

**A new approach to motivating English and Education students:  
Generating passion and utilising place-based learning to inspire engagement with Shakespeare**

**OVERVIEW: CONTRIBUTION & CONTEXT**

When I began teaching Shakespeare in regional far north Australia in 2018, I reflected on the impact of my location on teaching and learning. What is the relationship between literary texts and learning environments? How might place inform learning? Could connecting text and place inspire the passion essential for motivating learners to achieve success? Teaching and learning scholarship indicates that students of English literature perform better if they are inspired to engage (Kahu *et al.*), which leads to success, especially during the first year of university (Nelson; Kift; Krause & Coates). The learning environment also plays a significant role in generating engagement (James & Williams; Somerville *et al.*), but place can be under-emphasised in higher education (Shannon & Galle 5) and is often an 'untold story' in English literature classrooms (Cull 212). These reflections initiated a two-stage project developed over four years: the implementation of a passionate learning model to stimulate first-year student engagement in English, and a research-led place-based project to motivate students and enrich our community. My contribution to teaching and learning centres on inspiring students of English through this innovative two-stage approach focused on generating passion and using place.

My learner-centred approach focusing on students' context and experience illuminated two key facts: the high percentage of future English teachers in my classrooms (**Table 1**) and the place-specific demographic of my students. Over 14% of students across all my subjects come from regional/remote Australia, 53% are first-in-family (FIF) and 25% are of low socio-economic status. The high proportion of future teachers and

Year	2018	2019	2020	2021
<b>Bachelor of Education (Secondary)</b>	45%	39%	33%	39%
<b>Bachelor of Arts</b>	46%	43%	44%	50%

the regional context of my students drive my desire to motivate learners and led me to utilise students' sense of place to inspire and engage them in literary studies. In my first-year core subjects (*EL1008 Telling Tales*, *EL1009 Great Books*) I

focused on inspiring students by demonstrating a passion for literary studies through modelling passion for texts in class and employing the theoretical framework of 'presentism' to illuminate the texts' relevance for students' contemporary contexts and demonstrate why texts matter (Eklund & Hyman). In my senior subjects (*EL2097 Remaking Shakespeare*, *EL3100 Green Worlds*), I deepened student motivation through place-based learning. The evidence considered here draws on the 4Q model of evaluation (Smith) to attest that through inspiring passion and using place, my teaching increases student success in the classroom, models an approach that has received international recognition, and provides positive flow-on effects for our community.

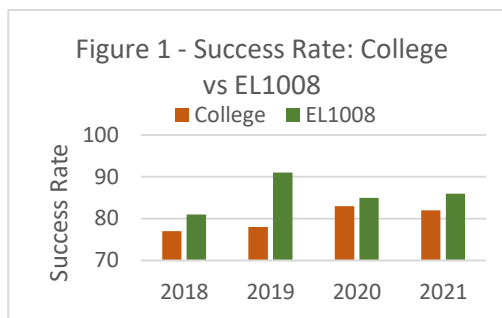
**CRITERION 1: APPROACHES TO TEACHING AND/OR THE SUPPORT OF LEARNING THAT INFLUENCE, MOTIVATE, AND INSPIRE STUDENTS TO LEARN.**

**A passion project: Positive impacts on student learning and engagement.**

My teaching philosophy is rooted in the belief that student engagement comes from modelling one's own passion for English literary studies. Shared passion produces 'critically aware and engaged students' (Gonzalez 493). My passionate learning model in first-year English has produced higher levels of student engagement and success. Student feedback explicitly connects the educator's modelling of passion with the learners' investment in and motivation for the subject (**Box 1**).

**Box 1.** *'Claire's investment in English literature inspires me to engulf myself in the subject' (EL1008 Teaching Report, 2018). 'She has an obvious passion for what she teaches and that ignites a passion in students.'* (EL1008 Subject Report 2019) *'Her passion inspired passion within the class, she was open to and encouraged huge amounts of student participation.'* (EL1008 Teaching Report 2019) *'Her passion for the subject is really inspiring.'* (EL1008 Teaching Report 2019) *'Her passion inspired me to do my best in her class.'* (EL1009 Teaching Report 2019) *'Her passion and knowledge about poetry was evident as she introduced these to her students aligning with [JCU] CP6: "Effective teaching is inspiring, motivating and research-informed"' (Dr Florence Boulard, Associate Dean, Learning & Teaching, Peer Review of Teaching, 2020). 'Dr Hansen's creative, informed and student-driven focus is reflected in the adept reconfiguring of learning experiences to ensure students' continued engagement' (Professor Jackie Manuel, External Peer Review of Teaching, 2020).*

University learning analytics and student experience data indicate an alignment between student success (pass rates), satisfaction and inspiration to learn. **Figure 1** indicates an increase in EL1008 student success over four years compared to the College average. This success aligns with subject satisfaction and students' inspiration to learn (**Table 2**), illustrating a profound link between modelling passion which inspires students to learn, student satisfaction and student success. Especially noteworthy are the flow-on effects of my passionate learning model among the Education cohort, who explicitly identified my teaching as a model for their professional practice. One student credited the subject with reinforcing her desire to teach, writing that 'it just further proved to me that I want to be an English teacher' (EL1008 Subject Report 2018), another hoped 'to take some of your teaching skills into my degree' (unsolicited email, 2020), and a third aimed to 'adopt' my approach in their 'own English teaching' (EL1009 Teaching Report 2019). The influence of my passionate learning model extends beyond university classrooms to positively impact secondary education through developing pre-service teachers' professional identities and teaching philosophies.



<b>Table 2. EL1008 Townsville survey on student satisfaction &amp; inspiration (subject vs JCU mean scores)</b>			
2018 (Response rate: 54% (32/59))	2019 (Response rate: 44% (23/52))	2020 (Response rate: 33% (8/24))	2021 (Response rate: 25% (5/25))
<b>'Overall, I was satisfied with this subject' (Subject reports 2018-2021)</b>			
97%: 4.6 (JCU 4.0)	100%: 4.7 (JCU 3.9)	88% 4.6 (JCU 4.0)	100% - 5.0 (JCU 4.0)
<b>'The teaching style of this staff member inspired me to learn' (Teaching reports 2018-2021)</b>			
94% - 4.6 (JCU 4.1)	96% - 4.7 (JCU 4.1)	100% - 4.8 (JCU 4.2)	100% - 4.8 (JCU 4.1)

**Drawing on scholarly literature: developing place-based programs and practice**

To draw on the potential of place to inspire and motivate students, I investigated scholarly literature in the field of place-based learning (PBL). PBL focuses on the relationship between environments and learning (Gruenewald 2003). 'The key concept of cutting-edge, place-based pedagogy is that student learning is enhanced when course content is grounded in a particular place of meaning' (Hagood and Price 603). I began a multi-faceted project to investigate how English students were influenced by their environments, and how place might enrich Shakespeare pedagogy. For three years I worked with secondary and tertiary students on their experience of place (JCU Ethics Approvals H8409, H7660) and received funding to run outdoor Shakespeare workshops for students. My findings illustrated that students often devalued their own place (50% viewed fictional settings as important but 48% saw their real-life location as unimportant), while paradoxically, my outdoor education trials indicated rich potential for place in pedagogy.

**From passion to place-based learning: Innovative and creative developments in learning environments.**

Building on the scholarly literature and my research findings, I implemented three forms of PBL to model passion through place: (1) outdoor education classes; (2) place-based journals; (3) online learning environments. **1: Innovating outdoors: an open-air education pilot.** I designed a new Shakespeare subject, EL2097, which explored the potential of PBL through outdoor education. Tutorials took place in an outdoor amphitheatre and surrounding green spaces. This learning environment deepened student engagement and inspired learning: EL2097 had an 85% success rate (above the 78% College average) and 91% of students felt 'inspired' to learn (EL2097 2019 Teaching Report). In a survey on outdoor learning (completed by 11 of 29 students), 100% of students agreed that the tutorials' location made a positive difference to their learning experience. Students reported that PBL: 'made me want to engage and I felt more connected to the work and the period'; 'made us able to understand how playing companies had to adapt to their environments'; provided 'a better understanding of the play as a whole...we would not have had this opportunity in a normal classroom', and 'encouraged student participation...I also feel that I was better able to retain content'. The outdoor space increased students' historical understanding of Shakespeare's outdoor playhouses and improved engagement through increasing confidence. This correlates with results from outdoor education research which indicate stronger levels of commitment and self-confidence (Becker *et al.* 10-11). **2: Place-based journals.** In my senior subject, EL3100, students kept a 'place journal' where they chose a local place meaningful to them and connected it to their weekly readings. This journal proved transformative for many students. In their final journal reflections, one student wrote: 'This subject

has not only opened my eyes to the role nature plays in my life, but also how important it is to reflect on things even if they have the potential to be very confronting...I am so grateful that I took this subject because it gave me the tools I need to appreciate [nature]'. Another reflected: 'I learned so much about nature without ever once feeling like I was learning'. Another student reported that, 'Since starting this subject I have attempted to become more environmentally friendly and aware'. This student changed her consumer behaviours by recycling soft plastics, purchasing natural products, and contributing to nonprofit environmental organisations. 100% of students felt inspired to learn and the subject had an 83% success rate (2020 Teaching Report). **3: *Creating innovative online environments***. The COVID-19 pandemic and shift to online-only teaching presented a challenge to my use of PBL. In response to this obstacle, I created online spaces which fostered engagement and inspiration to learn. These spaces included communications platform Slack and online meeting space Gather.Town. I was influenced by research into Slack's use in education and found that other scholars shared my concern about 'outmoded and cumbersome' traditional software (Sabin & Olive 185). During the Slack pilot, I ran a survey for students in my level 1 and level 3 subjects (40% and 32% response rate respectively). Some assessments of Slack were highly positive: 'I think Slack is a great concept that enables engagement with other students outside of tutorials. It means students can send links and explore various interpretations of the texts'. Another said: 'I am glad that Slack was chosen... It is much more interactive and feels less formal, in a positive way. I'm encouraged to interact with others and feel I have more freedom to develop my ideas.' Other students noted a problem: 'I think having a word count would help keep people in line and help move the discussions along'. Excessive posts stifled the interaction I aimed to support. In response to this, in 2021 I set clearer rules and word limits. Subsequently, one student wrote that their favourite part of the subject was Slack: 'I like the slack activities! Being able to participate on slack in my own time when I have time to process is really helpful!' (2021 survey). Students felt they had more 'freedom' and 'time' to engage, suggesting that Slack generated more *conceptual* space for learning. In a peer review of my Slack trial, its importance 'in an industry context' and usefulness for participation assessment was noted. My use of Slack led colleagues to rethink their practice and reimagine how English could be taught: Slack has since been adopted by other English staff at JCU, demonstrating my leadership and the impact of my innovative pedagogy. I plan to develop a research and ethics proposal to document English students' interaction with Slack, as currently most research investigates Slack outside the humanities (Tuhkala & Kärkkäinen). Further, to substitute the physical learning environment, I implemented Gather.Town. Its spatial design enables students to move avatars across virtual theatre stages and shows great promise for replicating 'on your feet' Shakespeare pedagogy. I have demonstrated my use of this to colleagues at Macquarie University and University of Sydney, who have since employed this platform in their own classes.

#### **Community and international recognition of place-based innovations**

My work on engaging and inspiring English students to succeed has been recognised not only in my region but across Australia and internationally. It has influenced not only my students, but my community, local teachers, and international scholars. ***International***. In 2021 I was invited to present my work on outdoor Shakespeare education at a prestigious Shakespeare's Globe event in London. This work will soon be published with global publishing house, Cambridge University Press, in my next book, *Shakespeare and Place-Based Learning*. I am also collaborating on an international outdoor Shakespeare project with leading U.S. Shakespeare scholar, Professor Gretchen Minton, who has submitted a Fulbright application to work with my students and our community on Shakespeare and place. ***State***. My work on inspiring students to succeed in English has gained traction state-wide. In 2019, I gave the keynote address at the English Teachers' Association of Queensland (ETAQ) State Conference. I am regularly invited to work with secondary students and teachers across Queensland. In a professional development workshop for over 125 English teachers on *Macbeth* in May 2021, one teacher commented: '*A great example of teacher enthusiasm engaging students, Claire - thank you*'. This community feedback (**Box 2**) reinforces the efficacy of my passionate learning model and its flow-on effect from the university to secondary classrooms. My work with ETAQ communities is essential for student engagement for two reasons: student success improves where educators engage with students' communities and support learning outside the classroom (Zepke & Leach 670), and classroom engagement for low SES communities is connected to 'sustained professional development for teachers' (Sawyer 11). ***Local***. Connecting my classroom to community is another way to motivate and inspire through place. Each year students engage with a local theatre

company, where they see firsthand how their studies apply beyond the classroom and resonate in their region. After a 2021 session with the company's actors, student feedback included: 'That was a great experience, so glad we had this opportunity' (Slack post). Students attend local theatre as part of their studies, connecting place to learning, and their responses are published online, reinforcing real-world skills.

**Box 2.** 'I did a PD with Dr Claire Hansen over the weekend (over Zoom) where she spoke on race in Macbeth and colour imagery and the way she used group work even in Zoom was so inspiring that I have worked hard this week to plan lessons where students are constructing their own learning. It has been so refreshing and exciting!' (unsolicited email, Cairns teacher, 31 July 2020) 'English teachers have had to cope with the introduction of a new senior curriculum and system over the last two years. Claire's ability to introduce Shakespeare into the classroom and integrate new and relevant perspectives has been critical in helping teachers adapt and cope with their dynamic environment.' (Heather Fraser, ETAQ President, Townsville Branch, 2020) 'Claire's capacity for creating imaginative, relevant and impactful teacher professional learning activities and events is second to none. The reaction of teachers to her events and presentations is relentlessly laudatory.' (Professor Liam Semler, University of Sydney, 2020)

## CONCLUSION

In a post-pandemic environment that has changed our pedagogical practice and greatly affected theatre and the arts, my sustained passion for teaching Shakespeare and my innovative place-based pedagogy have ensured that regional students and future English teachers are inspired and motivated to succeed. My use of PBL in Shakespeare pedagogy has been recognised nationwide and internationally, cementing my leadership in this space and demonstrating that in addition to benefiting my students, I am supporting a broader community and leading colleagues and pre-service teachers through an inspiring and engaging model for teaching English.

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