

CASE STUDY

BUILDING BRIDGES IN LITERACY P6-S2

Alehousewells School & Kemnay Academy

Aberdeenshire

Context

The schools involved

Two schools are involved in the project, Kemnay Academy and one of its associated primary schools, Alehousewells Primary. The Academy is a 12-18 non-denominational comprehensive school of 510 pupils in Aberdeenshire, drawing pupils from 4 local primary schools. The attainment is above the Scottish and Aberdeenshire average. Annually around 45% of the year group go on to Higher Education. Attainment in English is good with all pupils gaining a General or Credit pass at Standard Grade. A large Additional Learning Needs Base with 35 pupils exists, with a high level of integration into mainstream classes.

Alehousewells is a 3-12 non-denominational school of 220 pupils (including the Nursery) in the village of Kemnay. The majority of pupils transfer to Kemnay Academy. Attainment is rising, although work needs to be done to raise standards in Reading and Writing in Middle and Upper Stages. There is an Additional Support Needs Base for 14 pupils with a high level of inclusion in mainstream classes.

Project team

The core team consisted of seven members although contributions were also made by other colleagues from the Aberdeenshire Library and Information Service, from Alehousewells and Kemnay Academy staff and by Aberdeenshire's Cultural Coordinators.

At local authority level, Elizabeth Ann Engels led the initiative as Project Manager of the Early Intervention Team. She was supported by Helen Hague, Language and Literacy Development Coordinator. The senior management perspective was provided by Moira Lawson from Alehousewells and Graham Legge from Kemnay Academy. Sharon Shortland, P6/7 teacher at Alehousewells, and Gordon McKenzie, Principal Teacher of English at Kemnay, implemented the strategies with pupils in their classrooms. David Leggat, also from the Academy, represented library involvement.

Key focus of the project

The focus for the project is the development of an active model of reading. It aims to promote a number of 'hands on' techniques to engage pupils with texts across a range of genre and media. For pupils, the specific focus is on raising motivation, enjoyment and appreciation when reading either fiction or

non-fiction. For teachers, it is anticipated that their understanding of cooperative learning styles and strategies will increase. The project also reviews the role of the library and of technology in helping to improve reading skills generally.

A number of factors contributed to this becoming the key area for Aberdeenshire, one of which was a literacy audit carried out in both schools near the start of the initiative in September 2003.

The English Department at Kemnay identified the following as development priorities:

- Providing a more formal S1/S2 personal reading scheme
- Raising teachers' confidence when working with non-readers
- Improving boys' attainment
- Improving listening skills with new teaching strategies and materials
- Establishing closer links with primary colleagues

Similarly, Alehousewells highlighted the following as development opportunities:

- Celebrating and raising the profile of reading
- Motivating reluctant readers
- Raising the attainment of the poorest readers
- Challenging all reading abilities appropriately
- Providing a (flexible) structure for personal reading
- Improving listening skills
- Using reading to enrich pupils' personal and imaginative writing
- Establishing literacy links across other areas of the curriculum

Clearly, both schools identified reading, and its contributory factors, as the main area for attention. More specifically, personal reading presented a dilemma, on the one hand wanting to encourage freedom of choice over reading matter, on the other trying to widen the range and improve the complexity of selected books. Yet it was felt that if motivation and engagement in reading sessions could be increased, then improvements in reading ability would follow.

The importance of fostering positive attitudes towards reading has recently been highlighted by the PIRLS international survey of 2003 sponsored by NFER. Reporting from 35 countries, it found that whilst children in Britain read very well compared to those in other countries, their enjoyment of reading is poor by comparison. It also found that children's enjoyment of reading declines as they get older, particularly amongst boys. Compared to 1998, when a similar national reading study was done by NFER, children's confidence in reading has improved while their enjoyment has decreased. It has been suggested that a possible reason for this scenario is the introduction several years ago of a more skills-based approach to reading through such initiatives as the National Literacy Strategy in England. Although teaching is very directed and children learn to read well, the great majority of the reading material is chosen by the teacher rather than the pupils. It seems that pupils need to have a sense of ownership and responsibility over their reading in order to really enjoy it.

Early in the project, some of the teachers involved also attended several CPD events on the theme of reading. These gave them both ideas and the rationale for developing 'active' approaches. In November 2003, Sharon Shortland attended a seminar given by Dr Ron Fyfe and Evelyn Mitchell, authors of the Aberdeenshire Literacy Framework. Entitled 'Learning to Take Control', the seminar looked at empowering the reader and developing responsive reading techniques. It demonstrated the vital link between reading and writing, for example how successful writers use what they read for their own purposes. Fyfe and Mitchell also provided more active alternatives to the convention of hearing reading in a "round robin" through using approaches more common in book clubs than in the classroom.

Also in November, Sharon Shortland and Gordon McKenzie attended a Literacy Workshop run by the Aberdeenshire Early Intervention Team. Following on from Dr Fyfe's theme, it too looked at the possible links between reading and writing and how one can enhance the other. Among a number of approaches presented were Reciprocal Reading Strategies, Reader's Theatre (a dynamic oral presentation of scripts), Writing Journals, Book Clubs and 'Book Detectives', where readers work together on a text by each adopting different roles within the group e.g. 'word finder' and 'question master'.

In December 2003, both teachers attended another in-service session offered by the Early Intervention Team. Called "Bags of Books", the project is part of the Home Reading Initiative that supports families in sharing their child's enjoyment of reading and developing positive relationships. It encourages parents/carers to share reading and to read with their children. The initiative is aimed initially at P5 pupils with a focus on non-fiction resources. It provides a series of take home bags containing a non-fiction book, an activity or game and an adult non-fiction magazine. One of the principal aims of the project is to attract boys' interest in books and magazines and get them motivated about their reading.

Monitoring and evaluation

The starting point for the project came at the beginning of the 2003/2004 school year when the two teachers involved presented their classes with a quantitative questionnaire about their reading. As well as giving the children a sense of ownership over their reading, it also provided vital information about the pupils as readers. It was felt that this information would be useful for the teachers to gauge any changes in attitude, whether positive or negative, which might occur over the proceeding months as the project got underway and started to take effect.

In addition, other methods of monitoring were also identified in order to evaluate the progress and results of the project. The work of pupils with different abilities was sampled while, in terms of the teachers themselves, they were asked to evaluate the staff development events they had attended and identify how these CPD events might impact on their own practice. Use of the library or reading area by the focus groups in both schools was noted, as were the lending patterns of the pupils.

There was also an opportunity for self-evaluation by the pupils of their own reading. At both Kemnay Academy and Alehousewells Primary School, the teachers designed a range of worksheets based on the different reading approaches being implemented. They encourage interaction, reflection and ownership without being an onerous task in themselves to complete. Sharon Shortland also incorporated the 'traffic lighting' approach into her materials, an idea which came from Ian Smith of Learning Unlimited. Gordon McKenzie encouraged his pupils to assess their own reading attainment in relation to 5-14 criteria, encouraging them to become ever more sophisticated 'reading detectives' operating at a higher level.

This emphasis on self-evaluation was felt to be invaluable in the light of research gathered by Paul Black and Dylan Wiliam. 'Inside the Black Box' (King's College London, 1998) states:

"Opportunities for pupils to express their understanding should be designed into any piece of teaching, for this will initiate interaction whereby formative assessment aids learning."

"[Pupils] then become more committed and more effective as learners: their own assessments become an object of discussion with their teachers and with one another, and this promotes even further that reflection on one's own ideas that is essential to good learning."

Theory into Practice

The Primary Perspective – Alehousewells Primary School

Sharon Shortland

Primary 6/7 Teacher

Background

In common with most classes at this stage, there exists a wide range of abilities. Four pupils attend our Support Base for their core work in Language and Maths and have not, as yet, formed part of this project. For the purpose of this case study, I am considering the mainstream P6 class of 24 pupils. Within this group are children who have not achieved because of specific learning difficulties, or behavioural difficulties, or both. There are children who need significant support for their continued progress and those who need to be challenged and extended. Most are well supported at home, but not all.

Personal Reading Time

It was concerns about this that really prompted our school's focus for the project. At Alehousewells, we have a small library, run by parent volunteers, and classes visit the library each week at an agreed time. Some teachers then give the children time to read back in class, some insist upon some sort of book review before any book can be changed, others do a few reviews each term. In my new P6 class, I noticed that some children continually took the same book out or stuck to the same genre all the time. Others chose books that were too hard and gave up, or too easy and they would read them that day. It was all rather sloppy. I veered from one extreme to another: sometimes insisting that everyone write a book review on a particular day, at other times trying to encourage them to choose which book they wrote about from a range they might have read. Consequently, keen readers wrote a lot and the not-so keen were always going to write a report "next week" or conveniently "forgot" their library book that week. It was too loose, too messy. The children who most needed to "switch on" to a quiet time for personal reading were the very ones who were most "switched off". Some kind of structure was needed. But it had to be one that allowed choices within it. Remove the idea of the weekly "Must Do-Book Review" but, at the same time, involve all readers in some kind of follow up to what they were reading. Tighten the structure without choking the enthusiasm.

Aims

We are putting into practice a range of reading strategies in the classroom. We hope they will achieve our aims to encourage children to:

- Engage more with their reading.
- Read more books.
- Read a wider range of genres.
- Do all this with enthusiasm (most challenging!).

By supporting both teacher and pupils with a "toolkit" of reading approaches, we hope that pupils can move more easily from supported "group" reading towards a greater level of independence. The children should then move more smoothly from the primary into secondary stage of their education, at least, as far as English classes are concerned.

Strategies

In looking at teaching and learning approaches, we have devised a range of strategies for use in both Primary and Academy classes. Some of these emerged as a result of reflecting on pupils' responses to a reading questionnaire conducted in October 2004 (see appendix 1).

- Employ *Book Detectives* (see appendix 2) across class, group and personal reading.
- Increase Personal Reading time (consider doing this daily at the start of a lesson).
- Tell pupils what the task is BEFORE they read.
- Use Bookmarks to record brief responses.
- Classify fiction books according to genre and 5-14 levels.
- Start a Book Club.
- Use electronic media to exchange Book Reviews.
- Plan to celebrate World Book Day on 4th March, 2004.
- Build some formative assessment into aspects of reading.
- Set up a Reading Reward Scheme.

None of these strategies are meant to work in isolation nor provide quick-fix results. Changes in attitudes and reading practices are more likely to be gradual and subtle but will probably be longer lasting as a result. Setting up all of the strategies will also take some considerable time.

Implementation

I chose to introduce the strategies for *Book Detectives* by reading a novel with the class. In this way, I was able to model each role to the whole class over a relatively short period of time. Working solely with groups would have meant a much slower start. Indeed, the whole approach encourages teachers to decide at what pace they want to introduce each of the different roles and how long to spend consolidating them. Organising the class into mixed ability groups meant that children were able to support other members of their group. Nevertheless, it was also easy enough to set up ability groups when a particular task required it. Then the actual written task could be differentiated and supported appropriately so that everyone can succeed to some degree. More able pupils are encouraged to devise questions requiring inference or select more sophisticated words.

Whatever the class organisation, most of the pupils are able to work more independently when carrying out the *Detectives* tasks, a fact which has proved to be quite motivational. After going through the initial phase of modelling the tasks in a directed approach, pupils are now given a choice about which task they carry out and have to decide which best fits the stage that they have reached in their reading book. Some require support to make this decision, particularly if they did not actually enjoy the book. Remember: we are trying not to choke enthusiasm for reading.

Logistically, it requires occasional juggling of time and planning as some tasks naturally take longer to complete than others. The routines do take time to establish in a large class. Pupils need regular reminders about the 'new' approaches e.g. to transfer some words encountered during their reading into their 'collecting jotters' or to evaluate their own work. Successful implementation needs commitment and time; it cannot be hurried. However, still on a practical note, the strategies are great for a busy teacher as one does not have to keep inventing new tasks to support the reading.

Furthermore, I have changed my classroom practice by ensuring that each group has a clear understanding of the follow up task BEFORE they read the text. This certainly helps them to read more purposefully. I have also built some self-evaluation, or formative assessment, into the *Book Detectives* model by getting the pupils to 'traffic light' their work, reflecting their level of understanding of each task undertaken.

A large number of the pupils' responses had mentioned the importance of having somewhere quiet and comfortable to read in order to make it an enjoyable, relaxed experience. As a P6 teacher, I was fortunate in having a very spacious classroom as our P7's had moved to a new extension, leaving me part of their old space. I picked a sunny corner and set out a reading area, with cushions and plants to make it cosy and somewhere that the pupils would actually want to go voluntarily.

This year, teaching P7, I have established a new reading area shared between P6 and P7. Many books have been bought and are being levelled. They have been placed upon the shelves according to genres so that levels C–F are mixed. Children can easily find a particular kind of book and know which level is most relevant for them, though they are not bound by it. Some new furniture is still to arrive but it is already a popular place to read and to work. An area has been set aside for displaying children's reviews and illustrations. *Book Detectives* worksheet tasks are readily available, as are a number of other activities. Because I have involved the pupils in the setting up of the area, they feel more ownership and pride in it too.

Initially I increased the amount of time spent for personal reading after library visits to 30 minutes. We supported individuals as appropriate, for example by reading along with them and encouraging them to read a little longer. As the weeks passed, we found that the children became more settled at this time and some of the reluctant readers were purposefully engaged for longer.

Library and personal reading time has also been made easier for the pupils because I have started to level books according to their genre and their 5-14 level, in the same way as is

happening in our reading corner and in Kemnay Academy. This levelling supports their choices, making it less likely that someone will return a book unread because it is too hard or too easy for their own reading level. To avoid any stigma being attached to the level of book being chosen, I have arranged the books according to genre rather than levels. My pupils all know which level is most appropriate for them but can choose outside of this from time to time if they wish. They are also encouraged to experiment with different genres outside of their 'comfort zone'.

In P7, we are no longer tied by a specific library timetable and my pupils can access the facility more freely, to change a book they are not enjoying or have finished. For one lesson weekly, I expect them to carry out some form of task for every book but the tasks are varied, none are onerous and pupils have choice. A record at the front of their folders allows me to check what they are choosing to ensure coverage of the different genres and *Detective* roles available.

In addition, I also allow 10 minutes at the start of each Language lesson for quiet reading. My assistant and I target individual readers to share some of their book with us. As a follow-up activity to this personal reading, I have introduced 'bookmarks', an approach which Gordon McKenzie describes in more detail.

As a class, we decided to set up a Book Club, focusing on a particular genre every 4 weeks or so (flexible and open to negotiation). The children feel ownership of this club, having raised money towards buying books for it and dictating its direction through suggesting activities for it. Membership includes over half the class now, crossing all reading groups except the very poorest. (I am working on this!) Interestingly, the majority of members are boys, but then my class is 2/3 boys. Nevertheless, it reflects the fact that these male characters like talking and competitiveness! During meetings, we tell the group what we liked or disliked about our current book, play word games or run competitions. An elected chairperson ensures everyone gets a turn. When we remember, we pop a card inside the cover with a few brief comments about the book.

Impact

On teaching:

- I am not relying upon worksheets so heavily, particularly when sharing a story with the class. Many of the *Book Detectives* roles can be carried out most successfully using discussion, sometimes only writing if there is a definite use for the work afterwards e.g. putting words into our "Word Collector's Jotter".
- Those sheets that I do have are generic frames and can be used with a range of texts. This saves a huge amount of time although I can see already that I will adapt the sheets over time.
- It is very flexible and can be adapted to work with class, groups or individuals. Differentiation is very straightforward and can be through outcome or support.
- There is no single "correct" approach so teachers retain decision-making over how to use it with their class.
- Teachers will recognise the key aspects of the strategies as they are used for developing reading skills beyond decoding and fluency. However, I have found that having them under an "umbrella" of easily remembered titles has encouraged me to take a more active approach in my teaching. Quite simply, I can pull them out of my teaching repertoire at appropriate moments.
- Reading time is essentially for reading, not for written follow up work. This takes place in a separate lesson.
- It seems to work best if the reading time is at a set time in the day e.g. after break or at the start of a Language lesson.
- To maintain its value, the reading time must be adhered to. Pupils now perceive reading as having a higher status. Upper stages teachers need to feel able to spend time too in reading TO their pupils, just for enjoyment. This sends out a very important message to the children, one which can be reiterated by holding prominent

events like World Book Day. This was a great success in 2004 and has further contributed to the 'buzz' that is now associated with reading.

- Book levelling is time consuming and has to start on a small scale so having a separate section is ideal. If we had had to wait until the school library had been tackled, this part of the project would still be undeveloped.

On learning:

- In line with the principles of formative assessment, the learning intentions of each role are made specific at the outset.
- Pupils learn the different roles gradually and each one is frequently reinforced, for the benefit particularly of less advanced readers.
- With more independence in making choices about the tasks they undertake, pupils feel more ownership over their work.
- When used for class or group texts, the pupils can easily work collaboratively. Indeed, some roles, such as Question Master, depend upon this.
- There is a perceptible growth in interest in vocabulary from many pupils.
- As the pupils move on to the Academy after P7, they will be very familiar with the strategies, ensuring successful transition from one stage of education to the next.
- Having a daily reading time seems to help the children to develop the reading habit; only rarely does someone forget to bring in their book. It also maintains their interest and pupils usually finish their books between library visits. Regular short time slots are, therefore, preferable to a single weekly time, especially for the more reluctant readers.
- There is a general increase in and enthusiasm about books. Children are bringing in books to show me and get excited when a new package arrives for our reading area.

The Secondary Perspective – Kemnay Academy

Gordon McKenzie

Principal Teacher of English

Aims

The situation with personal reading in the English Department was that pupils were given one forty minute period per week for silent reading. We felt that this was not working on several levels. Pupils were not spending enough time selecting what to read and even seemed unsure as to how to go about this. Not enough of them were taking a book home and they rarely continued reading the same book over successive reading periods.

We had two main aims then:

- To encourage disinterested pupils to read and complete books.
- To guide those who were already reading towards a more suitable and challenging read.

As Principal Teacher, it occurred to me that some sort of reading scheme was required to support pupils. The department already had a range of tasks relating to personal reading but there was no structure and little guidance on their use. When the *Book Detectives* strategy was suggested to me, it seemed that this would be a suitable 'brand' for such a scheme.

Reading Time

First of all we decided to scrap the reading period. Instead, pupils would read for 10-15 minutes of each English lesson. I felt that this would help those who struggled with concentration to stick with one book as they would no longer have to wait a week between reads.

Book Levelling

I felt that one of the main problems pupils had when trying to sustain their reading was that they selected texts that were either far too easy or much too difficult for their own reading ability. They switched off quickly and distracted others, never making inroads into any one text.

We decided to label the books according to their level of difficulty. Having looked at several complex levelling systems, we felt that the only truly useful system for pupils would be labelling by 5-14 levels. The English Department decided from a small sample of junior fiction books what they felt constituted several texts at each level. This was based on length, language, subject content etc.

Pupils in the department already use coloured writing checklists and it seemed sensible to use the same colours, as follows:

| | |
|--------|-------------------------|
| Red | Working towards level C |
| Blue | Working towards level D |
| Yellow | Working towards level E |
| Green | Working towards level F |
| Orange | Working beyond level F |

We put a coloured sticker onto the base of each book's spine. Labelling the books has been a slow process, but once around a quarter of texts were done, pupils could choose from these books.

Adding Genre

The prospect of many tightly packed book spines can be off-putting to pupils and we wanted to give them further help. We decided to further classify each book by its genre. Pictures were added to the stickers which denoted a particular genre. The books from the 'supernatural and horror' genre, for example, have a picture of a ghost. The stickers also carry the name of the genre in words. We had the stickers commercially produced by a printing company. This meant that pupils would be looking for a particular colour, which narrowed their choice, but also that they could see the books that might interest them from preferred genres.

Bookmarks

To encourage reflection as pupils read, we provided them with bookmarks that have spaces to record information:

I expect...
The part I liked best...
Words I will use...
This reminds me of...

There is also space for pupils to draw a picture of an incident from the story.

Therefore, not only does the bookmark act as a concise reading log; through the use of these directed statements, it encourages the pupils to make links between their reading and writing. They take more control of their reading and use it to enrich their own writing by adopting interesting phrases and vocabulary they come across. This method also helps them overcome the misconception that using what they read in their own writing is 'copying' or even 'cheating'.

Task Sheets

We used the *Book Detectives* reading roles to devise eight different task sheets. Hopefully in the future pupils will already be familiar with these roles as they move up from Primary. Pupils complete one of these after reading each book. The tasks are short and are designed to encourage engagement, reflection and ownership. The idea was to avoid extended writing as some form of 'proof' that they have read the book. The sheets were produced on coloured paper to appear more inviting.

If the different roles are reinforced regularly in the classroom, pupils should begin to use the strategies almost subconsciously with any reading task. Both tasks and bookmarks are worked on during reading time.

Rewards

We felt from the outset that the *Book Detectives* approach should include some form of reward scheme. Coloured 'evidence files' were created at each level and these contain individual targets. These use a spy theme and refer to targets as each pupil's 'mission'.

The number of books to be read does not differ much as the difficulty of the books increases at each level. Instead, it is the range of books that changes and those working at the upper levels must read the full range of genre and avoid revisiting the same author.

Since the emphasis for pupils working towards levels C and D seemed to be on simply reading and completing books, their targets have no such constraints. At these levels, pupils receive a genre sticker for every book read which is stuck into their file.

Pupils must complete a bookmark and a task sheet for each book and a higher award is given for well-presented, thoughtful work. There is an award also for those who read several books but fall short of their target.

It has been decided that all award winners will receive a certificate and small prize but also that those who achieve the top level of award will win a book of their choice.

Impact

Currently all first and second year classes at Kemnay are using the *Book Detectives* scheme. It is obvious that the main impact has come simply from the focus on reading for enjoyment. Because it has been seen to be important to us, it is now important to pupils.

I feel that both aims have been achieved. Those who could not finish a book are now enjoying reading and discussing their reading with others. Those who were losing interest because of a lack of challenge are now surprising themselves with the quality of books they are reading, understanding and enjoying.

The phrase "there are no good books in the library" has become a thing of the past as pupils feel that choosing a suitable book has become much easier. Support teachers, senior staff and visitors have been amazed at the sight of certain pupils, quietly happy with a book.

Many pupils have really impressed us with the presentation of bookmarks and task sheets. There has been a real sense of pride in their work, which displays the importance they attach to reading.

Several points for teachers have become obvious already:

- The scheme works best when teachers are *involved*. This could be in discussion about reading, supporting pupils as they work on tasks or modelling reading

themselves. If teachers use this time to get on with something else, the importance of it all, for pupils, is lost.

- When used at the beginning of a lesson, the 10-15 minutes reading time really settles pupils down.
- Some pupils will forget to bring their books from home. Because of this, a small, labelled library has been set up in each room.
- Pupils need guidance on standards of work. There has been a range of standards between the classes when it comes to the completion of bookmarks and task sheets. We have all now begun to display examples of thoughtful, well-presented work on our walls and standards have gone up accordingly. It is also our intention to put best work into exemplar booklets for pupils at two different levels.
- A small number of pupils are meeting their targets already (in September!) and so we will need to think about how to expand the evidence files to include extra books.
- Teachers should be looking for opportunities in class work for pupils to use the *Book Detectives* roles, especially at the beginning of the session.
- We are going to have to make a big deal out of the presentation of certificates and prizes to try and match the effort pupils have put in.
- The whole project has also opened doors to support and resources of which we were not aware.
- We gave new S1 pupils a reading questionnaire when they visited Kemnay Academy in June 2004. We will give it to them again next June and compare the results as another way of evaluating the impact of this focus on 'active' reading.

Next Steps

For Alehousewells, continuity of these strategies is ensured because Sharon Shortland has taken the P6's of 2003-2004 into this academic year. The intention now is to get the current P6 teacher involved, as well as the Learning Support staff and classroom assistants. Pupils from outside the mainstream P6 and P7 classes also need to be drawn in. Decisions need to be made too about the nature of the Reading Reward Scheme and its implementation. There is a desire to build on the success of 'traffic lighting' and incorporate more formative assessment into the pupils' work. And, most pleasurable of all, the search continues for new stock for the reading area to widen the range on offer.

Kemnay Academy has author visits planned for the autumn term of 2004, which provide another way of raising the profile of reading and writing. There is also an opportunity to invite involvement from the upper stages classes at Alehousewells in these writers' visits. Similarly, the librarian David Leggat and a colleague are attending CPD on paired reading, the intention being to establish a 'buddy system' of reading partners between S2 and S6. David also plans to incorporate the book levelling/genre classification system into the library computer system to improve pupil access to this information, thus guiding their reading choices more meaningfully. The plan is to extend this classification to non-fiction as well. Furthermore, there are still plans to set up a site for primary/secondary book reviews on a shared school web page. Now that all teachers in the English Department are familiar with the *Book Detectives* approach, the aim is to involve the SFL teachers, providing some staff development opportunities, and, perhaps more controversially, teachers from other departments across the curriculum.

Finally, the immediate aim from the point of view of the Local Authority is to roll out all this good practice to other teachers in the Kemnay Cluster. An opportunity for such dissemination has presented itself on a staff training day on 8th October when the team will present their findings to the teachers of all Kemnay Academy's associated primary schools. On this day, there will also be an opportunity to take part in the original Early Intervention Literacy Workshop which Sharon Shortland and Gordon McKenzie attended at the very start of the project. These workshops are set to continue in November 2004 when they will be offered to all P6-S2 teachers across Aberdeenshire. As well as the original strategies, which include *Book Detectives*, more will be added e.g. rubrics to guide pupil self assessment of reading and writing plus 'Question the Author' techniques. Information about *Book Detectives* has now been added to the Aberdeenshire Literacy Framework, which is available electronically. The next step is to attach some video footage of Alehousewells and/or Kemnay pupils actually engaged in one of the *Detectives* activities.

Conclusion

This is not a report on a project that took place during the 2003-2004 academic year and has now finished. As groups of children move from one year into the next, they take with them the skills, practices and increased confidence that they have developed. Teachers' practice too adapts and refines itself upon evaluation of our own professional methodologies. New classes, and new members of staff, are involved this year and so the word spreads.

Nevertheless, we know that we have achieved much in the last year. There is a stronger link between the primary and secondary phases of the pupils' education, both in curriculum and staffing terms, ensuring a smoother transition for them. Through this process of liaison, this sharing of resources and experiences, professional relationships have strengthened. Teachers feel that they have not just been 'tinkering', producing a set of worksheets that will be filed away for posterity; they have brought about some fundamental changes in the teaching and learning that takes place in their classrooms and in the classrooms of colleagues. These approaches have long-term implications for all those involved. Therefore, our project has not ended but continues to develop and evolve. Indeed, one could say that we have only just started.

Appendix 1

Questionnaire: "So, what do you think about reading?"

I decided that I needed to give the class an opportunity to reflect on their own feelings towards reading and readers. Looking back, perhaps I rushed into this questionnaire asking questions that were difficult to collate and analyse in any statistical way since the responses were qualitative in nature and relied upon the pupils' ability to express themselves clearly in writing. I found myself speaking to pupils about what they actually *meant* by some of their comments. But, because of this, I did get a fair picture of what each child thought about their OWN reading and about that of their class mates, one which makes more sense to me now, a year on, when I know them much better. I can see the personality behind the comment e.g. a particularly active boy thinks a good reader is a 'fast' one! Therefore, he considers himself not good enough because he is "not fast enough"!

23/24 mainstream pupils were present that day. In answer to the question "Do you like reading?", 17 said yes, 6 said no. Interestingly, within the group of 'no' respondents, the pupils crossed all levels from WTB to WTD and had at least one person from each reading ability group.

Some comments as to what they like/do not like about reading:

YES "I like reading because it is like a movie in my head but better."
"I like having pictures put in my head."
"It's a fun thing to do."

NO "I do not like big words."
"Words are too long."
"It never sounds real." (an able reader)
"It wastes my time."

So, a mixed bag! The majority were quite positive about reading but later questions showed that most preferred to read at home, usually at bedtime, rather than in school.

Continuing with the principles embodied in formative assessment, particularly, reflective self-assessment, I asked the children to describe a "good" reader. Some interesting and very varied comments followed:

"Pauses when there is a full stop..."
"Can read big words..."
"Can read fast..."
"Is fluent -which I am not..." (again, an able reader)

Interestingly all these comments, which focus on the technical aspects of reading (fluency, word recognition, punctuation), came from the 'no' respondents, the very aspects that these pupils feel they are not good at.

Many of the 'yes' respondents had similar comments too but also amongst them were rather different ones. A good reader:

"Understands and enjoys their book."
"Puts in expression and imagination as they read."
"Is a good writer."
"Is some one you look up to."
"Is a fluent, patient and understanding person."

Appendix 2

Book Detectives: an explanation

The idea is not new but is adapted from work on 'Literature Circles' in the United States. The aim is to engage readers with texts and make them more active participants. It moves away from the practice of Round Robin Reading where children wait their turn to read a bit to the teacher. *Book Detectives* can be carried out with the whole class, groups or individuals.

Children are trained to adopt a variety of different roles and have to carry out a task within each of these roles.

| | |
|------------------|---|
| Summariser: | outlines key parts of the book |
| Question Master: | frames a set of questions for others to answer |
| Word Finder: | selects words to talk about and/or record because of their difficulty, interest, originality etc. |
| Passage Master: | finds a favourite passage and explains the choice |
| Illuminator: | searches text for evidence of emotions |
| Illustrator: | draws a particular part, either literally or symbolically e.g. setting, main character, key event |
| Mind Mapper: | draws a mind map of important aspects of the text |
| Link Maker: | draws links between what is happening in the story and their own experiences e.g. family, TV characters, films etc. |

The follow-up work may be oral or written.

Appendix 3

A closer look at Book Detectives using “Clockwork” by Philip Pullman

The combination of this particular novel and the Book Detectives approach worked very well. The children loved the story and the strategies could be introduced one at a time to help them grasp the complex plot more effectively. Using Book Detectives seemed to help focus our reading more and helped the pupils to follow what is actually quite a complex plot within a plot. However, when reading a novel with the class you have to be careful not to stop too much because it frustrates the children and slows down the story. The roles have to be introduced with this in mind. I can see how some of the roles could also support the children’s writing, particularly if they get into the habit of jotting down words along the way. The Book Detectives strategies definitely encourage readers to reflect upon the craft of writing.

Summariser – Modelled this for the class for one part of the story. Some children find this role quite hard because of their difficulties in structuring sentences so the task was differentiated. For example, for one section of the story, some noted the main points only, others did it in the form of a set of pictures with just a sentence beneath while others re-sequenced a set of points and added a few of their own.

Question Master – Pullman leaves his readers with lots of uncertainties at the end of a section so the class came up with some excellent questions, often quite perceptive and deeper than they have generally come up with for their other reading books. They just noted their own questions in their reading jotters and then selected what they felt was their most interesting one to share with the class. Later on, of course, we were able to discuss the answers. Many pupils asked questions about motives as well as just literal ones about plot and character. The quality of text clearly has an effect on the quality of questions a reader can create. The poorest readers are, in my experience, limited in class at times by the simplistic level of their school readers so it is important for them to have access to more advanced texts too.

Word Finder – Pullman uses interesting, sometimes quite complex words for his readers and the pupils got into the habit of pulling out a dictionary and thesaurus to hunt for meanings, synonyms and antonyms. We started a Word Collector’s journal too but did not always remember or have time to use it.

Passage Master – Did this orally. Groups were asked to select key points in the story and find a passage that gave a feeling of tension. Then we talked about how the author had created such an atmosphere. This linked back to the words used.

Illuminator –Close links with the Word Finder task as it involves finding words to show how someone is feeling. The class made two attempts at this, both highly successful. We thought about two of the key characters, Karl and Dr. Kalmenius. We searched for Pullman’s choice of words about them but then thought of our own. The bank of words that the children found were very sophisticated considering their age and spread of ability.

Illustrator – A simple and therefore popular activity! Capable of being developed to more than just a simple illustration by adding labels, illustrating scenes or events, predicting what someone might look like etc.

Link Maker - Children seemed to enjoy this one. Many drew upon the similarity between Karl and a key character from the TV soap, “Eastenders”, at the time. Both were depressed and trying to drown their sorrows in the local pub!

Mind Mapper - Harder to teach since I’m not entirely clear on this one myself and I want to draw more and more links so it ends up more of a ‘mind WEB’ than ‘map’! Needs development.