

Lake Nona High School

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Dr. Peeper,

It was an incredible pleasure meeting you and the other ESU members at the competition on Monday. I know we spoke briefly about the impacts of the Teachers Learning Abroad program (TLAB), but I wanted to take a moment to truly convey what the ESU has meant for me, over the last few years.

The Teaching Shakespeare Through Performance (TSTP) program changed my life. I was at a low point in my career and this program revitalized everything about my professional and personal life.

It is an experience that I didn't know I desperately needed.

It is the sole reason I am still in the teaching profession and why I still feel joy when I teach!

The Globe reminded me that Shakespeare is meant to be felt in my bones. It is not solely meant to be dissected and sterilized for testing purposes. It is full of emotion and should be utilized in a classroom setting for the purpose of fun and intrigue. Patrick Spottiswoode, the Director of Globe Education, made a case for having irreverence for Shakespeare. It was such an unexpected and simultaneously freeing thought. He suggested cutting, clipping, or omitting sections of Shakespeare's plays to fit within one's classroom. This has been an invaluable paradigm shift in my teaching.

After returning home from The Globe, I restructured the entirety of my Advanced Placement Literature and Composition course. I made space for small scenes, excerpted monologues, whooshes and props (high school students, like many of Shakespeare's tragic heroes, cannot resist a crown and a sword fight). I created movement and space for my students to feel the words in their bones.

I have 150-180 students in class every year. There are residual benefits of this program that continue every year I get to share my experience, along with the teaching strategies learned at The Globe, with my students and fellow teachers. There is a TSTP strategy used daily in my classroom, even when we are not exclusively reading Shakespeare. I'm overwhelmed with joy and gratitude when I have students express that Shakespeare "isn't as hard as I thought" or when they exclaim "I can't believe I understand!". I have students who have gone through 12 years of public education without ever reading a single line from Shakespeare and they find success with his texts in my classroom. The benefits of the ESU TLAB program, specifically the TSTP program, are incalculable.

Gail and I started the Shakespeare competition, at our school, the August I returned from London. Every year this competition grows in participants. We started with approximately 80 students participating and now have upwards of 100 students involved. In addition to the



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increase in student involvement, we also improve upon our school-based competition each year. This past year, we found success in combing classes, in the weeks leading up to the competition, and providing on-the-spot feedback. This feedback was led by Gail and myself, but also an open opportunity for other students to provide feedback and ask probing questions to their peers. Our goals parallel those of the ESU- to provide students with an opportunity to appreciate and access Shakespeare. As public school teachers, we find this task to be challenging, yet rewarding. In past years, we have seen the success of our private school colleagues and we are so incredibly proud to show that public school students are capable of the same success.

Speaking from a personal place, the communities that support and promote Shakespeare in education lack diverse representation. Our Central Florida Branch does an incredible job promoting diversity, however, it is still glaringly evident that there are too few non-white students and teachers involved with these educational programs. Our school is incredibly diverse, with more than 50% of the population listed as Hispanic. I am so lucky to show these brown and black students that Shakespeare is for all people, that he writes about the messiness of being human, and that his work unifies us all.

I am so grateful to the ESU and to programs like Teachers Learning Abroad. This organization is changing lives. Thank you for allowing me to share my experiences. It is an absolute honor to share the mission of the ESU.

Respectfully,

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