“It’s a time of growth and vulnerability, so people really do get to know each other.”

Bennett-Astesano, Ed.M.'08, assistant director of the University’s Office of Work/Life. She researched the history of childcare at Harvard and wrote a 20-page report and chronology as part of her master’s degree work.

Childcare first existed primarily on the Radcliffe campus in the 1920s and 1930s, she reports, “as a way to give young women summer employment.” The first more formalized “day nursery” opened at the Phillips Brooks House in 1941, and evolved throughout that decade “as a way to support families when dad was occupied with the war and mom was probably working.”

The close of World War II brought an influx of veterans with families to Harvard, which prompted the expansion and move of childcare services, in 1946, to two Quonset huts on Kirkland Street that accommodated 40 “baby-boom” children (there was a waiting list of 200).

After piecing together scant records, Bennett-Astesano says it appears that “for most of the 1950s and early 1960s, there doesn’t seem to [have been] any childcare operating on the Harvard campus.” But the mid 1960s brought a wider push for care, which, she says, began to be viewed as an important factor in women’s professional development—and liberation.

Frances Hovey Howe ’52, Ed.M. ’73, was one of the principal proponents of childcare at Harvard, and helped found the Radcliffe Childcare Center, which has had various locations and began operating as early as 1968. In a 1972 Harvard Bulletin article, “Who Needs Childcare?” she wrote that Radcliffe graduates “found that having a child eliminated their opportunities to achieve career positions in a highly competitive world.” By 1974, Howe had been appointed the first University Child Care Adviser, according to Bennett-Astesano; during the next six years, she helped oversee the founding, growth, move, or merging of several centers, including the Soldiers Field Park Children’s Center, Radcliffe Child Care Centers, and the Oxford Street Daycare Cooperative—all of which are still open.

Meanwhile, the Peabody Terrace nursery school was flourishing; by 1978 it had been incorporated as the PTCC. It became a full-fledged daycare center with added slots for infants around 1989. Childcare services at Harvard expanded further between 2006 and 2013, Bennett-Astesano explains, and “the centers continue to evolve and build on their histories, while Harvard works with them on modernizations—both in terms of physical space and in their ability to serve today’s workforce.” For PTCC director Katy Donovan and those who gathered in April, the center and its history highlight the importance of supporting family life, especially at a university. “These centers bring people together—faculty, staff, and students—on an equal playing field,” Donovan says. They also help connect families who come to Harvard from vastly different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. She has seen children who spoke no English when they arrived talking and playing easily with friends by the time they left. Even parents from opposite sides of political divides, who might not have engaged with each other otherwise, Donovan adds, have grown close, even asking about each other’s grandparents who were still at risk at home, such as during the Lebanese and Israeli conflicts of 2006.

“This is a very formative time,” Donovan adds, “when you have young children and you are defining your professional life and who you are as parents, and really who you are defining your professional life and who you are as parents, and really who you are going to be throughout adulthood. It’s a time of growth and vulnerability, so people really do get to know each other. Look at Susan Sacks and all of these founders who have stayed in touch for 50 years, based on when their children were here for two or three years a long time ago.”

All the World’s a Page

SHAKESPEARE, performed in the palm of one’s hand. So proposes educational technologist Alexander Parker, Ed.M. ’96, whose company, The New Book Press, has created full-length e-books of Macbeth and Midsummer Night’s Dream, with Romeo and Juliet due in August. What’s different and exciting is that when these are downloaded onto a Mac or iPad (streaming versions for all other devices are coming in September), the left-hand “page” displays a chunk of text while on the right side, professional actors play out the scene, bringing the lan-

In the e-book version of Macbeth, the witches’ dark mischief unfolds beside the text.
language truly alive.

This multidimensionality, Parker believes, will make all the difference to middle- and high-school students, and even many adults, who might otherwise struggle with the centuries-old text and thus miss out entirely on the bard’s timeless themes. “What trips up the readers is not the ‘thees and thous’ but the more dense, knotty passages,” notes Parker, who was born and raised in England and now lives in Manhattan. “What we provide are visual footnotes: the text is illuminated by the performance which, in turn, clarifies what is going on and permits a closer reading, understanding, and, dare I say it, enjoyment.”

He points to act one, scene five, of Romeo and Juliet. Young readers could be confused because Capulet “is basically reining in his nephew Tybalt, ‘a saucy boy’ who is being a hothead, while also trying to keep a party going—‘Well said, my hearts!...More light, more light!’—[lines] that are actually said to other people,” explains Parker. “You would never get that, or the feeling of dual purpose, without seeing Capulet’s body language and hearing the different inflections in his voice.”

Or take the opening of Macbeth. The text whimpers compared to the e-book’s arresting performance by the three witches, whose bodies writhe together as they speak in a slithering, sliding, chanting verse—“Fair is foul, and foul is fair: Hover through the fog and filthy air.” It’s viscerally frightening and foreshadows the unearthly evil ahead. These are plays, after all, that were primarily designed to be seen, heard—and experienced. “It’s striking,” Parker says, “when you see that there are limits to what words alone can convey.”

The videos themselves are a new art form. Tightly framed by the camera, the actors move minimally, eschew histrionics, carry only essential props, and wear simple, dark clothes. There are no stage sets: actors are silhouetted against a stark white background. “We don’t focus on spectacle,” Parker explains. “The actors are much more out there on their own and have to really know their Shakespeare and deliver the meaning through diction, context, and subtle body language, along with word-perfect performances, which is very hard to do.”

Parker has worked steadily with his director, Jessica Bauman, and cast members “to figure out the language of this new medium and use it intelligently,” he says. He also consults with Yale’s Shakespeare scholar, Bodman professor of English David Scott Kastan (a New Book Press advisory board member), who has helped ensure that nothing is “dumbed down.”

With the products now in hand, Parker has moved into marketing and distribution, with an initial focus on school districts. An extensive pilot program across the country during the last year indicated a desire for WordPlay Shakespeare, as the series is called. The medium fits well with the new Common Core State Standards education initiative, and also accommodates some of the “multiple intelligences” that were primarily designed to be seen, heard—and experienced. “It’s striking,” Parker says, “when you see that there are limits to what words alone can convey.”

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identified by Hobbs professor of cognition and education Howard Gardner, whose classes Parker took at the Harvard School of Graduate Education. “Linguistic intelligence, of course, focuses on the text while the visual and auditory learners may engage better with the video,” Parker asserts. A third group, the multitasking video game-playing generation, seem to watch, listen, and read simultaneously, while students with learning disabilities can pause, rewind, fast-forward, or isolate the audio and video portions.

Parker is also eager to reach lifelong learners and those who “didn’t quite get on the Shakespeare merry-go-round the first time. Every adult who has seen these e-books, including myself, has expressed a wistful wish that they’d had them when they were young,” he adds. “You begin to realize that there is this troubled relationship with Shakespeare, that very few of us got it immediately, and there is this distance between what we think we should like and what we actually enjoy.”

Parker, who was raised by a Venezuelan mother and Boston-born father, moved to America to attend Yale. He then studied technology in education at Harvard and worked for the Instructional Computing Group in the Faculty of Arts and Sciences, developing some of the first large-course websites with such early adopters as Knafel professor of music Thomas Forrest Kelly and Jones professor of classical Greek literature Gregory Nagy. He left for other jobs in New York City, but returned to Harvard in 2008 as the director of research computing in the humanities, a field, he reports, that “has been largely about a relationship with books: that’s how knowledge until recently has been stored and transmitted and it’s very powerful.”

Paper books are “here to stay,” he adds. But an increasing fascination with their other potential incarnations led Parker to find investors and, in 2011, move back to New York City to develop his ideas.

The first to launch was Eroica, in 2013, featuring the works of Harvard poet Kevin McGrath, an associate of the South Asian studies department and special program instructor in the Division of Continuing Education: on the left-hand “page” are the texts and on the right are videos of the eloquent McGrath reading and discussing the poems. “Even the shape of the book as we know it—a series of paper sheets bound at one edge that gives you access to text,” was once an innovation, Parker points out. “So then you begin to ask yourself, When do things like sound and movement get incorporated? I think we are at the dawn of a new era.” Readers and viewers of his Shakespeare e-plays may think we’re already there.

—Nell Porter Brown

Centennial Medalists

The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences Centennial Medal, first awarded in 1989 on the occasion of the school’s hundredth anniversary, honors alumni who have made contributions to society that emerged from their graduate study at Harvard. It is the highest honor the Graduate School bestows, and awardees include some of Harvard’s most accomplished alumni. The 2014 recipients, announced at a ceremony on May 28, are: Bruce Alberts, Ph.D. ’66, Chancellor’s Leadership Chair in biochemistry and biophysics for science and education at the University of California, San Francisco; Keith Christiansen, Ph.D. ’77, Pope-Hennessy chairman of the department of European paintings at the Metropolitan Museum of Art; Judith Lasker, Ph.D. ’76, the N.E.H. Distinguished Professor of sociology at Lehigh University; and Leo Marx ’41, Ph.D. ’50, Kenan professor of American cultural history emeritus in MIT’s Program in Science, Technology, and Society. For more about the honorands, see http://harvardmag.com/medalists-14.

Clockwise from far left: Judith Lasker, Bruce Alberts, Leo Marx, and Keith Christiansen