t need to give it a hundred percent but you have to mention it (translation our own) (Hanna).

Another interviewee, Alice, made the following remark along the same lines as Hanna saying that “skipping him would be like skipping to learn the alphabet when teaching students how to read”.

Purpose
Shakespeare and relevance

We asked our interviewees why they find it relevant to teach Shakespeare. One of the answers was because the issues covered in his literature still very much apply to today; another was that many of the modern plays and films are based on his works. A common goal among the candidates was to show how English has changed over time as well as demonstrate the contribution Shakespeare made to the language. More than one of the interviewees emphasized the fact that they wanted to provide their students with challenges, which was made possible through teaching this particular topic.

And also I think it’s to open up a new world to them and give them something, give them a challenge on something they didn’t know about and another language, something completely different to what they are usually exposed to (Laura).

The teachers proved to have different attitudes towards making Shakespeare relevant to their students. Two of the candidates were in favour of the students themselves being responsible for making the topic relevant, while the majority of interviewees saw it as the responsibility of the teacher. Some teachers made connections between Shakespeare’s old plays and contemporary movies, showing the relevance of the themes he portrayed. Also, some interviewees listed commonly used words and referred to Shakespeare as their inventor. One candidate in particular, Alice, made an immediate association between the themes in Shakespeare’s plays and the students’ lives.

I try to relate the themes in his plays to their reality. Modernize it. Things like love, hate, revenge, jealousy and stuff like that is always popular. Once they see that the plot in most Shakespeare plays are [sic] possible to apply to their own lives, they get less hostile towards it … (Alice).

Approach
How to start the first lesson on Shakespeare

How you choose to start a lesson, as a teacher can prove significant for the outcome. Most teachers seem to either try to engage their students by making a topic interesting or explain the relevance of paying attention by discussing the eventual assessment at the end. For three of our teachers a lecture about Shakespeare’s life, the society in which he lived and a cultural aspect is used as an introduction to the topic. In our interviews we found answers that concur with both above mentioned alternatives as well as a third that suggests introducing Shakespeare by relating the topic to something the students are already familiar with. The philosophy behind this third approach is that the students find it easier to learn when introduced to something they recognize before they are given new material to digest.

The following answer given by Alaska fits nicely with the first alternative of engaging the students:

I quote him and I make them guess who said this and I try to use funny things that he said like ‘scratching could not make it worse such a face as yours’ and I have a little book with the funny quotations from him and they usually laugh a little bit (Alaska).

Hanna gave us an answer that is typical of the second alternative where she discusses as part of her introduction of the topic the means of assessing the students.

I usually give them an introduction. I hand out some information about his life, the time when he lived, some information about the globe and some information about characters and who played different characters. I’m trying to give a historic perspective on it and there’s usually, if I teach it as a series of lessons, this is stuff that I expect them to learn [sic]. They will be tested in one way or another a little later on (Hanna).

Evelyn and Laura both showed evidence of the third alternative in their answers expressing their belief in giving the students something they recognize at the start. Their answers were as follows:

Well obviously it depending on the class and your mood and what you have planned but like I said before you start with something that you think they might recognize like a quotation (Evelyn).

Well I use the Taylor Swift and that work really well ‘cause they recognize that right away but they had never thought about Romeo so and all of a sudden they put two and two together so that was quite, that worked really well […] (Laura).

Teaching approaches that work
For this question we asked our participants to state some of the approaches they have used which they deemed successful. A reoccurring theme in the answers was to make the students act out some of Shakespeare’s works using variations of role-play. According Hanna these variations could include allowing the students to create their own versions of the plays. Talking about language and discussing the significance of his texts was another commonality. All of the teachers discussed and worked with the language of Shakespeare in one way or another, for example, poetry analysis was Hanna’s choice. Evelyn and Hanna allowed the students to have fun with language; Hanna encouraged her students to write their own poems. Beth chooses to demonstrate how the English language has changed and formed throughout time by, for instance, the influence of other languages. Evelyn guides her students through difficult language in order for them to comprehend enough to be able to discuss the plays. Abridged versions of Shakespeare's plays were favoured by two of our interviewees. The reason behind this was to ensure that the students “don’t have to stumble on the original pieces for ever and lose all faith” (Alice). Overall it seemed the candidates liked to change their approaches every once in a while keeping the instruction varied.

Two informants were more specific when listing successful approaches. They seemed to have found a recipe or a structure on which they base most of their planning when teaching Shakespeare. Alaska’s answer is a good example of this as she states certain basic elements she likes to include, whereas other elements are optional or depend on the capability of the students in the class. She also explains that some tasks she would assign to an NV- class but not to an ES, and vice versa, depending on their level of motivation.

I give them a handout where they can read about his life and the most important things and they have to read it and answer some questions. After that I give, sometimes, they have to read a play or a summary of a play and they have to act it out in groups for, to the rest of the class. I do that because it’s a little bit difficult to read all the plays and I don’t want them to become bored. So they get a chance to read a little bit more about one play, but then on the other hand see some more plays when the other ones are showing them. Sometimes, but I haven’t done this lately, I show a film but not always and then I end the whole thing with a writing assignment (Alaska).

Hanna had a similar answer where she stated a series of approaches within a given framework. These approaches include role-playing, poetry analysis and text analysis with a clear focus on developing all four language skills. Sometimes Hanna chooses to coincide the introduction of Shakespeare with Valentine’s day when some of his poems fit nicely into the context.

What teaching approaches have proved less successful?
Two key factors that every teacher mentioned when questioned about less successful approaches were detail and depth. Demanding too much from the students such as requiring them to study and memorize detail are among the approaches our interviewees discourage. The amount of time available within the two terms allocated for English B is also a key factor when deciding the levels of depth and detail possible,” You want to be well read and have this overview in the history of literature, well forget about it because you cannot squeeze that into a course that takes place in one year” (Beth). One teacher mentions not covering too much text at the same time while another states limiting the development of vocabulary to a specific text. One of our teachers recommended not letting the students work on their own but rather assist and guide them in their work.

**Teaching Shakespeare for the first time**
When asking our participants if they had any advice for teachers new to teaching the topic of Shakespeare they all mentioned the importance of making the subject come to life. One teacher emphasized the value of knowing why you are doing what you are doing. The same teacher also stressed the importance of being convinced of the topic’s relevance in order to inspire and motivate your students. The key factor in her answer is the mutual openness you should have with your students by having discussions about, “why should we learn about it [Shakespeare] because if you don’t know what goes on in their heads it’s very difficult to teach so openness is always the most efficient way to teach something” (Beth). If possible you should try and relate the themes within Shakespeare to what the students find interesting, such as horror or romance. Two interviewees mentioned keeping the instruction simple and not to be over ambitious. They also mention that you should be aware of the situation in the classroom and not have your lesson plan set in stone. According to Laura and Evelyn all teachers deviate from the original lesson plan in order to meet the students’ needs.

If you feel halfway through the lesson that this is not working out, they’re not enjoying it. You have to leave your... leave your… [sic] you have to change, you have to adapt to the class I think, but usually you have the class for a while and you know what works and what doesn’t work, but if you feel that they are not going to enjoy it, they are not going to play along, or they are just not interested, then just leave it (Laura).

**Evaluation**
To evaluate their teaching approaches all our candidates consulted their students for instant feedback. Some interviewees simply evaluated the immediate response based on the reactions in the classroom, while one took it a step further and handed out evaluation forms for the students to fill out. The most common evaluation method, however, was to simply ask the class what they thought of the topic. This less formal evaluation method seemed to be more of an ongoing process based on the instincts of the teacher.

Advice
While one teacher advised letting the students work independently the other candidates were adamant about the teacher being inspired personally in order to transfer that inspiration to the students. Some of the key words they used were to be “open-minded”, “adaptable” and “uncomplicated”. One interviewee said that “it’s not a good idea to be a copycat” but rather try and make the topic your own. It was also said to try and focus what the students’ are interested in and use that as a platform for your planning, for example the element of horror or romance.

You need to connect to them and you need to believe in what you say. If you don’t believe in it then you better go with what the students want to do, than to try to force something on them that you are not sure about (Beth).

Another point that was made was to, “[…] forget if Shakespeare is “holy” to you yourself! Cause students will try to trash him and his plays as much as they can […]” (Alice), recommending not to take it personally if you yourself enjoy the topic when your students do not.
Material and Media

We posed the question whether or not the teaching of Shakespeare is dependent upon teaching aids and all six interviewees responded that it is not. Even though some teachers preferred using equipment such as computers, stereo, DVD and television, it was not a requirement. However, they all stated that the availability of equipment and material made Shakespeare more interesting and that such aids are taken into consideration during the planning stage. All of the teachers were convinced of their own ability to make the topic interesting without the help of modern teaching aids, such as smart boards and the Internet. They stressed that even the most basic classroom can be turned into a theatre by simply making use of the furniture: ”I should’ve filmed the lesson they were on the tables doing the balcony scene with a lot of passion and so they really, they really enjoy it”(Laura). Some schools even have their own auditoriums where the students can practice and perform role-play on a real stage in front of a live audience. Even in this case the interviewees placed emphasis on keeping the instruction simple, recommending not to over do things.

[…] we haven’t always got that time and energy perhaps to do something really fancy. It’s not necessary always to do that, I think we have higher expectations of ourselves than the students have, actually (Laura).

The material our interviewees use consist of information sheets of varying content, such as fact sheets and quizzes as well as the course books whenever Shakespeare is included. More modern material was mentioned at several occasions with examples such as You Tube, PowerPoint, “pop cult phenomena” and film. One of the teachers frequently takes her students to the theatre and even invites the theatre group to perform in the school.
Discussion

Long & Carter describe the traditional justification for teaching literature as being obvious for "the truly educated person". In the last few decades opinions on including literature as an element in the second language learning process have been challenged due to the modern learners’ more practical needs. Today’s ESL classroom focuses more on the oral aspect of the language rather than on the written (1991).

The majority of the interviewees were influenced by literature’s traditional justification in the classroom. Some of our interviewees justified their choice of Shakespeare using the following comments, “you can’t leave Shakespeare, can you” (Evelyn), “skipping him would be like skipping to learn the alphabet when teaching students how to read” (Alice) and “I guess you include Shakespeare for traditional reasons” (Beth).

In analyzing our results the approaches discussed with our informants will be in accordance with the three models presented at the beginning of this dissertation, namely the cultural model, the language model and the personal growth model.

The cultural model

In the syllabus for English B the following requirement, which relates to the cultural model, is stipulated in order to pass the course:

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The student describes different societies, cultural traditions and living conditions in areas where English is spoken, and uses this background to comment and discuss fiction, film and music as well as factual texts of different varieties (translation our own)(skolverket, 2009).
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Although unaware, three of the interviewees (Alaska, Alice and Hanna) apply the cultural model in the initial stages of a lesson series. The students are either given fact sheets or lectures on Shakespeare’s life, his works, as well as the cultural and social aspects of the time in which Shakespeare lived. These teachers seem to use this method as a way of guiding the students into the subject, giving them background information and explaining why the topic is important. The introduction also serves the purpose of trying to engage the students’ imagination through a teacher-centred approach. The role of the teacher in this particular model is to inspire the students by contrasting the different societies, presenting “the best that
has been thought or felt within a culture” (Long & Carter, 1991, p. 2).

The advantages of this model are that it is less time consuming for the teacher to convey information in this manner. The information presented gives the students a foundation as well as easy access to the topic through simply listening to the teacher and reading the facts. The students get an insight into a culture different from their own, encouraging them to reflect on their own social conditions and comparing them to others. They are also introduced to new phenomena that do not exist in their own society, such as sixteenth century street lighting. Differences such as social structures, roles and relationships, customs and beliefs are some of the factors introduced. A good example of this is the courtship portrayed in Romeo and Juliet, which the students are frequently subjected to through working with the balcony scene. Two of our informants, Beth and Evelyn, favour working with this particular play and scene, which introduces the above-mentioned factors to the students.

Brumfit & Carter raise the issue of whether or not examining cultural aspects of a piece of literature is beneficial, since such texts may be difficult for ESL learners to grasp. They come to the conclusion that, “an examination of a foreign culture through literature may increase their understanding of that culture and perhaps spur their own imaginative writing” (1986, p. 192).

According to Rex Gibson Shakespeare offers “emancipatory possibilities”, opening doors to different dimensions of human behaviour.

It must show there are worlds elsewhere; other ways of living, other sets of values and belief; other ways of defining oneself. Education is concerned that individuals should not be imprisoned in a single point of view. Shakespeare’s plays have this quality supremely. They offer an inexhaustible resource of alternatives of what it is to be human, and of what societies are or might be (Brindley, 1994, p. 141).

It is, therefore, possible to interpret the cultural model as one where the students absorb facts through literature in order to understand human nature, which in turn leads them to understand others and themselves better.

One possible disadvantage to this approach could be if the teacher is not knowledgeable enough to inspire the students into reading more literature. One of our interviewees, Beth, stated that it is “better [to] go with what the students want to do, than to try to force something on them that you are not sure about”. Long & Carter state that the manner in which the teacher gives instruction can affect the students positively or negatively. When a teacher-centred literature lesson fails to engage the students they state the following as possible causes:

The two most likely faults were dreary manner of presentation and a selection of texts, whether
externally imposed or not, which failed to arouse the interest and motivation of the student (1991, p. 23).

This model could therefore be interpreted as more befitting the motivated learners, who are able to digest and remember a certain quantity of material and who have reading and listening as preferred learning styles. This coincides with Alaska’s method of selecting suitable tasks depending on how motivated the students are. However, the students that have different learning styles, and who favour a practical way of learning, are at a disadvantage when this teaching approach is applied.

On a negative note, Long & Carter also state that teacher-centred literature classes involve less active students that are not given the opportunity to respond or relate to the text emotionally, because of the time being monopolized by the teacher. The authors also point out the advantages of the students developing their own views on the literature, explaining that; “there is always a danger that a viewpoint (or judgement) presented by an authority becomes more important than the text itself” (1991, p. 25). Along those same lines, Collie & Slater state in their book, *Literature in the language classroom* that:

…teacher-centred approaches may foster detailed comprehension but student will probably not have made the text their own. Nor will the classroom process have encouraged them to share their own views with each other, and they may not have used the target language very much (1992, p. 8).

This concurs with Hanna’s method of letting her students work independently in order to establish relevance and form their own opinions.

**The language-based model**

In the syllabus for English course B the following goals to aim for convey aspects of the language-based model: “Being able to read, summarize and comment on the contents of longer fictional texts” and, “have basic orientation of literature in the English language from different time periods” (skolverket, 2009).

When analyzing our results from the perspective of the language-based model we found that aspects of this particular model were predominant. In *Literature and Language Teaching – a guide to teachers and trainers* the author Gillian Lazar explains the range of this model by presenting different ends of the spectrum. At one end of the spectrum lessons are learner-centred with activities such as role-play and practical games. The other end of the spectrum is represented by lessons that are teacher-centred with focus on language form, stylistics and linguistics. Lazar summarizes this opinion in the following quote:
A language-based approach is quite a broad approach which covers a range of different goals and procedures. Generally speaking, proponents believe in a closer integration of language and literature in the classroom, since this will help the students in achieving their main aim - which is to improve their knowledge of, and proficiency in, English (1993, p. 27).

In accordance with the language-based model, four of our candidates regularly use role-play as an approach to teaching Shakespeare. Alaska divides her class up into groups giving each group a different play to act out, while Laura has the whole class re-enacting one play. Laura also showed the students a clip of the balcony scene taken from You Tube on the smart board asking the students to imitate the actors on the screen. Beth takes the aspect of role-playing one step further and has a theatre group visit the school. The group, called *The Big Wheel*, performs and instructs the students on how to recreate their performance for the benefit of younger students. Hanna also uses role-play in the classroom and, on occasion, takes her students to see a play performed.

The benefit of using role-playing as a method is that it entails the students using all four skills. Furthermore, the practice of the role-playing is a social experience for the students, one that embraces getting emotionally and physically involved. Rex Gibson describes the relationship between the role-playing exercises and the students as follows:

> They welcome the opportunity to try out their own versions of Shakespeare and are responsive to a wide variety of practical possibilities. Active methods are learner-centred, acknowledging the active part every reader plays in making meaning. They involve all aspects of students’ capabilities, not solely intellectual abilities (Brindley, 1994, p. 143).

Some students’ inhibitions may affect the outcome and taking part in role-playing is not an activity all students feel comfortable with or will want to participate in. On a similar note, Lazar, mentions, “some groups of student may dislike having to discuss personal feelings or reactions” (1993, p. 25).

At the other end of this language-based model to using literature Lazar explains that

> […] a language-based approach to use literature includes techniques and procedures which are concerned more directly with the study of the literature itself. The aim here is to provide the students with the tools they need to interpret a text and to make competent critical judgements on it. Here the method of stylistics or stylistic analysis is frequently adopted. Stylistics involves the close study of the linguistic features of a text in order to arrive at an understanding of how the meanings of the text are transmitted (1993, p. 27).

All six of our interviewees talk about the language in Shakespeare’s works at some point with
their students. A common trait among the candidates is to discuss the language with the students, encouraging them to interpret the old English into modern, comprehensive language. The discussion about the language seems to generally include an analysis of the way the characters speak in the plays and the underlying meaning of what is being said. The incomprehensible manner in which the characters speak at times makes the interpretation of meaning more difficult. The teacher, therefore, guides the students towards a deeper understanding of the dialogue, thereby enabling a deeper understanding of the text as a whole.

One of the advantages of the language-based model, mentioned by Lazar, is the exposure to grammar and vocabulary through literature. The students draw on their previous knowledge of English in order to attain new knowledge and understanding. The students being exposed to language in new contexts make this possible. Lazar summarizes this advantage in the following quote:

> For the language learner, stylistics has the advantage of illustrating how particular linguistic forms function to convey specific messages. It uses terminology and a set of procedures reasonably familiar to students (those of grammatical description) to reach and justify literary intuitions. In this way it not only helps students to use their existing knowledge of the language to understand and appreciate literary texts, it also deepens their knowledge of the language itself (1993, p. 32).

According to Lazar this is one way the inclusion of literature is justified in the syllabus for English in England (1993). This also corresponds with the syllabus for English in Sweden.

On a similar note Rex Gibson explains in *Teaching English* edited by Susan Brindley, “Shakespeare’s language is both a model and a resource for students: powerfully energetic, vivid, sinewy, active, physical, robust, sensuous, volatile, immediate and reflective” (1994, p. 140). This relates directly to a reference made by Long & Carter in our discussion section, which states that students should acquire knowledge of how to use the language creatively.

One possible disadvantage regarding stylistics and the interpretation of meaning is the risk that the second language learner’s intuitions may be different from that of the native speaker. The reason for this is that a second language learner may interpret meaning differently, “since their linguistic, cultural and literary backgrounds are likely to be different” (Lazar, 1993, p. 31).

Another negative aspect of the language model is discussed by Collie & Slater, stating that the vocabulary in literary texts is much too different from the language the students actually need in their everyday life. The language in literary works is dissimilar to the language used in the learners’ textbooks and should therefore only be used as a complement to the material used for second language acquisition (1992, p. 4).
The personal growth model

Nothing in the steering documents refers to the student’s personal development outside of language and knowledge acquisition. There are several objectives in the syllabus that mention the student’s understanding of different types of literary texts, but nothing that relates directly to the student’s personal growth as a result of reading literature.

In agreement with the personal growth model, several of our informants discuss themes as a common element in their approaches to teaching Shakespeare. Among our informants only Alice was specific about relating the topic to the reality of the students. However, it can be assumed that discussing themes implies making connections to aspects of the students’ lives and to life in general. By having the lessons centered on themes, which are interesting and relevant to the students, the teacher increases the chances of the students connecting personally with the text.

Shakespeare’s characters, stories, and themes offer virtually endless opportunities for interpretation and reformulation. They treat of human relationships and passions which are immediately recognizable and personal: wives, fathers, sons, daughters... jealousy, love, hate, sexuality, loyalty, friendship, envy...

(Brindley, 1994, p. 141)

A number of the interviewees mentioned relating the themes portrayed in Shakespeare’s works to “current topics” that should be familiar to the students. In Hanna’s classes the students are given the opportunity to create their own versions of the plays and thereby make the plays their own by getting personally involved. On the subject of personal involvement, Collie & Slater describe the relationship that forms between student and text as follows:

Engaging imaginatively with literature enables learners to shift the focus of their attention beyond the more mechanical aspects of the foreign language system. When a novel, play, or short story is explored over a period of time, the result is that the reader begins to ‘inhabit’ the text. He or she is drawn into the book. Pinpointing what individual words or phrases may mean becomes less important than pursuing the development of the story. The reader is eager to find out what happens as events unfold; he or she feels close to certain characters and shares their emotional responses. The language becomes ‘transparent’ – the fiction summons the whole person into its own world (1992, p. 6).

However, the personal growth model demands motivated students that are able to connect with a text on their own and will be less effective with less motivated students (Collie & Slater, 1992, p. 6). This is an important point considering the fact that a few of our interviewees indicated that their students were not that motivated. Also, this model might be hard to evaluate since the inhibited student might hesitate to share their personal thoughts and
feelings about a text with the teacher.

Long & Carter emphasize that the personal growth model is only made possible when the literature class is learner-centred (1991). Motivation and learner-centredness seem to be the key to success when applying this model. Engaging with the text is left in the hands of the student and the teacher simply assists by demonstrating the connections between the text and the student’s experience. This is evident in the way that some of our informants discuss themes and relate current topics to the students’ lives.

On the other hand this model has the potential to be “highly motivating” and “involves learner [sic] as whole person” (Lazar, 1993, p. 25). This means that the learner will find the literature class more stimulating by being able to relate to the text. The text also invites the student to respond emotionally to the content.

Rich in imagery, thought and feeling, they [texts] contain ‘an invitation to infer’ on every page. Such an invitation is enormously productive of pupils’ imaginative responses as they speculate, reason, argue and reach their own conclusions, on meanings, motivations, absences and silences in each play (Brindley, 1994, p. 141).
Conclusion

The aim of this dissertation was to investigate and present different approaches to teaching Shakespeare. The qualitative method of interview was chosen to gather the information necessary to answer our research questions. Teachers with experience of teaching Shakespeare from five different upper secondary schools in the Malmo area were chosen to participate in this study. Since many of the responses to the interview questions were similar we conclude that a saturation point has been reached in the number of candidates. By that we mean, hypothetically, that interviewing more teachers would result in similar answers. The results of our research have given us better insight into the difficult task of teaching literature, and in particular teaching Shakespeare.

Establishing a connection between the lesson plan and the national syllabus for English is a requirement for all teachers. The question of connecting the topic to the syllabus was therefore posed in our interviews. Even though all of our interviewees were of the opinion that the syllabus is open to interpretation, they still felt that teaching Shakespeare is essential. All of the teachers relate the teaching of Shakespeare to the same paragraph in the syllabus, which refers to the teaching of literature from different periods of time.

On answering the research question as to how teachers make the topic of Shakespeare relevant to their students, the majority of teachers saw this as their responsibility. Two of the informants, however, were in favour of letting the students discover the relevance for themselves. One teacher in particular was adamant about relating the topic to the students’ lives and all the interviewees made sure to relate Shakespeare to current topics, movies and plays. Establishing relevance seems to be important to all teachers and this is usually done when the topic is introduced.

The motivation of the students plays a big part and is also a deciding factor when choosing the material for the lesson. The more motivated students are allocated more difficult tasks and the less motivated students are assigned easier tasks. This also relates to the interview question posed as to what extent the teacher is left in the hands of the material, where the interviewees stated that their approaches were not dependent upon teaching aids. We found it interesting that the use of modern material and equipment was deemed by the teachers not to be a requirement. However, all of the teachers use some type of media or equipment to teach
Shakespeare and exactly half of the interviewees have no experience in teaching the subject without technical aids.

In response to the research question posed as to what approaches are favoured by our candidates, most of our interviewees agree that the lessons on Shakespeare should be learner-centred and should involve qualities such as openness and adaptability in the teacher. The teacher should be sensitive to the students’ interests and plan the lessons accordingly. The teacher should not go into too much detail or depth when teaching the topic since this might deter the students. This is directly linked to less successful approaches according to our interviewees, which discourages the use of too complicated material and teacher-centeredness.

Assisting and guiding the students as much as possible is the consensus of the majority of the teachers. Two informants favoured having the students do their own research and work without guidance in order to discover the topic and the relevance for themselves.

Role-play is the method utilized by all candidates making the language-based approach the most successful according to our interviewees. This is also in accordance with the advice given to new teachers, which refers to the subject needing to be activity-based in order for the students to gain interest. We also established that even though it is stated in the syllabus for English B that a student needs to have cultural knowledge in order to pass, only three interviewees actually use the cultural model as a teaching approach. In regards to the personal growth model we ascertained that this particular model is harder to evaluate compared to the other two. The reason for this being that the model encourages an emotional, and therefore personal, development that can be difficult for the outside world to perceive. It seems assessing the relationship that forms between students and text would be a difficult undertaking for the teacher.

In conclusion the teaching of Shakespeare as a topic seems to require a combination of approaches in order to be successful. Success in finding a method which corresponds with the students’ needs, interests and motivation will increase the chances of avoiding the initial reaction quoted at the very beginning of this dissertation.
Bibliography

Primary Sources

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Alaska, November 13, 2009. Interview
Hanna, November 19, 2009. Interview
Beth, November 20, 2009. Interview
Alice, November 23, 2009. Interview

Transcriptions attached.

Secondary sources


Internet sources:


Interview questions

Name: 

School: 

Graduation year: 

Years of experience as a teacher: 

**Course perspective**

In what course do you teach/have you taught Shakespeare? : 

How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus for English? : 

Does the school have a local plan that includes covering Shakespeare?: 

**Student perspective**

How would you describe the students in your classes? : 

Are the students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare? : 

What types of reactions do you usually get from the students when introducing Shakespeare? : 

**Teacher perspective**

Why do you find it relevant to teach Shakespeare? : 

How do you make it relevant for the students? : 

How do you usually start your first lesson on Shakespeare with a class? : 

What different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare? : 

What methods do you know from experience do not work?
How do you evaluate your teaching strategies?

In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids (media, environment, material, etc.)?

Do you have any advice for teachers that are new to teaching the topic of Shakespeare?
Interview with Alaska

G – What year did you graduate?
A – I think it was 2006, I’m not quite sure but you can ask Bo.

G - Years of experience as a teacher?
A – Uhm almost two years, soon in January

G – Yeah, ok. In what course do you teach, or have you taught, Shakespeare?
A – Eeh, English B.

G – How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus for English?
A – Well, it says we should teach the student literature from different times so we have a choice there and I chose Shakespeare for my B-course.

G – Ok. Anybody else, or any other authors?
A – Yes, I let them choose after that so I give them a list where they can choose from with for example Jane Austin, Rudyard Kipling, uhm many many other authors.

G – But, and Shakespeare is one you actually have lessons on?
A – Yes, yeah and Chaucer too.

G – Ok. Uhm, does the school have a local plan on covering Shakespeare?
A – No, it doesn’t. But if you are going to, if you had an IG for example on the whole course and you want to have a G and you want to do a couple of tests to get a G you, then you have to study Shakespeare. So it’s a part of those tests. Do you understand what I mean.

G – Yeah, so it’s more than just a verbal agreement between teachers, there are some tests that have to be done to make up, in order to get your G?
A – It’s called “särskild prövning” in Swedish I don’t know what to call it in English, but otherwise we don’t have, we don’t need to teach Shakespeare if we don’t want to.

G – Ok, but this “särskild prövning” is it something, it’s actually your call.
A – Yeah.

G – Ok, Ok, right. Uhm students’ perspective, sorry actually to go back to that, is this, is this, is this something “särskild prövning” and the fact that Shakespeare is a part of it has this been a unanimous decision amongst the arbetslag?
A – Yeah.

G – And it’s something that happened before your time, I would imagine?
A – Yeah.
G – How would you describe the students in your class, or classes?
A – Do you mean if they are motivated or..? Well, most of them, I’d say 80 % are quite motivated to study. Uhm they would study basically anything that I give them.
G – Ok. In your class or..
A – In all classes.
G – What subjects do you teach?
A – I only have English but I, they would probably do the same thing for other teachers too.
G – Are the students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare?
A – Yeah, I think they’re a bit curious. Uhm but I don’t think that they think it’s a hilarious part of the course. But no one’s ever said so far that they think it’s terribly boring. So, I would say that they might think that it’s ok.
T – Why would you say that they don’t think it’s hilarious?
A – Because there’s a, when they talk about later on in the course, ’couse they usually start with Shakespeare at the beginning of the course and when they refer to Shakespeare they will have some irony like “oh yeah, that great part of the course Shakespeare” . But it’s not as bad as grammar so I’ve said it’s ok.
G – Ok. This question goes into the other one, what types of reactions do you usually get from the students when introducing Shakespeare?
A – One student now lately said why, I mean motivate, why should I study this I need some more motivation for this. Other students are curious I think and would like to know a bit more since it’s such a famous author. Uhm and some of them might not care at all. Let’s see this is reactions, yeah.
G – Some will just go with the flow then you mean?
A – Yeah.
G – What about the student that wanted to be, that was less motivated, how do you tackle that?
A – I show the You Tube clip. There was a clip that explained why we should study Shakespeare. And I think about it.
G – Do you know the name of the clip?
A – No, but I can find it for you.
G – Why do you find it relevant to teach Shakespeare?
A – Well, I try to but myself in the students’ situation and I remember when I was a student I actually looked forward to learning a little bit more about Shakespeare and I thought that this is a must when you study English. You should know this a little bit, at least a little bit about
Shakespeare. Uhm, I find it relevant to since he’s had such a great impact on the English language with all the new words that he has introduced also that many films and theater’s are based on his plays even today so I think that I have to at least mention him in my courses. And depending on, depending on if the like Shakespeare or not I can work a little bit more or less. It depends on the students actually.

G – Yeah.

A – And my time.

G – Ok, yeah. How do you make it relevant for the students?

A – Well, I try to explain to them what I’ve just said that we use many words from Shakespeare that Shakespeare has come, introduced and also the theatre – film – part. Uhm, I don’t know what else I could do. What do you mean?

G – Well you may have a, you may have a strategy for example. You may from previous experience know that you start a certain way or simply, actually I’ll not go into detail because a few of these questions will take you there. Uhm, how do you usually start your first lesson on Shakespeare with a class?

A – I quote him and I make them guess who said this and I try to use funny things that he said like “scratching could not make it worse such a face as yours” and I have a little book with the funny quotations from him and they usually laugh a little bit and it becomes a little more lose it’s not that tense and then we start talking about his life a little bit and why he is such an important person and I also try to give them the other side too, that maybe he didn’t write all these things maybe some else wrote them, which makes it maybe a little more interesting.

G – What different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare?

A – What do you mean with method?

G – Well, one method is, well you have already mentioned one in which you have a book with all his funny quotes that’s a method. There are other methods that could be applied
obviously, one of them would be role-play for example. What methods do you apply? So there’s different methods, it could be totally teacher lead or it could be you could have a questionnaire it could be anything. You could have a quiz you could have a role-play.

A – I give them a hand-out where they can read about his life and the most important things and they have to read it and answer some questions. After that I give, sometimes, they read a play and they have to act it out for, to the rest of the class. I do that because it’s a little bit difficult to read all the plays and I don’t want them to become bored. So they get a chance to read a little bit more about one play, but then on the other hand see some more plays when the others are showing them. Sometimes, but I haven’t done this lately, I show a film but not always and then I end the whole thing with a writing assignment.

G – What methods do you know from experience do not work? Or at least, don’t work well.

A – I don’t know. I can’t remember of any student saying something really really negative about Shakespeare like I would never want to do this again or something.

G – For example, I’ll give you an example, for example some people don’t feel comfortable with role-play.

A – Yeah, well if they don’t they don’t have to do it. Or they can do it to me and another person too.

G – But the methods that you’ve applied all worked? You’ve never had to rethink anything, that maybe the next time I’ll do it this way instead? Is there anything that comes to mind?

A – I change it almost all the time so I don’t know.

G – You mean you change the plays or you change your…

A – My methods.

G – Ok.
A – And I don’t do the very difficult parts with classes that can’t really handle it. Keep it more easy. Sometimes though, sometimes when I give them the monologue from Hamlet and they’re supposed to analyze it all the students can’t handle that, that’s why maybe I don’t give it to all the students. I don’t know about that.

G – What do you do?

A – Instead of, I just skip that part.

G – But if you were to give it to some students and not all...

A – It depends on the class actually. So I would give it to maybe an NV-class but not an ES-class or vice versa.

G – Uhm, how do you evaluate your own teaching strategies?

A – I ask the students sometimes but not all the times I have to be honest about that. I always ask them at the end of the year what they thought of Shakespeare, but sometimes I ask them after that period of time when we’ve studied Shakespeare and yeah...

G – What sort of feedback do you get then?

A – It’s ok.

G – In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids? And with that I mean, uhm, certain schools have these smart boards some schools have interactive smart boards some don’t …? Some schools have lots of computers some don’t so in what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids in this school?

A – Well, I have a power point that I show sometimes so I would prefer to have it in the classroom, I don’t have to though. And if I’m showing a film of course I need a DVD or something.

G – But would it be…
A – Impossible?

G – no not impossible, obviously it wouldn’t be impossible but how much would it affect?

A – It would become more fun with teaching aids I think.

G – Ok. Do you have any advice for teachers that are new to teaching Shakespeare of tackling the topic?

A – That they… I think they should find their own way of teaching Shakespeare. I think that goes to anything. You have to feel the topic and you need to see how the students react to different things and then be adaptable. Maybe the first time you wont succeed but the second time, third time. Be open-minded there are so many things on the net that you can use too when you are teaching Shakespeare.

G – Fair enough. That’s it.

S – That’s it? Thanks.

T – Thanks a lot, we’ll turn this off.
Interview with Evelyn an Laura

G – Right, in what course do you teach or have you taught Shakespeare? In what level?

E – English B and English C.

L – Mm, mm, yeah.

G – So B and C. And this applies to you both?

E – Yes but very much to English B and then it depends on what you are actually working on in English C, because in the criteria literature is actually in the English B. Aah I can’t remember the phrasing. I’ve done it in both anyway.

L – I think it depends a little bit on the class, whether they are ready for it or not and […] the course book I’m using there is actually a little bit on Shakespeare and the old classics in the B course so that’s why it’s quite natural to bring up Shakespeare since it’s already in the course book.

E – And most books will have that for English B, will have a section with literature I find really in the ones that we have used have had sections on Shakespeare.

L – Mm, mm. The chapter in this course book is called “Still going strong” which is quite appropriate. They bring up literary classics.

G – What’s the book called?

L – Progress Gold. We use different systems in this school. But most people use this one.

E – Yeah.

G – I’ve worked with that as well actually. Komvux uses these.

L – Mm, yeah
E – This is a very popular book so…

G – How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus for English?

E – Well since it is stated that we are to teach literature and older literature then it does relate to the syllabus doesn’t it? It is stated, we have to do it. And I think having reached English B, which is the highest compulsory course you can study in Swedish, it is quite natural that you would go back and study important authors, poets. I think that they should be able to deal with it […] our students. It’s quite an advanced level, English B and English C, certainly […]. So if that’s what you mean, I’m not quite sure..

G – Yeah, well, simply because it is not stipulated. It stipulates, yeah, litteratur från olika tider.

E – Yes, but Shakespeare does come into it, I mean, you can’t leave Shakespeare, can you?

G – For example in the English syllabus in England it does state

E – Yeah.

L – But the syllabus here is not specifying which author which books that’s really up to us. But I think it works really well, because almost all students have heard about Shakespeare, so somehow it rings a bell and if not they’ve seen Leonardo Dicaprio so they know. We have a discussion about that yesterday, is it the film or it’s the play. So somehow it seems quite familiar even though it might not be the easiest thing to do but…

E – Its difficult to compare though, obviously British students will have to study Shakespeare and the syllabus will be different won’t it, its their native language, it will be stated in a different way. You can only compare it to studying Swedish here and you cannot compare it to studying English, can you?

G – I was just wondering, if for the English syllabus, I suspected the Swedish syllabus is as non-specific as to what should be taught as the English syllabus is in Swedish, I mean it does not state in the syllabus that you have to …
E – It’s very open isn’t it? The Swedish syllabus and the criteria, everything is very open and that’s why it’s so difficult to compare England - Sweden, England – Denmark. It’s difficult. School systems are different. Even though its not stated, you cannot leave Shakespeare, can you?

L – Well, you could if you wanted to.

E – If they had already covered it in Swedish then yeah they do, then yes perhaps. But then, studying English, I don’t know.

L – You don’t want to, I think. I think that’s the main issue. I think that students find it quite amusing. We had a wonderful, because you were coming today I did my Shakespeare bit yesterday that I had planned to do later and they really enjoyed themselves, it was fantastic. They really enjoyed it. So many funny words, why don’t they just write proper English. Its sort of introducing them into a completely new world, which is quite fun to do, I think. I wouldn’t want to leave it out. But you can’t do, you can’t study, you can’t do literary analysis like that but you can introduce it and let them get the feel of it, but you would have to do it in a completely different way than you probably do it in English schools.

G – You suspect that?

L – I suspect that.

G – You think they deal with it more in depth?

E – I think they do and I think they should do. And also here, what you have to take into account is this is a second language and if you have a class where you find its very difficult you need to focus very much on reading, writing you want to spend most of the time doing that so then I believe modern literature is much more important and you have to take those classics and make it a bit smaller. If they need a lot of input when it comes to reading/writing, dealing with the language then you have to leave it for a bit but you bring it in anyway for a lesson or two perhaps and you try to make it a fun thing, you try to introduce it in a fun way and you will speak to their Swedish teacher perhaps ‘ what did you cover? Did you do
Hamlet? What did you do?’. Right, so there’s communication.

G – Does the school have a local plan that includes teaching Shakespeare?

E – Not a local plan. We have the national course plans, not a local, but I mean we do discuss, we talk about ‘what are you doing?, what would you do?, my class is not a good class, what would you do about that?’. We talk to each other but we don’t have a local plan at all.

L – I mentioned to you when we talked last time that all the English teachers in this school, we did a training course in Cambridge this summer and we got some inspiration. That was one of the questions we brought with us to Cambridge ‘how can we do it?, do you have any good ideas?’ and we had lots of good ideas and had good fun ourselves and I think we thought that this was something that we could easily transfer into our classroom making a bit fun out of it just letting the students play with the language.

G – Ok. How would you describe the students in your classes? I don’t want to give you too much information what we are looking for.

E – I think they are quite ready, I think in my classes they are quite motivated and eager to learn and interested but they need a lot of help many of them are quite weak. They need a lot of language training. But they are eager to learn.

L – I agree with Elisabeth on that. I have two classes, I have an A course and a B course and many of the students have not done a lot of English before and very many, a high degree of our students arrived in Sweden quite late and haven’t had any English training in grundskolan and it makes it very difficult. They are not at all at English A level when they come here so we have, and often its not just English its Swedish as well its language training, its writing and reading and they are not used to it. I did a little survey in one of my classes last year about reading books and only one student out of twenty ever read anything voluntarily so we just, we only read what you force us to read so many students have no tradition for reading books or novel or reading a book is a major task for many of them and we would, I would like them to read much more but it takes forever ,you have to really adapt your teaching to the students level even if you don’t want to do it you have to do it you can’t just push them. You have to really think about everything quite, but we use a, we meet, English teachers here, we meet
once a month, I think?

E – Yeah.

L – And we discuss that a lot. We try to sort of give each other ideas and ventilate our frustrations. But it goes for my students as well, they are really interested and they are not afraid of making fools of themselves and they are not afraid of speaking in class and they love to act out, I mean yesterday was, I should’ve filmed the lesson they were on the tables doing the balcony scene with a lot of passion and so they really, they really enjoy it. Even though they haven’t got the skills to do as much as they really want to do but they love, they progress a lot during these years.

E – They do and that’s the problem. They start at a fairly low level when they come here. Not all students but too many of them start at a very low level but they do improve throughout their two years of English here but English B has high requirements and so in the end we will still have students that fail even if they have worked very very hard. So English A, yes, they will pass that most of them but English B will be a problem for too many of them. But I believe, and my experience is that, most students want to work. They are ambitious and they want to work.

G – Do they, and this is a question that is not on here, but what are their attitudes towards English in general?

L – They want to learn.

E – I think so but learning a language is difficult and it takes a lot of work and is sometimes too much for them.

L – Many of our students are not really exposed to English in the way that our Swedish kids have been exposed to English throughout the years so for them it’s a completely new and very strange language and its very difficult, its not, I teach Danish as well and its much easier teaching Danish as a basic language as a beginners language than it is teaching English as a beginners language […] what we have to do quite a lot at a time. So I think we’ve discovered that English is really a very difficult language to learn if you have not been exposed to it but Swedish kids watch television and movies and the internet and so on to a completely different
degree.

E – One problem with English is that they are exposed to it a lot and they are quite content with what they have some students. They are quite good, or very good, but they are also content and so when we come here and we ask them to do even better that’s too much for them. Because they are praised when they travel, you know, ‘you speak very well’ that sort of thing.

L – Speaking skills are usually very high. They all have a fairly good, if we’re not look too closely at grammar and pronunciation, they have a fairly high level of speaking but when it comes to writing that’s really difficult.

G – Keep in mind now, that some of these questions are going to overlap.

E – Right.

G – That being said, I mean, at the risk of repeating yourself that’s fine, repeat yourself. Let me see, have you described, are the students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare?

E – They never ask ‘are we to study Shakespeare’ but when we do they like it.

L – I agree, yes. It wouldn’t be on a list of what you want to do in English B if we had a list like that I don’t usually have that but I, but, ‘cause that’s what I said earlier that this is something completely new but they are keen I think and they’re definitely into it so.

G – Ok, so this is a little bit of overlapping as well. What types of reactions do you usually get from your students when introducing Shakespeare?

E – Well often we will start with something useful that they might already know, a quotation or whatever, and so they are quite happy when we start with them, we know this and then you continue from there so I think they are positive. There are always students that don’t want to do that.
L – I think my students yesterday were quite curious about this. I started out using the idea I got from Cambridge playing up from YouTube Taylor Swifts “A love story” which is about Romeo and Juliet and then they all recognized that and said ‘oooh this song’ and then we read the scene many many times they had homework to read it at least three times and the first reading they didn’t understand a word but by the end of the lesson they all knew, they could all translate it into modern English and one guy kept saying ‘what is he saying here?’ and they thought it was terribly romantic and a bit corny and but fun. So it was very good reactions actually. Sceptic at the beginning but then quite into it.

G – Why do you find it relevant to teach Shakespeare?

E – Well like I said English B and English C are advanced courses and I think having reached that far you can ask of the students to know literature and Shakespeare certainly.

L – And also I think its to open up a new world to them and give them something, give them a challenge on something they didn’t know about and another language, something completely different to what they are usually exposed to. And I think I teach Shakespeare because I love Shakespeare, I love reading Shakespeare, I love him when I was in high school so I wouldn’t want to leave it out.

E – It does apply to today, doesn’t it though? Romantic in the stories and often the balcony scene will be in the books right and it applies to today so it is relevant.

G – What about the language issue?

E – Yeah, that’s a problem. You guide them. You guide them in the old English but that’s as far as you can teach them. They don’t know after three weeks, I would say, but you guide them so that they can deal with and play and talk about it.

L – I showed them. I found also on You tube, we have computers and smart boards in our classroom which is very useful now, I use it a lot, and found a clip from a play, the balcony scene , same text they had to act it out themselves and show the real actors doing the same thing. And they really enjoyed that, I could see them ‘oh that was my line’, ‘oh that is what I’ve just said’ sort of the recognition and something that is a bit of a challenge for them and
everything doesn’t have to be easy and things can be too difficult but if you can by the end of
the lesson understand it I think most of them are very pleased with themselves. So it doesn’t
always have to be easy. Most texts are difficult and this is very difficult when they first look
at it, it seems almost impossible. We can, we can work our way through it and then if it
becomes understandable they will become quite pleased with themselves. To go home and say
‘ we did Shakespeare today’, that’s a bit cool.

G – Ok. I’ve thought of a question and it’s not on the sheet here and I don’t want to lead you
too much but I would like you to… How are we for time?

E – I can stay until ten past, but then I have to leave.

G – Ok. How do let’s see, how do you usually start your first lesson on Shakespeare?

E – Well obviously its depending on the class and your mood and what you have planned but
like I said before you start with something that you think they might recognize like a
quotation.

G – As a starting point?

E – Yeah, a starting point. Somewhere you have to start so why not start with something you
think they might know.

L – Well I use the Taylor Swift and that work really well ‘cause they recognize that right
away but they had never thought about Romeo so and all of a sudden they put two and two
together so that was quite, that worked really well but I haven’t done that before.

G – And what different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare?

L – I’ve only done it this way using the balcony scene reading it through talking about what
are they saying so then what I did yesterday is they got two or three lines each so they were
divided into pairs of Romeos and Juliets and each pair had just a little bit, because I wanted
them to have to learn as much as possible by heart and its impossible to learn the whole scene,
we don’t have, I don’t want to spend too much time on it, so everyone had two or three lines
to learn and that worked really well and then we put it all together so by the end of the class everybody had their little say.

G – So a type of role play?

L – Yeah, so it became a role play yeah. Some of them got really into it and some were just reading from their little books and actually learned them and every third person received a director and that was also the idea for this book to give them instructions to put more feeling into it and look at each other and so on. And they, and then what I did is I chose the weaker student too, all the students that I knew would feel a bit sort of nervous about speaking out in the classroom, they would be the instructors so they had a very important part and that was very nice and then by the end of the class the instructors would also read a little bit together with me just to get the feel for the language and it worked quite well and so everybody had an important part to play.

G – What about you?

E – Well I also let them play and very often you have two or three students who enjoy being up there so I might in that sort of setting with two students act in front of the whole class and you can see that they are very much enjoying it. But there are films there’s music there are so many things you can use. I had a recording with Hugh Grant reading sonnet 18 I’ve lost it though.

L – God, what a shame.

E – There are many things you can do.

G – Have you given any extra work outside of lessons on Shakespeare?

E – Sometimes I give them texts on Shakespeare, Shakespearean times and maybe practicing at home reading a scene. I have to remember I haven’t done it this year yet.

L – There is one exercise in this book, I have done last year I’m not sure I’m going to use it again because it took forever, but there was a listen and react.
E – And that works really well.

L – Yeah, they listen to the story of Romeo and Juliet several times and then they have key sentences and they have to put them in the right order and that would be something for them to do at home perhaps or during one lesson but I’ve found that it takes quite a lot of time so I think they were quite happy with one hours of Shakespeare yesterday so I might just leave it at that and I can move on to something else. So there are exercises they can do and there is also a quiz about Shakespeare but I didn’t do that because they don’t know, I mean you could name three plays by Shakespeare its not really their world so it becomes a bit difficult.

G – What methods do you know from experience don’t work?

L – Too much text at the same time.

E – Depending on the text I suppose, since he is a dramatist you need to make it alive.

G – This seems to be something that crops up all the time, that its drama

L – But its so lends itself to act it out and our students love to act.

E – But the sonnets, I usually do sonnet 18 with them and they love that once they understand it, the girls especially obviously but they think its lovely, maybe because I’m there.

L – I haven’t done any sonnets. I’d like to do it.

E – They love that, but it’s difficult of course.

G – How do you evaluate your own teaching strategies?

E – When it comes to Shakespeare or generally?

G – When it comes to Shakespeare
E – Emmm…

G - Well you mention one already, why don’t you discuss it among yourselves.

E - Since we only use, I think most of us perhaps, I think one, two or three lessons. I think it’s the communication between me and the class that would give me, a hint of, did this work or did it not work. Emmm… I can’t remember asking especially, did you like this? But you can tell from their reactions whether they enjoyed it or not.

G – So there is no formal evaluation.

E – No, I don’t have a formal, do you (Liselotte)

L – No, no I haven’t done that. I was think about when we evaluate the whole course, do we specify the Shakespeare, no I haven’t done that. I’d consider doing that. Often they won’t remember, because we, we do quite early in the course and we evaluate the course in May. So they will have forgotten all about it. But I think that they would probably remember that lesson because it becomes quite a lively lesson. I don’t think we evaluate it in any formal way, we talk to each other over coffee, this worked well, this was fun.

G – In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids (media, environment, material, etc)?

E - It’s not dependent, I suppose you always have to adapt to what you have but obviously if you are studying the balcony scene it’s a nice thing to be able to show the balcony scene from one or two famous films, do the … that you were talking about, but you have to adapt to what you have and you do that when planning.

L – We haven’t really got classrooms that work really well for acting out scenes because they are really quite small...

E – You can use the auditorium I suppose

L – If you wanted to do that, or you can just move the furniture away, we did that yesterday,
just move it away and a table became the balcony and it was very simple, like imagine we are in Italy. We are not really used to having fancy equipment or anything like that. We are please with our smart boards right now, obviously takes much time to plan a lesson like that because we want to do a lot of things. But at the end of the day you find yourself… what’s in the textbook? With more time and like of the years you might be able to develop a really nice lesson, but we haven’t always got that time and energy perhaps to do something really fancy. It’s not necessary always to do that, I think we have higher expectations of ourselves than the students have, actually.

G – Do you have ….this is the last question… any advice for teachers that are new to teaching the topic of Shakespeare?

E – Don’t over do it,

L- But do it.

E- Do it, but don’t over do it, don’t make it too complicated. Because it is difficult for the students. When you are new, you have come straight form university, you’ve study Shakespeare in depth, perhaps and the risk is as always with teaching that you are overdoing it, you will want too much, you will want to give what you have, you want them to understand everything you know, but that’s not possible you should.

L - I agree, absolutely, I’m quite new to teaching and emm, that is something I have learned… and I think that that goes not just for Shakespeare but for everything they do, keep it at a simple level, because the students are very pleased, you don’t work too much , I mean it takes forever, planning a lesson can take as much time as you have, you could spend eight hours planning a lesson and the result is not always better than it would be if you .. You have to… I think you have to be flexible, that’s why. If you feel half-way through the lesson that this is not working out, their not enjoying it. You have to leave your... leave your… you have to change, you have to adapt to the class I think, but usually you have the class for a while and you know what works and what doesn’t work, but if you feel that they are not going to enjoy it, they are not going to play along, or they are just not interested, they just leave it.. I don’t think you should feel that you must do Shakespeare, but it is fun to do, it can work, its worked fine for me..
E- It does work

L – It does work but you have to do it in a playful way, you can’t think that you are going to do this in any serious in-depth way, because that will never work. Not here at least, maybe in other schools.
G – That’s it
E – It’s up to the teacher perhaps because perhaps they will do it in Swedish as well, so they will study Shakespeare in Swedish as well.

G - And that’s definite?

E – I think so, I think for most Swedish teachers anyway. I know that most of my classes study Hamlet with their Swedish teacher.

L - We try to do it the same periods if possible, at least in our department, we try to do it in English and Swedish at the same time, not necessarily the same play, we thought about doing that, we though about doing a whole project on Shakespeare in Swedish, English and in Danish, and go to Helsingor and visit the castle, that’s in the future, so we are thinking about do a cross curriculum theme.

E - Swedish being a course very much about literature so I think they will talk about literature, so I think most Swedish teachers will talk about Shakespeare
Interview with Beth

Graduation year: 1994

Years of Experience: Over 20 years of teaching

G - In what course do you/have you taught Shakespeare?

B – Rarely in the English A course, a little bit different activity, comes up in the English B course because it says in the syllabus that we need to cover different periods of history when it comes to literature, so the students are required to read excerpts from different periods and that’s how it comes in.

G – How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus for English? Maybe you could elaborate a little bit on your last answer.

B- How I bring it up?

G – Yeah, How do you relate Shakespeare, why Shakespeare?

B – He kind of famous, I think he’s part of the…. how do you say it. I think if you are going to understand how a certain period worked, I think Shakespeare is a good example, he covers the concept of individualism in his plays so if you want to understand renaissance then it’s good material, but of course it’s a way of thinking as a canon of literature, Shakespeare, the bible, Shakespeare there are certain heavy chapters you can’t pass without, and the students are, in our school aware of this, they come from, many of them come from academic families, there is a certain expectations that there is such a thing as a traditional canon although it’s not the common way of dealing with literature, as a teacher of English you don’t look for what is right to teach, but I guess you include Shakespeare for traditional reasons.

G – Does the school have a local plan that includes teaching Shakespeare?

B - No, the only thing our local plans has, it gives a presentation of how to, I don’t know, how to be a student in English, it’s about participation and about taking part in planning the course, so there is a lot about fostering a certain student profile, and also what it means to be in a communicative classroom, that you are expected to participate actively, and that we have certain criteria that we agree upon, or not criteria. A certain selection of aspects that should be
the base for giving a grade, otherwise it becomes very unfair, the system. So all the English teachers have agreed upon what we are going to test, there is no specific mention of Shakespeare. In the national test there is no specific mentioning of any literature whatsoever, it’s just a mix of texts, it could be a selection of articles, might include some literature, it’s not really it only really exists in the first two bands when you give a grade, there no mvg-excellent criteria for literature. So it’s a bit confusing the way you deal with literature in that respect, it doesn’t say what the student is required to do with literature, it only says for passing. Simply for passing it says that you should be orientated in literature, it’s very vague in that way, that’s why there is no use making a local plan that is not in agreement with the national curriculum, we need to make sure we are, so to speak, giving a presentation of the same system and the same kind of thinking.

G – How would you describe the students in your classes?

B – OK this is hard, because now I’m going to be generalizing a lot. I teach on three programs out of four, we have one vocational program, the others are for higher education. The vocational program, I don’t teach English B on that program, other teachers do and I cannot say how they work but in general on that program, if you decide something, I remember I did something in the A course with a vocational program. Henry 8th wives, we talked about how he killed them off, when you have the vocational program you have to think about how to make them participate in an active way, you have to focus on life long learning themes, such as jealousy, relationships. So it’s not really studying literature for its own sake, so you lift out something where you can watch a film or so, I guess this is the same as my colleagues would teach in the vocational program. The other programs you can do more traditional, like try to teach what Shakespeare was about. On the national science program I focused this year on the dilemma that this was the person, that there are no historical documents, because they are science students and they like riddles. At the same time we are connected to a program financed by the EU, they had to make some research on parallels between Tycho Brahe who was an astronomer, living contemporary type with Shakespeare, so they make a special assignment on that to see, can you see some parallels. Well in Shakespeare drama you can find the mentioning of Hamlet you can find the mentioning of certain things, the way Shakespeare used the stars as an astronomer in his metaphors. So we did something nerdy like that, but we also had invited a theatre group, we had a lot of fun activities and interaction, taught them four to five ingredients of the tragedies. This is what I did this year connected to Shakespeare, and we did the Romeo and Juliet because they are a little bit into natural
science. We did some role play of Romeo and Juliet talking about love, it was a love scene and the antagonism between the two families. They are quite familiar with the plots of the most common Shakespeare plays, this is what I did this year but I’ve done it in all kinds of ways before in other programs. Most of them are quite familiar with the stories of Shakespeare so what you tend to do is focus on something that could develop them at that moment in the course or depending on what they are doing.

G- What you discussed there is more how you make it relevant, if that was the question then it would have been a very good answer

B - Because I though it was connected to the way they are in the classroom.

G – What I’m trying to get at, maybe I should be a bit more specific, are they motivated, are they not motivated.

B – They are motivated to learn English, there’s no problem with that, just to study Shakespeare it’s yes and no. The ones that are.. some of them are very curious about knowing about literature and history like doing all kinds of things related to Shakespeare, but not all of them. Ahh… Because they refer to literature as something, ahhh.. it’s not a study, they don’t see literature as study, they see literature as entertainment, and then they, if they want to choose a book they will read twilight. So they don’t understand why you should read Shakespeare, it doesn’t give you the same amount of pleasure. So it’s a little bit of a… how to say.. ahh.. It’s not in our curriculum to teach literature, it doesn’t say, that’s why a mentioned this to you before. It’s up to the teacher to motivate the students and therefore you have such an array of different activities that you do with the students. I’ve had very well adjusted and motivated students, they just want to learn, learn a lot. Then I’ve just had a whole session, this is the most extreme to that end, a whole session of different periods in the history of literature, so Shakespeare and we went on like that through history, very traditional, you actually teach what was typical of the time it takes. You study very similar to the way you study at university. That’s when the students are very motivated and they would be loyal to any method you use because they just want to learn, but not every group, they don’t look like that, some of them are very much for influencing what and how we do things in a classroom, then we cannot go on like that. So you cannot plan like that, I’m going to teach Shakespeare this way. Because when you come to the classroom you have to have the students with you since it is not motivated in our curriculum that you must know about Shakespeare, so … a little bit of a hassle, you have to use diplomat,
G - diplomacy?

B – Exactly, so that’s why, it’s different…

G – Are the students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare, you have already answered this question.

B – Emmm…

G - And as I said some of these questions overlap so that’s fine.

G – What kind of reactions do you usually get from the students when introducing Shakespeare?

B – Emm.. Ahhh.. How can you some that up? If I start with what they might enjoy, they really enjoy watching filmed versions of Shakespeare, that’s always a success, they like the humor, the word puns, they like the film as a media, it’s very accessible. When they don’t like to read about, is because it’s dry, it’s hard language and they don’t know what it’s going to be used for in the future.

G - What would there initial reaction be if you said, right, from tomorrow on for the next three weeks we are going to cover Shakespeare. What would there initial reaction be, without sort of telling the students, giving the students information about any method you are going to use?

B – Emmmm..They would be a little bit surprised, we usually try to motivate will we are doing things and some of them, it’s a very open atmosphere, some of them will say Ahhh..but not many of them, they are very well adjusted at the same time. So they know what school is about, the teacher is in power and they need their grades to get unto university so they would be very well behaved and say Ohh..

G – It’s mixed expressions.

B – Yes it’s a mix. Some would express, what-why and some would say YES, and somebody there to the side would probably say yes because they are interested in Shakespeare.

G – OK fair enough

B – It’s hard to give a very general answer, maybe one would say, couldn’t we watch a film, yes they would probably say that.
G – OK. Why do you find it relevant, we have already touched on this, How is Shakespeare relevant, how have you convinced yourself.

B – I love the comedies, I tend to avoid the tragedies, I took a theatre group to come and show them the tragedies and I really love the comedies. I also like the films, and I think it’s good to, it’s also interesting for the students to see how the English language can change through time, so it’s also a good way to show different types of English. Because some Swedish students, they think they know everything about English already and they get very annoyed when you try to correct them, but there is more to learn. It think is also important to expose to see how the language, and they you can connect it to the history has changed, and the language the way it is with so much Latin and French it is, so it gives them also a feeling for the language. Then I like the part when I actually try to show the students the beauty of the language. I usually use translation to do that. So they read the Romeo and Juliet balcony scene or a poem/sonnet in Swedish with a good translation. So they have this feeling for the language so it help them to a, how to say, to stimulate their emotional relationship to a language to see how it feels in Swedish, then we would look at the text in English and have a discussion on which is the best version, so this is also use for those things since there is always in these plays this emotion, when I can’t stop somebody to rhyme or not to rhyme, but to use metaphors. But I like the intrigues are very complex, so it’s good theatre play to look at. But as you notice, I let all students, I mean the only time they are exposed to the actual script is when it is a very short piece, you never let them read, well there are students who get hooked, so they want to read a whole play. But usually it’s only short script like the monologue, or sonnet, or little exert from one crucial scene. This is the only way they are exposed, otherwise it’s all about looking at the film or talking about it because it’s too far away from the curriculum to go into reading all plays.

G – How do you usually start your first lesson with Shakespeare with your class?

B – It’s usually within a theme.

G – OK

B – So usually it’s Macbeth, Hamlet, Romeo and Juliet. I mean if you are talking about the text, the text in the course books that we use, so the canon is very limited. But if you are talking about the film version, then it’s wider, then we use more writings.

G – Would you start by showing a film or would you start by..
B – Usually I would have started the theme already, then we can look at moving on, or like a game like I did with Romeo and Juliet activity, we did. So all the boys were Romeos and they were Juliets, some had to change sex but they didn’t mind. They were walking towards one another like a little role-play, but they were asked to tell the story but they were only allowed to use the names. Romeo-Juliet. So they should tell the whole story just by using the names. It’s to relax ambitious students, at the same time they could tell me through their actions that they knew the plot.

G – Ahh OK

B – You can do it this way, starting with a game and then you can go on to talk about Shakespeare for example, or if the class is well adjusted you could talk about it within the subject of English literature. We have spoken about something before, we will speak about it in that time in history, just look a one text or a few texts from each period. Then we can have like a mix of a lecture and looking at the text with text questions. But theme is the most common way.

G - What different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare, You mentioned some methods already.

B- Yes I think I have.

G - You touched on some methods already, you mention theme, you mentioned comparing written texts English/Swedish, and you mentioned role-play.

B - Yes role-play, and theatre and education. The Big Wheel, they actually visited us and inspired us. I actually worked with the whole group of theatre students because we have actually also the art program. We went to London actually and we let the students be taught that method, so that when they came back they taught younger children about the middle ages the same way. So the theatre group we have been inviting for several years, we went to them instead. And Merchant of Venice, we did this amm.. The whole thing based on one drama, but then they were given a lot of sort of methods, but then I’ve sort of kept the role-play ingredient with Shakespeare because I think it’s good to have different ways of dealing with it. Otherwise it’s just the traditional method of having an exert in your course book and reading in pairs and listening to it and talking about language, form, yaa.. in a traditional way. I would say it’s a mix of methods which are relationship with the group, what would be useful here, what would they appreciate, what would be the easiest way to make them understand
things.

G – What methods do you know from experience do not work?

B – I try to do very rarely this idea of teaching history of literature because when you do it in this way, and I’ve had colleagues to, it’s not just my experience, it gets over the top, it’s so in-depth, detailed knowledge which the students fell, they do not know what they are going to do with this

G - As a whole, the history or literature, as a whole it is just too much?

B – Yeah, too much with a series of lessons like that.

G – So you just picked one or two gems from history?

B – You read it within a theme and you talk about it there, you make some kind of overview which is just a little bit more surface. You try to focus on something within the text instead, and not focusing on making them study and memorize, because it doesn’t really, it doesn’t work very well. I’m not doing that any longer.

G – OK so there is more focus?

B – Yeah it’s like demanding too much from them. There is amm.. it doesn’t work with the curriculum, it’s as simple as that. Though I must say, there is something, they are very vague, written in the course curriculum, because when you say that you want the students to have some orientation in the history of literature. What do you mean by that? So I can say this is a constant experiment going on, not for me only but for all colleagues, they try this in different ways, because it doesn’t really.. You don’t land and say this how to do it.. you know how to do that.. you want to be well read and have this overview in the history of literature, well forget about it because you can not squeeze that into a course that takes place in one year. So what we try to do is communicate with the teacher in the Swedish lessons who also is teaching a course in which you should have an overview of literature, so we try to share what we do in the lessons. We will try and fill in gaps more, then Shakespeare has stayed in one of the gaps, so because the English teachers they like to bring it up, they find this as a meaningful situation, I mean a meaningful thing to do in a English B course, and then you rely on other teachers when it comes to the enlightenment and everything else. We try to do that together with other teachers. And then it’s better for the students that they don’t have to have these English lectures/lessons. So I’m not doing that every year, but I’ve done it a few
times, and colleagues of mine. It works with some of the students when you don’t have the whole group with you and then you have to have this traditional test of course, if you have taught traditionally you should test their knowledge to and this becomes too much in the course.

G – How do you evaluate your teaching strategies, how do you evaluate what you have done?

B – I ask the student what they thought.

G – It’s as simple as that?

B - Emmm…

G - In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids (media, environment, material, etc)?

B – What do you mean depend?

G – Well depend and depend, some might say that it’s easier to teach Shakespeare if you have a, what do you call t, a auditorium or if the students have their own computers or if work on their own, is it dependent?

B – The best thing if you can go somewhere and look at the play, I don’t thinks it’s within the classroom. We have been doing that together with Lund’s University because there is this lovely lady Kiki, who instead of, yeah we went to the same school together many years ago. So we have known each other for a while. So I have been bringing my students to see her students performing and this is a good way but that’s not exactly the classroom. With the classroom, all the equipment and all those things, I would say what I have I use and that’s how it is. Now I have one group with laptops so I use the computers more in that group and ahh.. I’ve worked in Israel, you didn’t have any equipment you used your voice and that’s it. You use what ever you have and actually I think, and many of my colleagues the same, I think about whatever they have access to, if they have two very good film versions of Shakespeare and I come and tell them we are only going to read, because it’s not, your not in the same sort of league. We need to use what they have access to and then it can become a more efficient way of learning. I would think they would get more insights, that way.

G – Do you have any advice for teachers that are new to teaching Shakespeare?

B- Yes teach what you yourself appreciate, because if you don’t appreciate Shakespeare don’t
teach it, because that’s a drag, I mean you have to believe. When you as a teacher, you have to be responsible, I picked this for you to study, you have to know why you are doing that. And it’s not a good idea to be a copycat and to teach something that another colleague is teaching, if it’s within that area of the curriculum. It’s actually you who define this with students, I will always ask, I mean tell my new colleagues to ask the students how what they want to learn about. Also have a discussion about why should we learn about it, because if you don’t know what goes on in their heads it’s very difficult to teach so openness is always the most efficient way to teach something. And I don’t mean to say, that since there are those that say this sounds boring. You don’t just stop there as a teacher because you are the teacher and say what’s so boring about it and you have this discussion and you can see OK their interested in this and that. Then if they are interested in horrors then you can have some scenes, you can talk about Macbeth you can take some, or if they have studied own literature in Swedish from Greece, then you can talk about how sort of the teacher developed and you can hang onto that. You need to connect to them and you need to believe in what you say. If you don’t believe in it then you better go with what the students want to do, than to try to force something on them that you are not sure about. Of course we have the curriculum and we can never get away from that so if you have to read excerpts from different periods within the history of literature you must know this is not negotiable, but if you are allowed to make a selection, be aware of why you select that text you brought to the lesson, so that’s important.
Interview with Hanna

G – So try to speak as clearly as possible because people are walking in so we avoid as much background noise as possible.

H – Absolut.

G – How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus?

H – År det ok om jag svarar på svenska? Eller vill du att jag ska svara på?

G – No that’s fine.

H – Ok. Överhuvudtaget så står det i alla kursplanerna att man ska läsa så olika typer av texter som möjligt och bekanta sig med olika genrer så att jag har vävt in det dels ur ett historiskt perspektiv och dels beroende på kanske olika teman om vi har haft poetry analisis så har man kunnat ta vissa sonetter tex och har vi haft mer dramabetonat så har vi kanske gått direkt in på pjäs men överhuvudtaget att man ska ha en varierande textmassa för eleverna och för mig är det, jag undervisar i psykologi också, så att hoppa över Shakespeare det är lite grann som att aldrig nämna Freud. Man behöver inte koncentrera sig till hundra procent men man måste nämna det.

G – On second thoughts, would you mind speaking English?

H – Hmm no, I suppose not.

G – Because this has to be transcribed and I’m just thinking that it’s gonna be tough to transcribe and translate. It’s gonna be quite a lot of work.

H – Ok, alright. Will you present this in English?
G – It’s being presented totally in English.

H – Oh I see, I see, I see. Ok, alright. So from now on.

G – Yeah. Does the school have a local plan that includes covering Shakespeare?

H – No, no we don’t do local plans. Not as such.

G – Ok. How would you describe the students in your class?

H – With great variation really. It depends on the course of course A, B or C. I have not taught very much Shakespeare in the C course but some in the A course and certainly in the B course and I have had students in all different programs from HP, SP, NV and the IB so I couldn’t really describe my students with just a few words because I have the entire spectra.

G – Ok. Are your students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare?

H – Both yes and no, and I’ve gone slightly over to the next question as well because when I introduce it or if I just say ‘how about some Shakespeare’ if I just you know ask them a third of the class will go ‘yeah alright’ and two thirds would probably go ‘oh no why’ because they do have the preconception that it will be difficult it will be really heavy the language will be so difficult to understand and some of them don’t really see the point so after my introduction where I give them different options where if I give them some background then they’re more positive towards it and they are curious about it.

G – You have answered the second question.

H – Yeah.

G – But eh, this is a spontaneous question, where does these preconceived ideas, preconceived notions that Shakespeare is difficult, boring or whatever, where do you think they come from?

H – I think some of the students are influenced by Swedish having difficulties reading old Swedish texts others have read some Shakespeare, well, in between seventh and ninth grade where some of them have not really liked it and enjoyed it and for the same reason some
students are quite interested from the beginning because they have read something which they have been well introduced to uhm and uhm they have a positive idea of what it would be like.

G – Would it be fair to say, this is a very leading question, would it be fair to say that it stems from working with Shakespeare in Swedish?

H – Difficult to say really because I haven’t talked to that many högstadie-teachers so I just go by what I hear from my students. So I don’t really think that you know teaching Shakespeare in Swedish necessarily kills the interest uhm but but some of the students no actually most students do enjoy Shakespeare in Swedish as well. So that’s not what kills the interest. But some of them have never read anything at all by Shakespeare.

G – But they still have preconceived ideas?

H – Yes, oh yes.

G – Why do you find it relevant to teach Shakespeare?

H – Uhm its uhm, I think Shakespeare is a part of history uhm I think Shakespeare uhm is good literature in the sense that there is, its still very much applies to modern times you still find the same problems then in his plays uhm that you do now certainly some of the plays I’m not really talking about the history plays not that a few people wouldn’t like modern history plays to be re-enacted but its still current topics and I think that his language is fantastic and I think once the students realize that they start enjoying him or his texts uhm and also I think that uhm I want to, I want to provide my students with challenges. Not everything should be that easy and predictable and for their enjoyment.

G – Obviously (laughs).

H - Absolutely, absolutely. I came to think of I have something that I try to include is Shakespearian insults which they take great pleasure in so that’s fantastic and even a year later I still hear them sometimes in the hallways and just sometimes in the classroom refer to the Shakespearian insults yeah and one of their favorite's is ‘we leak in your chimney’ and another one is ‘I wish thou where clean enough to spit on’. Excuse me just for one second.
G – How do you make it relevant for the students?

H – Uhm that’s a difficult question in a way because I make it relevant when I explain how it fits in with everything else and how they can learn something from it but I, I think it’s better for me to have the students make it relevant. (interruption)( Jessica, kan du ta det utanför – tack snälla, sorry about that)

G – So the question was how do you make it relevant for the students?

H – Yeah through my instructions and through explaining what they can learn from but I try to make them see the relevance of it themselves and some of them don’t and many of them do (door slams shut).

G – How do you usually start your first lesson on Shakespeare?

H – Uhm I usually give them an introduction uhm. I hand out some information about his life the time when he lived some information about the globe and some information about characters and who played different characters I’m trying to give a historic perspective on it and there’s usually if I teach it as a series of lessons this is stuff that I expect them to learn they will be tested in one way or another a little later on.

G – ok. What different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare?

H – I think in the beginning I already mentioned the poetry analysis which we do and that is not necessarily as part of a lesson plan that goes on for weeks and weeks but we can throw in a little poetry including Shakespeare for example around valentine’s day or anytime really where it would fit in but what I like to do is to have them role-play different plays. Usually I pick one or two plays or one play actually that we read more in detail depending on how much time we have I select the passages from the play I have chosen and I make copies for them and we study language and we study how different characters speak. So we study one play in more detail and then they have abridged versions or short versions of five or six different plays and they’re divided up in to groups and they get to explain the plays and role-
play them to the class so it will be creative and educational at once.

G – What methods do you know from experience do not work?

H – That’s a tough question.

G – Is there anything in particular that you feel…

H – You have to have a purpose you have to have, it has to be meaningful to them in one way or another and they find it meaningful if its properly introduced and if they see, well, if they see the point and if they enjoy what they’re doing then its meaningful to them. I can’t really specify a method that wouldn’t work. Well I can’t say that I ask of them to study a lot of vocabulary. We won’t really have vocabulary checks as such apart from certain extracts which we have studied which we have talked about where I want them to be able to explain something or explain a situation in more detail. So in order to do that they need to know what it is about and they need to know the vocabulary to a certain extent.

G- How do you evaluate your own teaching strategies?

H – How I evaluate it or how I have my students evaluate it?

G – Well both. It could be that you have your students evaluating.

H – I do. I try to. Sometimes to be honest, I forget, but I try to have them evaluate what we have done whether it’s a project or a text we have worked with so I do get feedback and actually I think I get instant feedback from my students. I can easily tell when something doesn’t sit well with them. And how I evaluate it, if I have the sense that I did not enjoy it then it didn’t work and if they did not enjoy it then it didn’t work.

G – ok. In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids?

H – Uhm as of now, well I find that this school is lacking in technology uhm and its too much work to bring technology to the classroom and we’re eagerly awaiting the new times to come but environment for example when we have the role-plays then we try to find a room where
there is some kind of stage. It doesn’t necessarily have to be the assembly hall but we have other rooms where we can be as well and if we can’t book a room like that we’ll be in the classroom but we’ll do something to the classroom environment. If we have discussions we can rearrange the furniture, I mean I’m not sure if this is what you’re getting at.

G – Yeah this is what we are…

H – Ok, I try to rearrange the furniture in the room or actually I have the students rearrange it. They can make suggestions as of how to sit for example. Just to have the standard arrangements in the classroom its not, it kills the creative spirit.

G – Ok, ok. Do you have any advice for teachers that are new to teaching the topic of Shakespeare?

H – Encourage student, students to do their own research. I would say that, if you don’t feel very confident, you know, study the background you know study, be prepared to give the students a framework with as much information as you think they need and then have them work and have them discover and have them research. Its more fun for them and you don’t have to stand there and feel that you are less of an expert and its just more fun for all and I think also that it’s a good learning experience. Otherwise I don’t know, trial and error.

G – Fair enough. I’d like to actually backtrack to one of the questions if you don’t mind. How do you make it relevant for the students its a question.

H – Right.

G – And I suppose that what I’m getting at here without leading you too much is that you know these plays are like 400 years old, you know, and can be a hard sell, how do you sell it? H – Well I wouldn’t sell it like that.

G – No? Good point!

H – I would probably tell them that they are going to read some fantastic test, text about, as I’ve said before, current topics. Something that they can relate to and I just came to think of
what else I do sometimes either as a role-play or they get to rewrite different Shakespeare texts into their own modern version.

G – For example?

H – Uhm and what I do also is, yes I do pick out a few extracts from the original texts which we go through in more detail for them to get a feel for what the language is like and how difficult it really is but I don’t necessarily have them read an entire play depending on, for the B course for example MacBeth would certainly work some of the other plays I would say are for the C course or for my IB courses. I think MacBeth is probably a good beginners play. And I try to emphasize how many people have been influenced by Shakespeare and uhm and if people still enjoy it then it is still relevant we shouldn’t read something just because its old we should read it because its still enjoyable because it still plays a certain role in comparison to other plays or other texts. But the historical perspective, we also read parts of the Canterbury tale for example, we also read parts of Beowulf and we have the old version and the slightly more modern English version and then they can create their own very modern version of course where they can make a cartoon out of it or something.

G – What about the language issue? Could you give an example? If a student for example is reading ‘to be or not to be’ or ‘thou art whatever’ and they go ‘why do I need to know this’ they’re not using this so why…

H – Well the phrase ‘to be or not to be’ is used at least by the older generations not so much by my students I suppose. Its relevant to a certain extent because all students use, all students use when they speak they use the word ‘stuff’ and ‘stuff’ is a Shakespearean word so in that way he is still extremely relevant, ‘stuff’ is a very commonly used word so uhm. But language, well, its interesting to talk about how language changes and how it has changed throughout history. Sometimes, if its not an IB course, just a regular national program, we can compare it to a Swedish text written 400 years ago and see the changes the English text would be so much easier to understand than a Swedish one uhm. And we talk about language in general and their language and how that changes, spoken language versus written language. I haven’t really, I haven’t put much thought to it uhm like that but I do think that that is included in what we do in the classroom.

G – Ok, good answer actually. So we’ll stop
Interview with Alice

Course perspective
In what course do you teach/have you taught Shakespeare? :
English B but also in Swedish B and Drama A (Estetisk verksamhet A).

How do you relate teaching Shakespeare to the syllabus for English? :

The syllabus says that students should get to know the culture and literature of the county they’re studying and its most well known and influential writers, and I think Shakespeare is one of them… According to me, Shakespeare is the stem and root to most modern drama today.

Does the school have a local plan that includes covering Shakespeare?:

No. No local plan considering any particular author. That was a fact many years ago (according to older colleagues), but not nowadays. Today it’s up to every teacher which writers are being taught in their classroom.

Student perspective
How would you describe the students in your classes? :

Nice, sloppy, lazy, generally rather immature, mostly from very stable and safe middle class homes, 99 % of them are born in Sweden to Swedish parents. They go to either the technical program or the construction program. Mostly boys, like 95 % However, I only focus thoroughly on Shakespeare at the technical program, since the language studies at the construction program is very different. (It’s more of a practical program and in most cases the students there have much different needs.)

Are the students motivated when it comes to learning about Shakespeare? :

No, not really. They are generally not interested in authors at all, especially not old ones.
What types of reactions do you usually get from the students when introducing Shakespeare?

These are actual quotes:
“Oh no not that boring old dead English guy with all his stupid boring plays…”
“Oh we did this in ninth grade but I don’t remember anything cause it was so boring”
“Why do I have to know this?”

Teacher perspective

Why do you find it relevant to teach Shakespeare?

Because I consider him one of the world’s most important and influential writers ever, and skipping him would be like skipping to learn the alphabet when teaching students how to read. And his stuff is still relevant today, to all kinds of people. Also, today’s kids need to get to know this kind of cultural phenomena too, not just modern pop cult.

How do you make it relevant for the students?

I try to relate the themes in his plays to their reality. Modernize it. Things like love, hate, revenge, jealousy and stuff like that is always popular. Once they see that the plot in most Shakespeare plays are possible to apply to their own lives, they get less hostile towards it…

How do you usually start your first lessons on Shakespeare with a class?

With brief lectures about the society Shakespeare lived in, the Elizabethan theatre and of course about Shakespeare’s own life.

What different methods do you use when teaching Shakespeare?

Lectures with students taking notes, a written test, acting out scenes, analyzing poems and extracts from plays, watching movies, if possible take the students to see a play. I also try to find easier versions of the texts so they don’t have to stumble on the original pieces for ever and lose all faith. 😊

What methods do you know from experience do not work?:
Just letting them work on their own, reading a whole play which they are later going to present to the class. Never works. It’s too hard to grasp, they need the teacher’s help.

How do you evaluate your teaching strategies? :

I talk to the students, ask them what they think, let them fill in anonymous evaluation sheets, and also compare these results with their test and presentation results.

In what way are your approaches dependent upon teaching aids (media, environment, material, etc)? :

I like to have a TV with a DVD but other than that it works without most technical aids.

Do you have any advice for teachers that are new to teaching the topic of Shakespeare? :

Try and make it funny, try to make the students see similarities with the themes of their own lives, compare Shakespeare with more modern pop cult phenomena. And forget if Shakespeare is “holy” to you yourself! Cause students will try to trash him and his plays as much as they can and you will have to start from ground zero.