

Blending the Old and New: Engaging Students in Shakespeare through Technology

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Simon Fraser University, 2007  
Bachelor of Education, Simon Fraser University, 2008

A Project submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF EDUCATION

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

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University of Victoria

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### **Abstract**

This project outlines a Grade 10 Shakespeare unit that is delivered through multiple technologies and movement-based activities. Based on a review of the literature, it was decided that students would engage with “Romeo and Juliet” using a blended online and in class delivery. The culminating assignment was the collaborative creation of a graphic novel of the entire play. The website and online graphic novel creator, *Pixton*, proved to be engaging for students. Additionally, it provided an accessible means through which students could demonstrate their understanding of the play. The unit is designed to be practical and interesting for students, allowing them to successfully access difficult language and concepts through movement-based activities, online and in-class discussion, and graphic novel creation. The result was increased participation from students as they engaged in the unit. This project includes the literature review, the outline of the unit with instructions for setup and delivery, and recommendations for teachers interested in engaging with this type of content.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

As I embarked on this this Masters journey two years ago, I did so with the intention of doing a project that demonstrated the dangers of excessive technology use in education. However, the program has helped transform my views on the subject. I no longer see technology itself as a problem. Rather, I have come to see that it is the manner in which it is implemented which bothers me. Generally, a lack of funding, organization, and direction make it very difficult for teachers to successfully use new technologies in the classroom without committing an unreasonable amount of their own time and money. Rather that create a project that resists the evolution of technology and education, I have chosen to create a project that will help other teachers specifically and practically incorporate technology into their classrooms. Specifically, I would like to create a Language Arts unit in which a simple yet effective immersion in technology is possible. I will use an online delivery platform to help students create a complete graphic novel of a Shakespeare play using the comic book generating website, *Pixton*. First, however, I will outline my journey from tech resister to tech embracer.

Firstly, I must state that I am not a Luddite. I own an iPhone, iPad, and computer. I subscribe to the internet. I use Gmail, Facebook, and read my news on the web. I enjoy technology in its many forms and appreciate the convenience it can afford. Nonetheless, I graduated from high-school twelve years ago. At that time, while some families had the internet, some, like mine, did not. Walkmans and discmans were the height of technological distractions in the classroom. Cell phones were for the business elite, camp workers, and emergency responders. Violent and realistic video games such as Call of Duty and Halo did not exist. Facebook was founded in 2004, while I was in my second year of university. I purchased my first cell phone around the same time. I avoided the stresses and pressures added to high school that I believe accompany a

reliance on cell phones, social networking, and video games. I am grateful for the fact that the sharply rising technological curve came after my time in the public school system. In three years, 2016, we will be graduating the first class of students who have had these technologies present for their entire public schooling. In 2022, these technologies will have been present for their whole lives. I have observed the effects of technology on students and the education system, and fear the possible results. It is my hope that my daughters, who will graduate in 2027 and 2029 respectively, will have an educational experience where technology is used in a focused and responsible manner that is consistent with the educational and life values and realities of not only the curriculum makers, but of students, parents, teachers, and society at large.

My concerns over technology stem from a number of observations and experiences from my five years as a teacher:

“Can we use our cell phones to look up these words?”

“No, use a dictionary.”

I decipher snippets of the murmuring that spreads around the room: not fair, no reason, power freak, dick. I look up, and then look down again. They will get used to it soon.

Tears. She is crying now, though her look still tells me that she hates me. After several warnings and conversations, I have taken her cell phone away. She cannot check her Facebook, Twitter, or texts. I am witnessing immediate and severe withdrawal.

“I can't think straight today.”

“Why not.”

“I was gaming hard last night. Up till four in the morning.”

“What did you eat?”

“Mountain Dew and chips.”

I shoot a stern glare across the room as Rachel’s cell phone rings and disrupts.

As she pulls her phone from her purse, she gives me a rehearsed glance and says, “Sorry Mr. Murphy, it’s my boss. I need to take this.”

I do not know whether to scream or laugh. I do neither. Instead, I stare at her with bewilderment. I realize that she is under the impression that because she is telling me it is her boss (which it is not), that I should stop the class and wait silently as she sees to more “urgent” matters.

“Paul, guess what?” asks my vice-principal.

“What?”

“As a way of bringing more technology into the classroom, we’ve just bought twelve Kindle e-readers for the library. They can read the books to students and connect to WiFi.”

“Great. Who will be using them?” I reply, with attitude.

“I was hoping you would...”

I do not know whether to scream or laugh. I do neither. Instead, I stare at her with bewilderment. I realize that she is under the impression that I should be happy.

An excerpt from the BC Ministry of Education on 21st Century Learning:

In 21st Century Learning, students use educational technologies to apply knowledge to new situations, analyze information, collaborate, solve problems, and make decisions.

Utilizing emerging technologies to provide expanded learning opportunities is critical to the success of future generations...The Premier's Technology Council described "blended learning" – technology-enhanced learning that is both online and in the classroom– as an effective approach to enhance education. (BC Ministry of Education, para. 1).

Over the course of my teaching career, I have become skeptical of the emergence of technological directives that have been mandated in British Columbia public schools. As shown above in the summary of 21st Century Learning from the BC Ministry of Education website, technologies are believed to be necessary in education. It has moved beyond computers and word processing, sometimes morphing into the belief that a cell phone is an adequate substitute for books. I have seen administrators eagerly promote the use of cell phones in the classroom. I have also seen the disturbing effects that certain types of technology are having on students, and worry that the push for more technology use is enabling addiction. Furthermore, I question whether students have the ability to be empowered by exposure to technology, rather than simply being distracted. Rather than being disgruntled, this Masters project affords me the opportunity to get move past my technological biases, and produce a useful and effective technology based unit for the senior English curriculum.

As a result of my concerns, I have been considering where particular types of technology fit within curricular discourse. The word technology has immense scope. In order to focus my inquiry, I would like to look at which technologies can be most effectively and practically applied to a senior Language Arts Curriculum.

After much thought and consideration two primary statements have emerged that require exploration:

1. Not all technologies are educationally useful for every student and are sometimes harmful.

2. Technology based education materials need to be usable and practical, and not require a vast shift in a teacher's personal teaching style.

Of particular importance to me is the use of online social-networking and cell phones. I believe that through their use of cell phones, social networking, and video games, children create, consciously or not, alternate selves. The texters' fascination with their inbox, Facebookers' obsession with how many "likes" they have, and gamers' fixation on his high score seem to draw enormous amounts of resources and energy from their real selves. I see it as an unhealthy preoccupation with a world that does not exist. It appears that students are dedicating an unreasonable amount of time and energy to their alternate selves at the expense of their real selves. This project will use technology to circumvent these potentially unhealthy activities, and to engage students in meaningful materials. Consequently, and despite oft felt pressures, I will not be utilizing mobile devices or social networking sites as part of this project.

In "Scientific Method in Curriculum Making" (1918/2013) Bobbitt discusses the difference between "undirected and...directed training" (p. 13). Reading this article helped me consider the purpose of using technology in education. Bobbitt (1918/2013) suggests that it is worthwhile to identify what students learn in undirected training, that is, the training that students receive outside the school. Once identified, directed training should be used to fill in the gaps in school. In part, I agree with Bobbitt's (1918/2013) ideas. With regards to technology, students learn many of its uses and benefits through undirected training. They are so "plugged in" that the bulk of many students' undirected training is related to mobile and social network-based technology. On the other hand, they have very little undirected training for specifically useful technologies. I would argue that the directed training in the classroom should focus on giving students the ability

to work, think, play, socialize, and function without their devices, but using focussed technological programs to enhance learning.

Freire (1970/2013) suggests that it should not be the few in power who make the curriculum, but the many who are not in power. If “dichotomy” (p. 157) exists between the two, then those in power are being neglectful and speaking an “unauthentic” (p. 157) word. Freire (1970/2013) argues that a top-down approach to planning is rarely authentic, and often results in unrest. This is true of technology use in education. The BC Ministry of education has designed curriculum that mandates increased technology use in the classroom. This mandate is sent down to the teachers, and subsequently to the students. While it may be a good idea in theory, the lack of a cooperative approach to the mandate, inadequate training, and a lack of practical resources results in an “unauthentic” (p. 157) implementation. It is my hope that this project will help with the practical implementation of technology in the English curriculum.

In a recent study, Philip and Garcia (2013) highlight the “naïve assumption” (p. 308) that having cell phones in the class will automatically boost student interest and engagement simply because students like their cell phones. Their focus on the problematic promotion of cell phones in the classroom reinforces trends I have been observing. While Philip and Garcia (2013) highlight the positive and negative impacts of technology on students, a central idea of their article is that it may be an unnecessary imposition of a tool that students do not want or need. Like Freire (1970/2013), Philip and Garcia (2013) see a problem in the top-down approach to policy making. They note that the curriculum experts create policy based on their own realities, realities which may be incongruent with those of the students for whom they are designing the curriculum. The assumptions made by policy makers do a disservice to students. While students may like their devices, they may not need or want them in the classroom.

To properly engage in the discourses of technology, education, and its dangers and benefits, it is essential that I look further into each topic and how they relate. Huang and Leung (2009), have looked at instant messaging addictions in Chinese teenagers. Their study highlights that students who are addicted to instant messaging are more likely to alienate themselves from peer groups and suffer deteriorating grades. While this may not be surprising, it is comforting to see that some of the fears I have exist as fact in past studies. To add to works such as Huang and Leung (2009), I worry that the system places too strong an emphasis on technology with little consideration, and may enable the problem through provincial education mandates. I am not asserting that this is a malicious attempt by the province to create a generation of passive technology addicts. Rather, I believe that a dangerous disconnect exists between provincial mandates and the reality of student lives both in and out of the classroom. The idea of more technology in the classroom might be theoretically sound, but the manner in which it is currently being encouraged does not reflect that soundness.

This project is designed to explore useful and adaptable technologies for the English classroom. The development of an organized, usable, and efficient technology based Senior Language Arts unit is a step in the right direction. By using an online delivery system to help students create a graphic novel of Shakespeare's work using the *Pixton* comic book making site, I hope to bridge the gap between the new and the old, both personally, and professionally.

There is strong evidence that the use of technology has its place in education. The different technologies that can be used to enhance the educational experience are ever evolving, and the research is constant. As someone who has been previously hesitant to use technology in my teaching, I will create a technologically immersive Language Arts Curriculum. To do this, I will use an online system, such as Sharepoint, to deliver a unit on Shakespeare. The unit will be

focussed on having students create a scene-by-scene graphic novel of a Shakespeare play. To do this, I will have students use the online graphic novel creation website, *Pixton*. As someone who has managed the Online Distributed Learning department in School District 72, I have seen first hand the mixed results that come when students take on the challenge of an online course. The design of this Language Arts Unit will be to allow students a chance to engage with an online course in an independent and positive way, while still having the guidance and supervision of a classroom teacher. As a result, I hope to pave the way for future success for these students in online courses.

In this project, I will focus on demonstrating that Shakespeare can still be made relevant to the modern student, and that the graphic novel is a deserving, engaging, and worthwhile medium for having students engage in literature. Moreover, I will reinforce that they are particular appropriate for the youth of today, and that the role of the graphic novel is evolving from one of support, to one of enrichment.

In my short six years of teaching at the high school, I have never once delivered the same curriculum to different classes. I make a constant effort to change and adapt according to the needs of the students and, as a Language Arts teacher, to the evolving literary scene. This adaptation has been as simple as ensuring that we have relevant and up to date novel selections that span multiple grade levels. Recently, I have made an effort to incorporate graphic novels into my classes. It has become evident that this is a very engaging genre for the majority of today's students. My hope is that I can use this high level of engagement to draw students into an online world of education with which they are not entirely familiar. I will develop a Language Arts unit that using an online delivery platform that is supported by School District 72 to have students use the *Pixton* graphic novel creator to engage with and create a new version of a Shakespeare play.

Students are often expected in high school, or very early on in university, to take part in online courses, however they receive very little training. It is my hope that I will be able to have them meaningfully engage in this online process due to an interest in graphic novels. Hopefully, this will act as an enriching training ground for their future online courses. I will close with conclusion on graphic novels drawn by Carter (2007), “In short, the English classroom that integrates graphic novels will be and is becoming a classroom with books that suggest the class is a place of acceptance, diversity, deep and multifaceted reading, and discussion that does not shy away from challenge” (p. 52). This is the class I wish to create.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this literature review I explore whether Shakespeare's plays can still be made relevant to the contemporary student. Lighthill (2007) explores the relevancy of Shakespeare's writing to modern youth. He highlights two sides of a debate that cannot have a winner. Arguments range from pointing to teachers having a moral obligation to teach Shakespeare, to pointing out a lack of emotional maturity and basic language ability of students resulting in an inability to effectively engage with Shakespeare's plays. Ultimately, he shows that an updated form of delivery renders the debate moot, creating significant engagement.

The graphic novel is a deserving, engaging, and worthwhile medium for having students engage in this literature. I will reinforce that they are particularly appropriate for the youth of today, and that the role of the graphic novel is evolving from one of support, to one of enrichment. Carter (2007) notes that the "English classroom that integrates graphic novels will be and is becoming a classroom with books that suggest the class is a place of acceptance, diversity, deep and multifaceted reading, and discussion that does not shy away from challenge" (p. 52). The use of graphic novels will allow me to simultaneously create engagement and challenge within my classroom.

I further explain how I have used the research of online teaching systems to inform the choices I have made in how I will deliver this unit. In particular, using the work of researchers such as Dickey (2005) and Vonderwell (2003) I will explain the benefits of anonymity and avatars in online delivery. Additionally, Tallman and Fitzgerald (2005) highlight the benefits of an online/classroom hybrid course.

With reference to today's students, Irish (2007) poses this question: "Is there...a classroom practice that engages these students enough to challenge electronic media for their attention?" (p. 139). I hope to create an online/classroom course that can achieve this. In order to explore this

possibility, I will look at students' attitudes toward Shakespeare, the role of the graphic novel in education, and the function of the online classroom.

### **Shakespeare Today**

**Student Attitudes.** Presenting Shakespeare's writing to today's student is difficult. Students come to class with many preconceived ideas of who Shakespeare is and what a study of his works will be. There are a variety of attitudes that are elicited at the mere mention of his name. For instance, many students share the attitude that "although [they] know nothing about Shakespeare, [they] know he's boring" (Lighthill, 2011, p. 37). Irish (2011), conducted a case study on the value of using an active approach to teaching Shakespeare. Instead of having students sit in a desk and read and respond, they were engaged through a variety of acting exercises. Early in the study, it became evident that students were resistant. The teacher, Karen, found that learning Shakespeare was seen as "difficult and challenging" with "little value" and irrelevant "to the modern world" (p. 11). One student even provided the typical response that she "didn't 'do' Shakespeare" (p. 11). Because of many students' attitudes, teaching Shakespeare – which is a common resource that fulfills the drama requirements in grades 9 through 12 as identified in the British Columbia grade 9 to 12 IRP (B.C. Ministry of Education, 2006) – can be a daunting task. Ever newer ways of approaching the playwright's works are necessary in order to make the experience enjoyable and worthwhile for students.

**Engaging Students.** Lighthill (2011), Irish (2011) and Avery (2011) each investigate ways of engaging today's students with Shakespeare. Lighthill (2011) creates a unit that works to make Shakespeare relevant in students' lives. In her case study, Irish (2011) highlights the benefits of using an active approach. She chronicles one teacher's (Karen) experiences and successes with using drama activities to engage students. She notes the importance of changing the physical

space in which students are experiencing the play. She trains students to move desks and chairs efficiently, conducting her classes in an open concept room. As a result, students are in new surroundings, and are more apt to develop new attitudes. At first, she was met with some resistance, but soon new attitudes emerged. The teacher found that students exceeded her expectations, and the active approach has become a mainstay of her Shakespeare curriculum. This is an approach that I already use in my practice. I have been using the acting and movement activities provide by the Stratford Festival Education department for four years. The activities involve a variety of drama-based games that allow students to become familiar with the plays and language in an active manner. This will lay the foundation for having a class engage in Shakespeare's work.

In his first year college Shakespeare class, Avery (2011) addresses the plight of a non-English student in a required college English course. In many ways, this is similar to high school language arts programs. Students who are not interested in pursuing a career in literature are forced to experience it in an educational setting. Avery discusses multiple ways he engages students. As in Irish (2011), student movement is central. He has students in a circle saying simple, non-threatening lines from a Shakespeare play. Additionally, Avery (2011) found that it is not necessary for students to completely read and understand the entire play in detail. Reading the entire play effectively is unrealistic for some students. However, they can grasp major themes and ideas by having a deeper understanding of portions of the play.

For my project, the use of *Pixton*, a graphic novel creator, allows students a new way to show their understanding of Shakespeare. Also, each student will be responsible for recreating one scene from the play. After reading the play as a class, their primary responsibility will be to have

a thorough understanding of one key portion of the play. Further, they will be allowed to experience the course in a new (virtual) space; online.

### **Why Graphic Novels?**

**Graphic Novels in the Mainstream.** Though not the cutting-edge literary form they once were, graphic novels have yet to make it into the mainstream as a Language Arts resource. Ever growing in popularity and availability, it is time that the reading and creation of this literary form becomes a standard of Language Arts curricula. Lavin (1998) noted that “the sophistication of the American comic book/graphic novel may be the most underrated literacy movement in recent United States history. Many teachers, librarians, and comics professionals have commented on the particular suitability of comic books and graphic novels for the current generation of young adults, who were raised on television, video games, music videos, and other highly visual media” (as cited by Short and Reeves, 2009, p. 417). Stylistically, it makes sense that graphic novels would deepen engagement among youth. Current students’ access to resources that combine the written and visual can result in a struggle when presented with text-only resources. Connors (2013), conducted a study of an after school reading group that focussed on graphic novels. He explains that modern adolescents frequently “interact with texts that blend semiotic resources” (p. 49) Additionally, he reflects on the work done by Allen and Ingulsrud (2003) who found that Japanese students liked reading manga for the simple reason that it seems easier. These studies reflect a reality that student tastes and strengths are changing in the literary sphere, and it is necessary for curriculum to change as well. This is not to say that these resources should be

stricken from the curriculum. Rather, that room should be made to accommodate a changing literary landscape.

**Modern Content is a Necessity.** This changing educational landscape extends beyond graphic novels. There is a larger movement to have students work in their areas of strength. Allowing graphic novels into the mainstream as a necessity is reflected by Steinkuehler's (2008) perspective on technology, and video games in particular: "Games are the new literacy, whether those of us in education are willing to recognize them as such or not. From this perspective, we need to research and understand games for the sheer reason that they are, much to the chagrin of an older generation, one of the most important cultural media to date" (p. 19). She reinforces that it is the responsibility of educators to understand and provide access to these new ways of thinking and creating.

**Modern Youth are Engaged by the Graphic Novel.** Morrison, Bryan, and Chilcoat note how the creation of graphic novels in any course can help students "develop their writing, comprehension, and research skills in a cross-curricular activity" (as cited in Schwartz, 2006, pp. 58-59). It is my hope that the combination of the written and visual demystifies the writing process for some students, making it less threatening, as all students are experiences a new process on a level playing field. It should truly allow students to develop new skills.

This is not a revolutionary concept. Other teachers have used graphic novels as a means for students to display their understanding of Shakespeare. Phyllis Hartfield, a teacher from Oklahoma, had her students create a graphic novel version of *Romeo and Juliet* (Schwartz, 2006). It is not noted whether or not Hartfiel used an online delivery or program for creation of the graphic novel. This is where I see this approach to be doubly important for students. The interactive use of *Pixton* will engage students both in Shakespeare's work, and in becoming

familiar with online learning platforms. Schwartz (2006) noted that Hartfield thought that using the graphic novel as a medium for representation allowed students to experience a “playful approach” to Shakespeare (p. 59).

**Graphic Novels for All Learners.** There is a spectrum of opinions regarding the usefulness of graphic novels as a classroom tool. Often, they are given to students who struggle in Language Arts as a means to make content more accessible. The increasing popularity and availability means that there are more and more relevant graphic novels for the classroom. While they do require different reading skills, Schwartz (2006) notes that they are particularly useful for “reluctant readers,” and that for “students who no longer deal with pure word texts in their daily lives, multiple literacies are a necessity” (p. 63). In a way, teachers and the education system are almost doing a disservice to students if we do not include content such as graphic novels in the curriculum. It is the responsibility of the teacher to bridge the gap to a new era of literacy in which modern students exist.

Jacobs (2007), explains how graphic novels have grown from being a fringe literature that were considered at times subversive and dangerous, to a relevant part of the modern literary collection. They were “at best, ...popular entertainment and, at worst, ...a dangerous influence on youth” (p. 19). Jacobs steers away from having graphic novels seen simply as adaptive help for the reluctant reader. Instead, he believes that by using them in education, “we can help students develop as critical and engaged reader of multimodal texts” (p. 19). If we can help them become readers of such materials, then it stands to reason that we can have them complete the same process through creation.

Graphic novels are not only a resource to help students who struggle with reading and writing. The usefulness of the graphic novel extends beyond this to point where it can enrich and act as “an intermediary step to more complex word-based literacy” (p. 24). This is expressed by Jacobs:

Reading and writing multimodal texts, then, is an active process, both for creators and for readers who by necessity engage in the active production of meaning and who use all resources available to them...we can more effectively help students become active creators, rather than passive consumers, of meaning in their interactions with a wide variety of multimodal texts. In doing so, we harness the real power of comics in the classroom and prepare students for better negotiating their worlds of meaning. (Jacobs, 2007, p. 24).

Jacobs recognizes that having students create, as well as read graphic novels is an important part of literacy development. Creation requires them to demonstrate knowledge and ability related to both written expression and visual representation. Graphic novels are not an easier method, simply a different one. It challenges students to move beyond the traditional text-only world they are often confined to, and into a literary world that more reflects their day-to-day lives.

### **An Online Course Delivery**

**Benefits of Avatars in Online Delivery.** The online graphic novel creation site, *Pixton*, allows students to create avatars to represent themselves on the website. This is beneficial as it allows students to recreate themselves in the online classroom. Dickey, 2005 conducted a “qualitative exploratory case study” that looks at the effectiveness of using a 3D virtual world, *Active Worlds*, as a means to enrich the distance education learning experience at the post-secondary level. *Active World* is a program that allows students to choose avatars to represent themselves in group discussions. Similarly, *Pixton* allows students to create their own avatars to use on the site. In this case, the first case study highlights an asynchronous distance education course from the University of Colorado – Boulder College of Business, while the second examines a synchronous

course from Active Worlds University. She notes that Active World allowed distance education students to “fost[er] a sense of place, presence, and community” (p. 445). The participants noted that the course made it feel more like they were “at school” (p. 445) than traditional distance education programs. Also, the popularity of the course went up and attrition rates went down.

The second case study had similar positive findings. Dickey notes that it allowed students to “learn in a collaborative and supportive environment” (p. 447). Ultimately, whether asynchronous or synchronous, both classes benefitted from a more realistic classroom and heightened engagement. By using the *Pixton* avatars, students will hopefully experience the same positive outcomes with regards to a sense of belonging and community.

**In Class and Online.** To some, overexposure to the internet and its dehumanizing social networks is seen as a danger to young people. Valkenburg and Peter (2008) explain that as online chatrooms emerged in the 1990s the assumption was that they would result in weak social skills and reduction in social connectedness. They go on to note that new theories recognize “online communication may result in greater positivity of interaction...and in more breadth of interaction” (p. 4) have emerged.

Nonetheless, the opportunity for “online harassment and cyber bullying may be associated with the disinhibition that results from the reduced auditory and visual cues” (p. 4). Tallman and Fitzgerald (2005) provide insight into more benefits of a blended classroom. In their work, they had the same group of students concurrently take an online and in-class course. Firstly, they found that in the face-to-face meetings, students would often seek support for the online course. Secondly, “the diversity of modalities supported a creative combination of teaching options” (25). For this reason, I feel that it is beneficial for students to first experience online learning in a setting that allows them to learn and work both online and in the classroom. This will allow them

to be able to experience online learning, while at the same time be able to, seek help, reflect on their experiences and action with their peers on a regular basis, and have the benefit of multiple forms of delivery. A hybrid approach that allows them to be part of both the online and classroom communities may/should allow for a truer understanding of the student to student relationships.

The need for a combined online/classroom approach is highlighted by looking at some of the pros and cons found by Dickey (2005), and Vonderwell (2003). Dickey notes that “students were able to designate a meeting time and place for collaboration activities” (p. 445), and that the Active Worlds course was able to foster collaborative problem solving” (p. 445). By comparison, Vonderwell (2003) found that “computer mediated communication was a drawback in terms of communication among the students” (p. 82). Additionally, the students in Vonderwell’s study felt there was a “lack of ‘one-on-one relationship’ with the instructor” (p. 83), a “delay in immediate feedback or communication” (p. 84), and repetitive discussion posts. One major benefit Vonderwell observed was that the discussion post format required students to “carefully construct and express their ideas” (p. 86) in order to properly communicate their message. Lastly, Vonderwell notes that traditional courses do not necessarily prepare students for the level of independence required in an online course. It is easy to see how this lack of preparedness could be a hindrance to success in online courses, particularly at the high school level.

Given that this unit will be supplemental to the classroom, I will have the opportunity to reflect on a typical group of students as and their computer work habits, engagement with the content, and engagement with one another. This will allow me to avoid the problems found by Vonderwell (2003), while allowing students such as those described by Dickey (2005) article to embrace their independence.

**An Asynchronous Approach to Discussion.** Pena-Shaff, Altman, and Stephenson (2005), found that providing students with an asynchronous framework for learning was perceived by students to be beneficial. In particular, it gave them “extended time to reflect on and structure their ideas...in-depth discussion of class topics...access to different perspectives...and increased control” (pp. 418-419). While students will have time to work on the graphic novel in class, the nature of the online model will allow for students who need to work at a different pace to do so. Additionally, asynchronicity will allow students more time to create in-depth responses to the work of other students. Soliciting feedback in a high school classroom can often be difficult. The “increased control” that is felt by the students, combined with online anonymity, may result in greater engagement.

Johnson (2008) conducted a study comparing the synchronous and asynchronous online discussions. She concludes that an asynchronous model may allow students to compensate “for less than ideal learning behavior” (p. 169). Interestingly, when surveyed, the strongest response in favour of an asynchronous model was the “time to think” category. Many teaching strategies are designed to allow students sufficient time to think. An asynchronous model allows some students to overcome the pressures felt when they are singled out, and allows them time to sufficiently process and share information. In the graphic novel unit, the extra time to think will hopefully lead to more in-depth peer discussion and responses.

**The Online Student – Anonymity.** With relation to the potential drawbacks of anonymity, Dickey (2005) does note that because the students remained anonymous behind the face of the avatar, they took “great liberties in their interaction” (p. 445). Inappropriate language such as “hey babe” (p. 445) was more prevalent and accepted than in a typical classroom. Based on the findings of this article, it seems that the anonymity that *Pixton* affords should be addressed with

students from the outset. While I would not expect inappropriate conversations, it is, of course possible.

In Vonderwell's (2003) article, "An Examination of Asynchronous communication experiences and Perspectives of Students in an Online Course: A Case Study," the author studies the pros and cons of using an asynchronous online course model. Specifically, Vonderwell looks at a course for preservice education majors from a "College of Education of a large Midwestern University" (p.79). Like Dickey (2005), Vonderwell (2003) makes note of the effect anonymity can have on the behaviour of students. In this case however, the anonymity was viewed as a positive, allowing students to "ask more questions without worrying what other people think" (p. 82). The positive aspects of anonymity identified in this article will certainly affect students' attitudes toward and engagement in the creation of a graphic novel. As a teacher, it is often difficult to have students fully engage in public creation and presentation of art-based assignments. By allowing students to remain anonymous throughout the process, students who are self-conscious, shy, or who simply struggle with art, may have many of their fears diminished.

As mentioned before, for a high school art project, I believe anonymity to be valuable. The potential downsides to this anonymity such as the threat of cyber-bullying or inappropriate language use, can be averted simply by having a conversation with students to inform them that they are anonymous to their peers, but not to their teachers. They need to know that they will be held fully accountable for their actions both on the classroom and online.

## **Conclusion**

Shakespeare. Graphic Novels. Online Learning. A review of the literature demonstrates that these three learning tools will be able to be successfully blended to create a technology-based

Language Arts approach that is both meaningful to contemporary students and realizes the outcomes of curriculum. Although Shakespeare's writing is often met with resistance on the part of students, there are practical and achievable methods to foster engagement. If the delivery of the material is updated, the content of the plays can come alive for students. Having students recreate classic texts with a modern literary genre and textual/technological platform is a valuable experience. Graphic novels are no longer part of fringe literature. Rather, they are multi-modal mainstream resources that engage modern students who exist in a multi-modal world. Once used primarily to engage struggling readers, they have become a tool that can help students learn to interpret and engage with the multi-modal world in which they live.

Additionally, an asynchronous online/classroom hybrid approach to online learning will give students a positive experience that will empower them to be successful in their future online course. With online avatars for an art-based assignment, students will experience the benefits of online anonymity that will allow them to take risks that they might not otherwise take in the classroom.

The unit that I am developing for this M Ed project will allow students to have a positive experience with both Shakespeare's works and online learning by employing the use of the graphic novel creating website *Pixton*. Rather than have students be passive receivers of the Bard's great works, I intend them to be active creators, working with modern systems that allow them to demonstrate strengths and understandings that can be lost through traditional delivery. In the following chapter I present this project.

## Chapter 3: Project Presentation

### Introduction

Introducing new ideas and curriculum to our teaching practices can be a daunting task. It can be especially difficult as many teachers have beliefs that make them resistant to new or untested technologies is. To counteract this, it is important to “introduce teachers to the types of technology uses that can support their most immediate needs” (Ertmer, 2005). Likewise, for many new teachers, such as myself, the use of Shakespeare’s works in the high-school English language arts classroom as required by the curriculum can easily be ignored due to a perceived lack of interest among the students. However, in order to address changes to digital-based ways that many students communicate and engage with a widening range of textual formats, I feel that a shift in my own practice toward technology is necessary. As a result, I am delving into the use of websites as a learning tool and resource, and having Grade nine English language arts students create online graphic novels of scenes from *Romeo and Juliet*. This unit serves two purposes. The first is to engage students in Shakespeare’s work through movement- based, entertaining activities. The second is to have students engage in familiar and current communication platforms such websites, discussion boards, and *Pixton.com* – an online comic/graphic novel generator. This chapter will outline the processes and reflect on the successes that I experienced with my students through this M Ed Project’s Unit. These discussions are each supported by integration of critically informed perspectives from my research of the literature. In particular, this chapter discusses the preparation of the technology, creating engagement in Shakespeare through movement, and the features and successes of *Pixton*.

### Preparing the Website and *Pixton* User Accounts

As part of the Unit titled “Blending the Old and New: Shakespeare and the Graphic Novel” that I developed for this M Ed project, it was necessary for me to set up two technological

applications. First, I needed to set up an account at *Pixton.com*. There are two options in doing this. The first option is to set up a licensing agreement for the whole school - this ends up being cheaper per student if hundreds of students use it. As I was the only teacher using *Pixton*, I opted for an individual month by month agreement. For a cost of \$14.99 plus taxes per month, I was able to sign up my 60 students for this program. Once registered, the students go on and create accounts using personal email addresses. In doing this, they are able to create a Screenname ensuring their anonymity among students when displaying their work. Generally, some students choose to be anonymous, while others will use their real name. While the anonymity is an added feature for students, it does not seem to be tied to performance. Dickey (2005) noted that some students take negative liberties when given the opportunity to remain anonymous. As part of the Unit's preparation, I informed students that although they would be anonymous to each other, I know who they are online. This easy step has mitigated any potential negative impact of anonymity. This preparation process is very simple, and is assisted by a help line that connects directly to *Pixton* creators in Parksville, British Columbia. In my experience, information and help has been granted quickly and efficiently.

The second technological application that I needed to create was a website using my School District's approved SharePoint software developed by Scholantis, a Vancouver, BC based software company. It appears that much thought has gone into making the SharePoint software user friendly. I added a number of pre-set features including: Featured Links, Announcements, Assignment Dropbox, Course Outline, Handouts and Materials, Media Gallery, and Discussion board. From there, I added some current stories about "Romeo and Juliet," a course outline, a link to an online "Romeo and Juliet" video game, and a graphic novel assignment assessment rubric. I left the discussion board and gallery inactive, as students would not be accessing the site

for several days. To add student permissions to SharePoint websites, it is as easy as copying and pasting a student list directly into an “access” bin. Students are then able to access the site from the school website using their standard School District username and password. As someone who understands technology, yet is hesitant to use it in the classroom, I found that this process was easy, streamlined, and effective.

### **Creating Engagement through Movement**

Being the first day of the course, I took some time to do a general overview for the students. Upon hearing that we would be beginning with “Romeo and Juliet”, the general reaction from students was one of dissatisfaction and annoyance. I am always sure to justify why we read “Romeo and Juliet,” but find my reasoning often falls on deaf ears.

As first activity, I introduced the Tableau of Romeo and Juliet ([Tableau Activity Link](#)). This is an activity that was presented to me through my aunt, who acts at the Stratford Festival in Ontario (Stratford Festival). The play is broken up into 12 parts. The class is divided into six groups. Each group becomes responsible for two of the parts of the play. As a group they must create a still image of their scene using only their bodies. They can act as humans, animals, or inanimate objects. They are not allowed to talk or move, and must be able to hold the pose for thirty seconds. The class then performs the play in order. For each Tableau, I took the time to explain what was going on, allowing students to become familiar with the play before we began reading. This knowledge allowed them to relax and engage with the play on a micro level, without needing to worry about the bigger picture of the story. This activity got the students moving, and allowed them to have some fun in their initial interaction with the play. Irish (2011) noted the importance of having students move while engaged with Shakespeare based activities.

The tableau allowed for this movement, in fact, it required it. Students need to be reminded that these are not simply meant to be read, but are meant to be performed.

Near the end of this lesson, I introduced the idea of *Pixton*, and the creation of a graphic novel. This news was met with a reserved excitement. This is reinforced by Connors (2013) who, in his research in using graphic novels with adolescents, found that they engaged well with the genre because of their familiarity with text and image based reading in their daily lives. Allen and Ingulsrud (2003) also found that students like this genre because it seems easier. I was able to explain to students how the Tableau is effectively a human graphic novel; a series of still images with narration. In doing the tableau, having some fun, and preparing for the creation of a graphic novel, students began to see the Shakespeare unit as one in which they can engage in and succeed.

### **Delving into the Language**

For the second day, we began by doing a “Tossing Lines” activity ([Tossing Lines Link](#)). Each student was given a significant line from the play. Once they have practiced and understood the line, the entire class stood in a circle. One student started with a ball. They said their line, then said the name of another student, and then tossed them the ball. This sequence was repeated until each student had said his or her line. They were encouraged to say their line theatrically, and with an intentional tone. This activity was generally well received by students. They were both confused and excited, as this did not meet their expectations for the Shakespeare unit.

Upon completion of this activity, we sat down to begin listening to the play. Students were introduced to their ongoing assignments: Timeline and Lines of the Day. They must chart three main events and three significant lines from each day of listening. In Total, it ends up being between 24-30 timeline points and lines.

To listen to the play, I used the BBC Radio recording (Shakespeare, 1993). Beginning with the prologue, I stopped frequently to explain the language and the events of the play to the students. I made it clear to them that all students come with different levels of understanding. The goal is for everyone, myself included, to improve their understanding. In order for all students to have adequate understanding of the events, it was necessary for me to stop and explain frequently. They were given a variety of informal tasks such as decoding important passages, illustrating imagery rich descriptions (such as Mercutio's description of Queen Mab), and general discussion. The small, simple tasks broke up the monotony of listening to the play, and it often resulted in a "what's next" attitude among the students.

As we listened to the play, tasks and assignment were kept intentionally simple. Lighthill (2011) suggests that students expect Shakespeare to be boring, and as a result of this impending boredom, students find Shakespeare daunting on its own. In a course such as English 10, there are ample opportunities to write more difficult pieces such as essays. Rather than combine the two potentially stressful activities of understanding Shakespeare and writing an essay, I chose have them demonstrate their understanding through more familiar mediums.

### **Keeping the Students Interested**

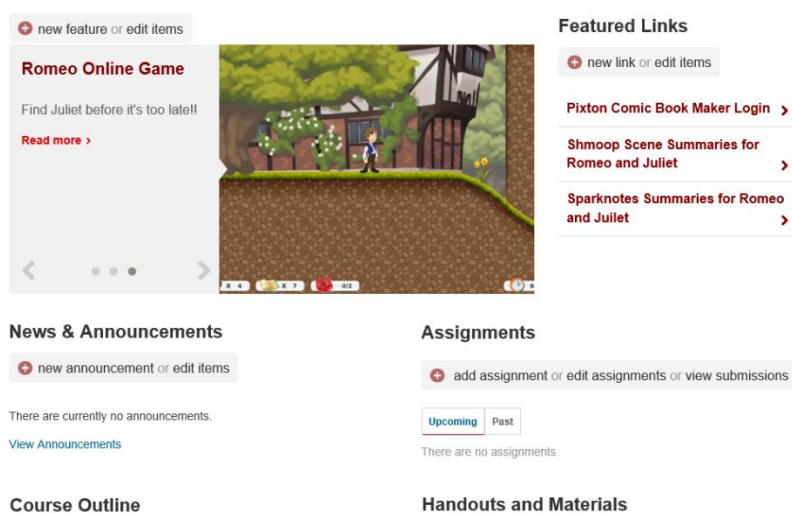
One final preparatory activity worth noting is the insult game ([Insult Game Link](#)). Each student was assigned an insult from the play, we then took turns alternating insults with each other. This activity can only take place only in a class that is safe and friendly. It resulted in many laughs, and opportunities for me to explain the meaning of the language, and help students begin to understand. Once again, this was a movement based activity that allowed students to enter into a relationship with the play in a humorous and interesting way.

Once the insult game was complete, students took their seats and we began listening to the play. We moved very slowly at first. Typically, I stopped the play every 5-15 lines to explain to the students what has happened or what was about to happen. Listening to the play at this rate takes anywhere from 7-10 75 minute classes. Interspersed with the readings were various artistic and discussion based activities, along with 5-15 minutes each class for students to complete their Timelines and Lines of the Day.

As Avery (2011) noted, it is not essential for each student to understand every part of the play. In fact to expect them to do so is unrealistic. Activities such as the Tableau, Insult Game, and Tossing Lines allowed all students to become familiar with the basic structure of the play, as well as important and humorous lines. For many students in this unit who would otherwise be unengaged with Shakespeare, these became their most memorable activities.

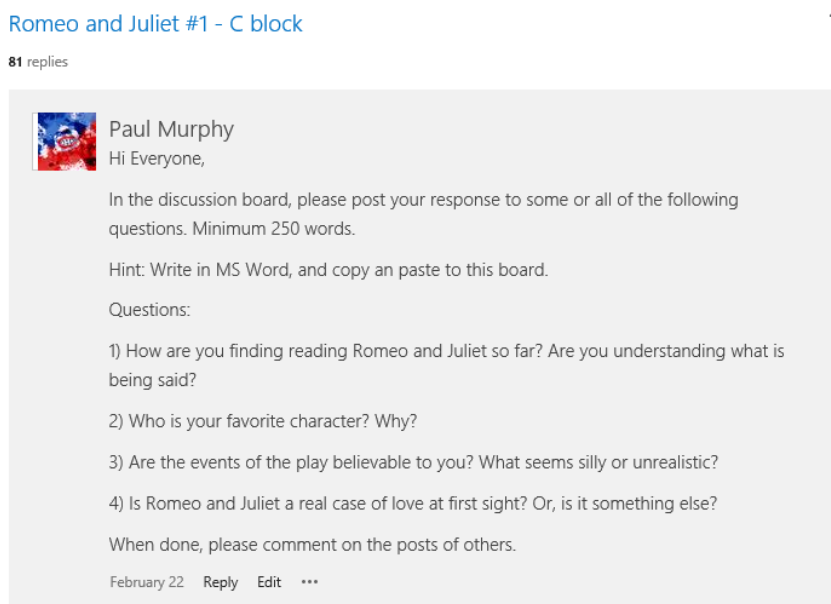
### **Introducing the Website**

Prior to completing the play, students spent one class in the computer lab. I directed them to some of the functions of the website that would help them through the play. Simple links to Schmoop.com and Sparnotes.com offered students some easily accessible scene summaries for future reference. I noticed that students found these sites helpful and accessed them frequently. The posted articles about modern interpretations of the play were less interesting to them. However, the online Flash based video game “Romeo” was popular, likely because of the novelty of having a teacher tell them to play the game.



**Figure 1.** This screenshot shows the homepage of the Sharepoint site created for the English 10 “Romeo and Juliet” unit.

The primary purpose of this day in the lab was to introduce them to the discussion board function. I assigned the following:



**Figure 2.** This was the initial message board assignment. Responses were typically thorough and honest.

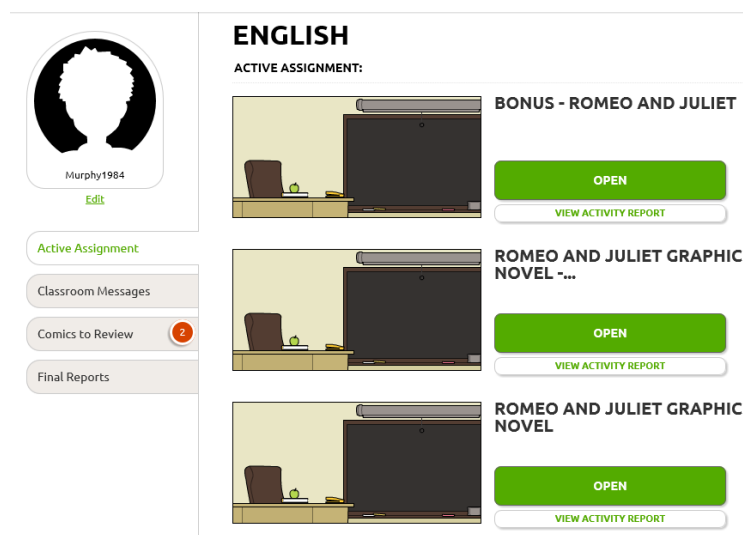
While I do often have group discussion in my classes, generating discussion among students can be difficult. They are often hesitant to share ideas and opinions that could be wrong. I was astonished at the level of discussion that took place on the discussion board. The informality of the discussion board brought out a refreshing honesty in the students. I made it clear that they were not going to be marked on their writing ability (that comes later in the course), but on their ideas and insight. Many students who would typically be perceived as weak students were able to demonstrate their understanding in a style in which they are comfortable. I found the discussion board posts particularly interesting for parent teacher interviews. It was a way for me to clearly show parents that their child understood the play. An example of this informality that allowed lower achieving students to thrive might look like: “Tybalt is a beauty. He is a SNAP SHOW!! and I like how he always backs up his words with his fists.” While the colloquial nature of this example would be inappropriate in a more difficult written medium, such as an essay, it clearly demonstrated understanding of an element of Tybalt’s character.

The success of the discussion board was truly staggering for me. As someone who, some months ago, thought that it would not make a difference to student contribution, I must admit that I was wrong. Student engagement with the discussion topics was more than I have ever seen when done as class discussion or journal responses. Likely, the fact that it can be accessed asynchronously is good for students. Pena-Shaff, Altman, and Stephenson (2005) and Johnson (2008) laud the benefits of asynchronous discussion. While Grade 10 students may not be ready for complete independence, the option to continue the discussion board at home offered them the “extended time to reflect on and structure their ideas...in-depth discussion of class topics...access to different perspectives...and increased control” (Pena-Shaff, Altman, and Stephenson, 2005, pp. 418-419). Using their school login, students were able to fully access all

components of the site from home. For me, the online discussion board is a new part of my practice that is here to stay.

### Introducing *Pixton*

Having students buy-in to the website, *Pixton.com*, is essential for the success of this technology based Language Arts unit. I posted a link to my English 10 website that went directly to the student login page for *Pixton*. This was effective in that it eliminated the need for cumbersome URLs or a series of steps to log in. Students were then able to create pseudonyms for themselves, subsequently working in anonymity with other students. Having the role of teacher on the site, I was able to access usernames, passwords, and pseudonyms. This was beneficial in two ways to me. Firstly, I was able to know exactly who was working on what, their progress, and their final product. Secondly, I was able to provide students with usernames and passwords which, inevitably, were sometimes forgotten or lost. Once students log in, they were able to access the assignment page:



**Figure 3.** Student view of the assignment page. It is clear and well laid out.

Once signed up, students were each assigned their scene for recreation, as well as the criteria for assessment. There are 26 scenes, including the prologue, in “Romeo and Juliet.” If there had been more students than that in the class, I would either split up the larger scenes, or assign the same scene twice. It worked out very well, with each student contributing equally to the play. In a class with an extreme range of abilities, I was also able to intentionally assign students scenes that were suited to their abilities, making the assignment as accessible as possible.

Once all students were registered, I ran them through a number of the functions on the site that they would find particularly useful in the creation of their comics. I did so in a fun, and somewhat goofy manner, which is often a way to des-tress students and have some laughs:

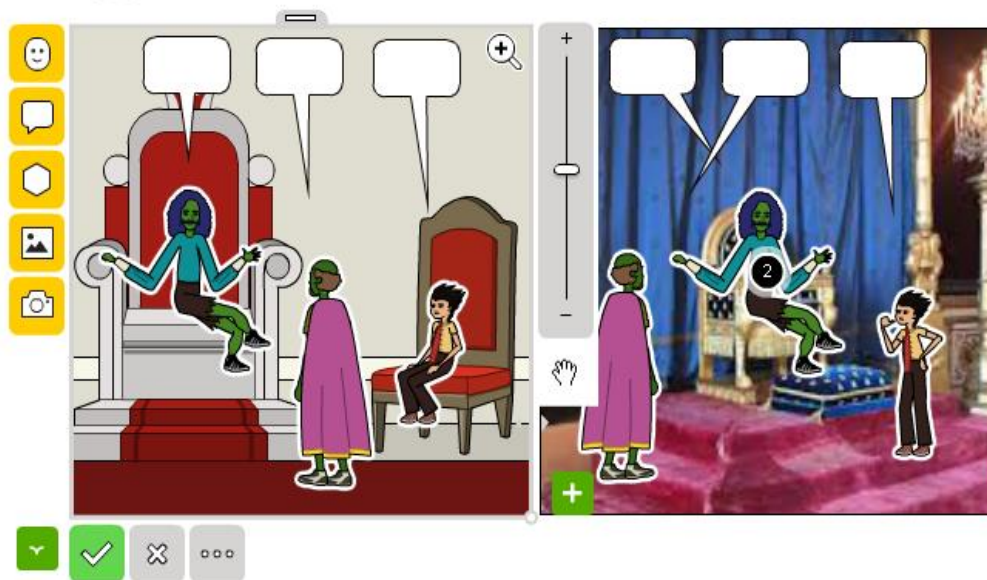


**Figure 4.** Showing student how to use the program is necessary and fun. Here are some samples of teachers’ examples.

Ultimately, students were adequately equipped with technology skills to the point where, with some initial basic instruction, they were able to quickly move beyond my abilities into an area of expertise. Primarily, I focused on the *Pixton* functions of Setting, Character, and Props and Dialogue.

## Setting

The *Pixton* website allows students to choose from a variety of preset settings, as well as allowing for students to upload any image to use as a personalized background. For the Shakespeare assignment, students were allowed the choice of when and where to set their scene, as long as it made sense. To achieve the highest possible grade, the rubric (Appendix A) requires students to have at least one frame that has a setting that is an original picture, not a preset setting. This serves two functions. Firstly, it results in a more personalized comic strip for the student. Secondly, it forces them to delve deeper into the functions of the programming for increased proficiency.



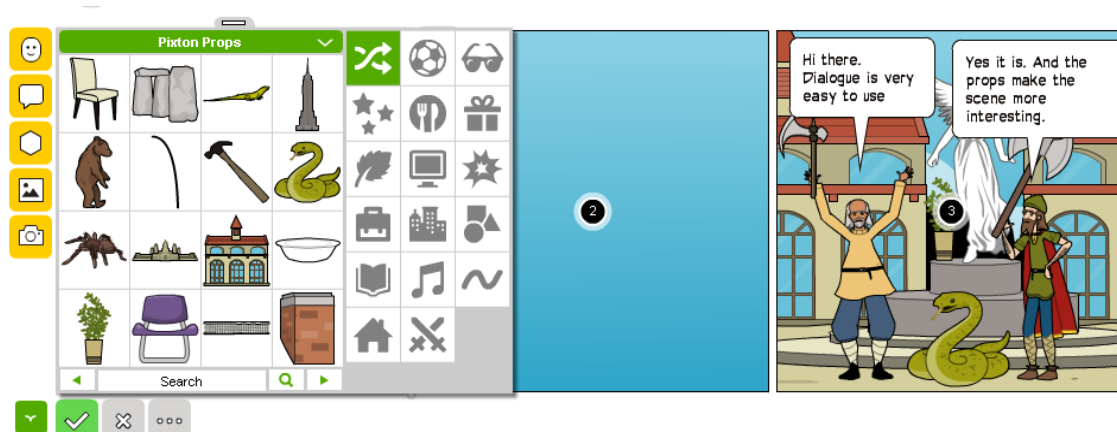
**Figure 5.** This demonstrate the difference between a present *Pixton* background, and the option to import images from other places. This is one element that separates the assignments in terms of quality.

## Props and Dialogue

Aside from character and setting, props and dialogue offer students further opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the play and their assigned scene. Once again, specifics are

reflected in the rubric. For dialogue, student needed to use writing that is flawless, had no errors present, demonstrated a sophisticated use of sentence structure and vocabulary, and had an excellent balance of modern and Shakespearean English (Appendix A). Students still needed to demonstrate a competent understanding of the language and be able to either paraphrase accurately or use the original dialogue properly.

Additionally, it was required that students selected three relevant props to use in each frame. *Pixton* offer a selection of hundreds of props to choose from, ranging from animals, to weapons, to food, to vehicles and more. Choosing and trying out the various props was a chance for the students to experiment with humorous options before making their final decisions.



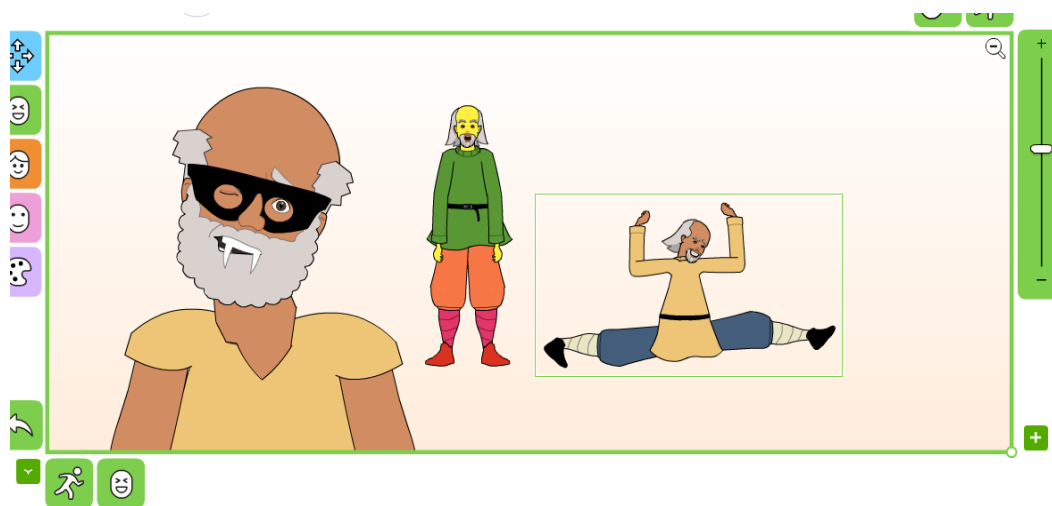
**Figure 6.** Including props and dialogue is easy. Students must make the choice about what props to include and how to manipulate dialogue to have a scene make sense.

### Characters

The function that required the most work was the creation of characters. Once again, *Pixton* provides a range of stock characters. To achieve an upper level mark, however, students were required to create a scene that included a minimum of three characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: original character development, a variety of expressions, and effective use of color (Appendix A). This criteria was necessary in order to ensure that students made use of

the many functions available. Students reflecting on the process noted that they enjoyed this process, as it put them in a director type capacity. Having watched the 1996 Hollywood version of “Romeo and Juliet” starring Leonardo DiCaprio and Clare Danes, and thoroughly disliking the creative choices made in the film, students seized the opportunity to create their own personal version.

Once students selected their characters, they could modify the physical expression, clothing, size, physical appearance, and colour. Details as minute as the positioning of the eyebrows are available for modification should the students choose. Further, *Pixton* offers clothing and accessories from a broad range of history, allowing students to create accurate and consistent scenes for the graphic novel.



**Figure 7.** Expression, looks, colour, and sized can all be manipulated. These three characters come from the same root character. However, after just a few minutes, they are all different. From left to right, the functions primarily used are looks and size, colour, and expression.

### **Some (but not many) Difficulties**

*Pixton* itself, as a functioning program, is excellent. However, it is important to acknowledge that the computer speed from a given school can greatly affect the usefulness of the program. At

my high school, all but one lab has been connected to a single server through the use of computer “terminals.” While these terminals save space and make the use of computers around the school more consistent, they do not support Flash based programs. Our first day using *Pixton* resulted in our tech support employee bursting into the computer lab asking us to power down. Apparently, we had crashed all the other labs in the school through our use of *Pixton*.

The solution, however, was simple. One lab in the school still runs off traditional computer towers. For the remainder of the unit, I made sure to book that lab, as it functions separately from the main school server. However, that lab is due for an upgrade, at which point we will need to troubleshoot another solution. As with most technology use in schools, the hardware and software must be compatible and supported by the school and districts. While this was not a substantial obstacle, it is one worth considering and troubleshooting prior to beginning a unit such as this.

### **Conclusion**

The purpose of this project was to engage students in Shakespeare’s works while creating an accessible and useful technology-based Language Arts unit. The first step was creating an online learning platform in the form of School District 72 supported SharePoint websites. Following that, grade 10 English students were engaged with “Romeo and Juliet” through a series of movement based activities. Subsequently, the class used *Pixton* to create a graphic novel version of the play.

This experience has been enriching for teacher and student alike. Using non-threatening, movement based programs such as those from the Stratford Festival Education Department created an interest and engagement with Shakespeare that is rarely seen in students. These

activities broke down the perceived barriers that students see between themselves and Shakespeare's works.

Additionally, the worthwhileness of using technology in a Language Arts class has become clear. The anonymity of an online art program such as *Pixton* allowed students to relax and proceed free of judgement from other students. The website allowed for easy access to many resources, assignments, rubrics, and articles. The discussion board allowed for an asynchronous approach to talking about a subject, Shakespeare, which is daunting and difficult for many students. The site, *Pixton*, allowed for students to have maximum creative freedom and liberty, while not being limited by a lack of artistic talent. They were able to focus on their interpretation of "Romeo and Juliet," rather than being overly concerned with their lack of artistic ability. This is a case of blending the old and the new, Shakespeare and modern technology, to create a unit that was at worst, mildly interesting and entertaining, and at best, revelatory, exciting, and inspiring. Personally, this experience has been refreshing enlightening. In the final chapter, I will take an opportunity to reflect on how this experience has changed me as a student, teacher, and member of the greater educational community.

## Chapter 4: Comprehensive Exam

### Summary

I entered into this Masters program with a clear intention: To investigate the negative impacts that technology is having on the students of today. What I have produced could not have been further removed from that original idea. Through this journey, faced with a variety of personal, ideological, and pedagogical challenges, my views have changed. I have chosen to take a subject area passion - teaching students to appreciate the works of William Shakespeare - and combine that with an area of unfamiliarity; the in-depth use of technology in the classroom. Unlike my original ideas for this project, this has been both productive and inspiring.

In Chapter 1, I outlined my initial stance and reasons for it. Following that, I explained my transition to my new way of thinking and resulting idea for the technology-based language arts unit. Chapter 2 provided an outline of the supporting literature. Chapter 3 provided an outline of the unit itself. Chapter 4 offers a welcome chance for personal reflection. In this chapter I will discuss how my values and beliefs have changed, the impacts this project will have on me professionally, and offer some recommendations to those who are interested in engaging in a unit such as the one outlined in this project.

When I arrived at my current school, very few teachers were using Shakespeare's works in their classrooms. The copies of the plays were collecting dust on the shelves. A retired former teacher of mine encouraged me to bring the plays into my classroom. In doing so, I was reminded of the beauty of the language, and felt compelled to share it with students.

In an effort to continually improve my teaching practice, I have used the time in this Graduate program to create a blended classroom and online unit for a grade 10 language arts class. To begin, I created a website for hosting the unit. Capabilities included posting assignments, articles, rubrics, and links; creating and sharing discussion board topics; and providing enrichment and

assistive resources. Additionally, I created an account at *Pixton.com*, an online comic/graphic novel design and generating website. I then linked *Pixton* to the class website.

The goal was to use these technologies to create engagement with “Romeo and Juliet.” Initially, I engaged students in a movement-based introduction to the play. Following this, they were introduced to the website for resource and discussion purposes, and then to *Pixton*. The final outcome of this project was an entire class-generated graphic novel of “Romeo and Juliet”. This was achieved by creating engagement, assigning each student a scene, and providing clear expectations. The result was two classes of students who were able to demonstrate their understandings of the play through digital and graphic novel mediums that were familiar to the students in their everyday literacy development. It is my hope that this project’s unit will achieve two further outcomes. First, that it will enable students to successfully engage in other online courses in the future. Second, that it will help to create a generation of students who look forward to the prospect of reading and engaging with Shakespeare’s works in high school. If I am able to do this, I will consider this project and resulting unit to be a success.

### **What has Changed?**

In undertaking this project, I have grown in my professional thinking, beliefs and intentions. The major shift in my professional thinking is in regards to my attitude towards technology in the classroom. My reservations stemmed from the overuse and lack of oversight in public schools that has existed since the popularization of the cell phone. There was a time when it was easier to unilaterally ban the use of technology, with the exception of word processing and research. Since then, students have developed technology etiquette that allows me to begin considering the use of technology in the class.

For this graduate program, we engaged in an Educational Technology class, and were exposed to a gamut of technological tools. In doing this, I came to the realization that it is my responsibility to select useful tools, and guide students through their technological experience. This is where I discovered *Pixton*, and where the ideas for this project were first considered.

Further to this, engaging students in the Shakespearean graphic novel process reinforced the value of engagement when working with materials that might be perceived as difficult. Grade 10 served as an excellent year to put aside some of the daunting writing and knowledge-based assignments and allow students to become engaged with a fun and somewhat familiar process. Ideally, any enjoyment felt by the students will translate into a level of interest as they move on to “Macbeth” in grade 11, and “Hamlet” in grade 12. In seeing this, I was also reminded of a concept that I have always strived to include in my practice, the necessity for continual change. This is a unit that I will work into my language arts courses for years to come. This is necessary for my own sake, as I will be in this profession for the next 30 years, and change is necessary to keep the job interesting. As well, it is necessary for the sake of my students, as a refreshed and inspired teacher, to challenge myself with new materials, and offer a fresh experience. The Masters program also presented new learning opportunities in arts based methods such as Metissage, that proved to be both enjoyable and memorable.

On a more academic and philosophical level, I have changed in my understandings as well. I have become keenly aware of the value of qualitative research methods and conclusions. This is very satisfying in a profession where statistics dominate the professional debate. Be it school closures, policy change, or job actions, the experience often seems secondary to the numbers.. The value of the educational experience has been recognized in this program in a way that is validating for me as an educator.

Additionally, having been exposed to a variety of educational philosophies and systems, and recognizing that none are perfect, I have come to terms with the reality that we will always be striving to do our best as teaching professionals in an imperfect system. Also, being part of the academic discourse has provided me with the opportunity to observe the disconnect that exists between the academic/philosophical discourse, and the practical educational reality. This is not to say that one is out of touch with the other. Rather, that there is good work being done on an academic level that takes time to trickle down and connect to schools on a practical level.

### **Professional Impacts**

This graduate experience will have several impacts on my professional career. Firstly, my attitude towards technology has shifted. Before this program, I found it much easier to simply outlaw technologies in the classroom. They were too distracting and difficult to manage. My new attitude is that in this technology infused educational climate, it is now my responsibility as an educator to teach students how to use useful technologies responsibly and efficiently. Rather than allowing or disallowing technology use, I must direct its use.

As I have been teaching this curriculum at my Secondary School, a number of colleagues have stumbled across worksheets, rubrics, and *Pixton* samples. I have had a number of inquiries regarding how to access this program with a high school class. Also, our technology support teachers have used my grade 10 Shakespeare website as a model when corresponding and troubleshooting with the *SharePoint* company's tech support.

I have been approached about running Professional Development sessions in the district on two fronts. Firstly, I have been asked to demonstrate the merits of running a blended website/classroom unit using the district websites. Secondly, there has been significant interest in my running an introductory session on how to effectively and easily use *Pixton* in the classroom.

I have never facilitated a Pro-D session but will likely do so in the future. I am confident in passing these ideas along because I know that the district has the resources to allow for this simple technology to work in the schools. My attitude toward technology is that in order for it to be recommended it needs to be useful, affordable, and accessible. I believe *Pixton* meets all of these criteria.

### **Recommendations**

Having been in the education system my entire life, I have seen a range of content, curriculum, teaching techniques, and experts come and go. Over those years, as both student and teacher, I have taken fragments of what I have seen and learned and applied them to my own practice. I recommend teachers who are about to engage in an activity such as the one outlined in this project use this document as a guide, taking from it what is useful for them. It my hope that other teachers can use fragments of this document to add to their practice.

Secondly, I encourage people to consider this project with an open mind. There have been many times that I have observed or personally demonstrated an immediate resistance to new ideas, particularly those involving technology. This project has helped me evolve to a point of giving educational technologies the benefit of the doubt and taking the necessary risks to include technologies in my teaching practice. I hope that this project can be approached in a similar manner, with a belief that technology is useful, and with an expectation that the activities, content, and attitudes demonstrated in my experience can be recreated in another classroom. This belief is necessary in order to create a positive classroom environment in which a unit like this can succeed.

Lastly, I need to stress the importance of the teacher's attitude in making this unit a success. Based on my experience very little in the way of educational material has an inherent buy-in. In

order to have students engage with Shakespeare's works in a positive way the teacher's attitudes must be undeniably positive. The success of this entire project relies on moving past a potential negative reaction from students almost immediately. For this to happen, the teacher must show love and value toward Shakespeare's works, as well as a sound understanding of his writing. The movement-based activities rely on students taking a risk, it is the teacher's job to lead the way, creating a safe environment and showing a supportive and enthusiastic attitude. Additionally, as it is very much a technology-based unit, glitches and technological problems should be expected. They are a natural by-product of technology use. Maintaining a calm and positive attitude when problems arise demonstrates a respect for the technology that students need to develop in order to put their best effort forward in the technological portions of the unit. If attitudes like this are established often and early, success with the rest of the unit will follow.

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## Appendix A Pixton Rubric

### Pixton Rubric

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Block: \_\_\_\_\_

Total  
/21

	Characters	Setting	Content/Clarity	Mechanics/Spelling/Grammar
6	Includes a minimum of three characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: Original character development Variety of expressions Effective use of colour	Includes an original picture incorporated into setting as well as: Three objects in each panel Variety of backgrounds	Effectively conveys the content and meaning of assigned scene. Panels transition nicely and storyline is clear.	writing is flawless. No errors are present. Sophisticated use of sentence structure and vocabulary. Excellent balance of modern and Shakespearean English.
5	Includes a minimum of three characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: Original and stock characters Expressions Effective use of colour	Includes: Three objects in each panel Variety of backgrounds	Effectively conveys the content and meaning of assigned scene. One or two panels may lack clarity or transitions.	One two three simple errors present. Excellent use of sentence structure and vocabulary. Excellent balance of modern and Shakespearean English.
4	Includes a minimum of two characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: Character development Expressions Use of colour	Includes: Three objects in most panels Variety of backgrounds	Adequately conveys the content and meaning of assigned scene. Several panels may lack clarity or transitions.	Several simple errors are present but do not interrupt flow of writing. Adequate use of sentence structure and vocabulary. Acceptable amount of Shakespearean English.
3	Includes a minimum of two characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: Stock characters Expressions Use of colour	Includes: Three objects in half the panels Variety of backgrounds	The content of the scene is understandable, though at time it is unclear to the point of distraction.	Errors appear throughout and are distracting. Lacks variety in sentence structure and vocabulary. Limited Shakespearean English.
2	Includes a minimum of one characters and makes use of a variety of functions including: Stock characters Use of colour	Includes: Three objects in less than half of panels One simple background	Though attempted, does not convey the meaning of the assigned scene.	Errors impede meaning. No Shakespearean English.
1	Does not effectively use characters to complete the task.	Includes: One simple background	Incomplete or inadequately completed	Complete disregard for the conventions of the English language.
Score	/6	/6	/6	/3