

Context

South Parks Primary

South Parks Primary School has a roll of 300 pupils and at the start of the project was divided into twelve mainstream classes. There is a nursery attached to the school with 40 morning places and 40 afternoon places. There is also a resource base for hearing impaired pupils with 17 pupils on the roll. The catchment area is mixed and has 50% placing requests. The percentage of children taking free school meals is 14.39%

The chosen focus groups were two primary six classes, with the intention that they would continue with the project in their primary seven-year. The range of abilities within both classes spans from Levels A through to E. One class is predominately boys and in the other is a child with additional support needs. The children worked in mixed ability pairs, with their 'poetry partner'. The two members of staff involved with the project are:

- **Julie Watkins 25 pupils**
- **Shirley Steedman 23 pupils**

Glenrothes High School

Glenrothes High School has a roll of approximately 900 pupils and is one of three high schools within the Glenrothes area. There are four associated primaries all within walking distance. The English department has seven staff. The two members of staff involved with the project are:

- **Grant Rintoul**
- **Deborah Sloan**

Focus

To explore ways of enabling pupils to engage with texts confidently and independently, and teach them the basic techniques of textual analysis.

At an early stage in our discussions, it was decided to concentrate on reading. It was felt that Fife had already made considerable progress in implementing strategies to teach writing which also helped to provide continuity between Primary and Secondary. These were based on the North Lanarkshire approach but had been adapted in such documents as "Write First Time" It was already intended to implement these strategies within the English Department beginning with S1 in session 2003/04. While it would have been possible to link this implementation with Building Bridges, we would not have then been challenging ourselves to develop new ideas as much of the course was already in existence. The Primary school also felt that writing was not a major concern at this point.

After discussing the various strands of reading featured in 5-14, we agreed that the area where we felt we most wished to make an impact was "Reading To Reflect On The Writer's Craft". We had a number of reasons for choosing this strand:

- *From a Primary point of view, they felt they lacked the experience to teach towards the Level F Writing test, "Writing About Texts".*
- *This test was also a concern for Secondary teachers as it was felt that pupils often lacked the skills needed to pass it.*
- *It was a more general concern of the Secondary that pupils lacked the confidence to work independently with texts.*
- *It was also a concern that pupils found it difficult to engage critically with texts further up the school at Standard Grade and Higher Still.*

Having identified our major concerns, we then divided our focus into three particular aims:

- To provide pupils with appropriate terminology and the confidence to use it.
- To provide pupils with a process which will allow them to analyse texts independently.
- To empower pupils with the confidence to approach texts independently and facilitate their own understanding.

We also intended that the project should benefit both primary and secondary staff in the following ways:

- By reducing teacher correction
- By teaching pupils how to use highlighter pens, whiteboards, annotation and the use of a key when working with texts
- By enabling teachers to 'step back', and gradually reduce support which would then be provided through use of a 'poetry partner'.

Having done this, our next steps were to measure our starting point while, at the same time, considering how best we could achieve our aims.

Starting Points

The children were asked to complete a questionnaire about certain aspects of their language programme. It included what the pupils thought and how they felt about different aspects of the subject. To summarise, it was found that there were a number of pupils who didn't enjoy reading poetry and also found it difficult to understand. Also pupils found it hard to understand why a poet had used certain words and phrases.

(The results can be observed in Appendix 1).

We also wanted to assess the children's existing knowledge and skills.

The children were presented with the poem 'A Poem to be Spoken Silently' by Pie Corbett (**Appendix 2**). They were left to read the poem and work through a series of tasks. The tasks included finding out 5 things that they found interesting about the poem and 5 questions that they could ask other poetry pairs.

Both classes were filmed so teachers involved could observe how the pupils tackled poetry work. In general there was no consistency of approach from the children in the way they tackled the poem. This led the team into devising a 'poetry prompt' card that would enable the pupils to tackle a poem systematically and logically.

(See detailed findings from video in Appendix 3a and 3b).

Teaching

When?

The lessons were scheduled fortnightly. However, as we did not start teaching until January, the first four lessons were delivered on a weekly basis.

Where?

The venue for the lessons alternated between the Primary and the Secondary. This was made relatively straight-forward by the close proximity of the two schools (2-3 minutes walk). It was felt the children benefited from visiting the High School and that this added to their enthusiasm and the seriousness with which they approached the lessons. A programme already existed to allow P.7 pupils to visit the High School for lessons in Computing, but this was the first time P.6 pupils had visited.

What?

We decided to focus on poetry initially as this had the most scope for teaching textual analysis and many of the techniques we wished to make pupils aware of, were more obvious in poetry. We felt that our first task was to teach the pupils a systematic process for approaching a poem. It was important that this was not complicated and could be carried out independent of the teacher. We agreed the following approach:

- 1. Read the poem.**
- 2. Read the poem out loud to your poetry partner.**
- 3. Decide on the poem's subject.**
- 4. Explore difficult words and phrases.**

While Step 1 may seem obvious, teachers will know that pupils often attempt to answer questions before reading a text in its entirety. It is certainly rare that they will spontaneously read it twice, especially if a first reading proves difficult. We chose to ask pupils to read it aloud as:

- *This can aid understanding*
- *This can highlight certain techniques*
- *Pairs with a poorer reader would also have an able reader*

Step 3 was to allow pupils to achieve some general understanding of the poem before looking at smaller details. A grasp of the overall subject matter of the poem would help when looking at any difficult areas. We provided pupils with prompt questions to aid them in arriving at an answer:

- *Is it about a person or an animal?*
- *Does it describe a place or an object?*
- *Does it tell a story?*

We also directed pupils towards the title as a clue to the subject. On one occasion we removed the title from the poem and Step 3 was carried out by asking the pupils to provide a title.

Step 4 was designed to encourage pupils to tackle words / phrases they did not understand rather than avoid them. (A limit of five was placed on this so that pupils did not spend too much time on this one task and also to encourage them to be selective). Pupils were told to underline any words or phrases they did not understand. We encouraged pupils to decode meaning through discussion. On one occasion pupils were told to take any words they were unsure of into a wider group, then each group was allowed to ask about one word. These words were put to the class as a whole and a definition was provided for each one without the teacher's participation. The class had decoded the vocabulary of the poem without any help.

The four steps were put onto a laminated prompt card (**Appendix 5 & 6**), which each pupil kept in his or her folder. However, it did not take long for the process to become internalised, and pupils would begin the process the moment they were given a poem without requiring any instruction.

Poetry Pairs

Pupils were put into pairs for the lessons, working with the same partner each time. This was done by the Primary teacher using the following principles:

- Average ability children worked together
- The most able worked with the least able

This meant that a lot of the teaching was carried out by peers.

Lesson Planning

The broad approach of our lessons was planned at an early stage. We decided to begin by looking at sound techniques as we felt this would emphasise the need to read the poems aloud and also build confidence by concentrating on features that were, in the main, relatively easy to find and didn't rely on the understanding of meaning. Only after covering all sound techniques did we move on to look at shape, and, finally, imagery.

Each lesson used a similar format (outlined below) but also built upon previous lessons. After a technique had been taught pupils could be asked about it in any subsequent lesson. Thus, although the lessons were not frequent, there was a great deal of revision and reinforcement.

Definition

Each time we focused on a new term, we created a definition. This was done by taking suggestions from the class and, through questioning and examples, refining them until sufficiently accurate. For example, we didn't accept that alliteration involved the same letter (you need only write 'knock' and kick' on the board to prove this) but pursued this until we agreed it was the sound that mattered. A good example of the importance of definitions is rhyme. As you would expect, almost all pupils could identify rhyme, but defining what we meant by rhyme in an accurate way took the pupils a great deal of thought.

(See Appendix 7 for a full list of the techniques we covered)

Highlighters

Highlighters were used to highlight the techniques which pupils were asked to find. Where we were examining more than one technique, different colours for each technique were used. This was a way of creating a key for the poem as well as being the quickest and most visual method of identification, this also encouraged pupils to think of the poem as a working document where their own ideas were welcome.

Annotation

Highlighting was obviously the first step towards annotation, which was also encouraged, with pupils writing definitions of techniques and meanings of words directly onto their copy of the poem. This meant that for each technique studied the pupil had not only a definition but, alongside, a series of examples. These Poems were kept in a poetry folder as a record of work and revision resource for the children.

Individual Whiteboards

These were not used from the start but also became a valuable teaching tool, used for quick revision tests and for pupils writing their own examples of techniques. (Although copying techniques was a method of testing understanding which we made a deliberate attempt not to use regularly as we felt that pupils would then tend to associate analysis with creative writing, we did on one occasion create a class poem of similes using the boards in only five minutes). The advantage of the boards is that they allow easy editing; therefore, pupils are more confident in writing down ideas and not so easily discouraged by possible mistakes, particularly in spelling.

Short Tasks

Each lesson consisted of a series of short tasks, rarely longer than five minutes each. This ensured that pupils had to remain focused or they would not be able to complete the work. Pupils also enjoyed the challenge of working quickly, and able pupils did not have the time to become bored. In fact, one of the most important facets of the lessons was to challenge the children. It was important to not always accept first answers and to probe even good answers with a further question. Even asking questions which the pupils were extremely unlikely to know the answers was useful (e.g. what the significance of 'Hungarian' was in 'Siesta of a Hungarian Snake'). This at least made them aware of the question and also encouraged them to be imaginative in providing answers. It was made clear that a wrong answer was better than no answer. The pupils responded to this by being always willing to attempt answers and frequently surprised us with what they knew or could work out.

Where are we Now? (6 months later)

After reading several poems using the 'poetry prompts' we found that the children were much more confident in analyzing poetry.

Children, as a matter of course, read the poem to themselves and then to their partner. They worked collaboratively, using dictionaries for unusual or difficult vocabulary. They were able to identify various features of sound using highlighting and annotating techniques. It was agreed that using this system the children were much more focused and confident in approaching poetry.

In order to confirm our judgement we decided to give the pupils the first poem again and the same task: To find five interesting things about the poem and make five questions which they could ask others pupils about the poem. The team were pleased with the results as they confirmed our thoughts (see **Appendix 5a and b**).

Evaluation (Primary Perspective)

The benefits of the project have been numerous and liaising with the High School has been mutually beneficial:

- After observing first year pupils, the primary teachers felt that there was little evidence of progression between P6/7 and S1. Was this due to lack of information in the handing over process at P7 to S1 or was it that expectations of the High School were too low?
- After the first visit to the High School primary teachers could immediately see the motivating effects on the pupils learning. (The novelty of having a male teacher was particularly motivating for the primary class who were predominately boys).
- There was a definite increased enthusiasm for poetry across the two classes.
- Specialist features of language were touched upon that would not necessarily be covered by primary School e.g. *metre/rhythm*.
- Children benefited from using whiteboards and highlighting techniques on a regular basis and from the range of teaching and learning styles.

Evaluation (Secondary Perspective)

Although the Primary 6 pupils who we worked with are not yet at Secondary School, we already feel we have benefited from participation in the project. In itself, teaching in the Primary School has had a number of positive outcomes:

- Working with Primary 6 pupils has increased our awareness of pupils' ability at this stage. Specifically, it has raised our expectations of S1 pupils. The work we undertook was not much 'easier' than we would have undertaken with S1 and we felt that the pupils coped well with it - not only the most able pupils, but the class in general. (*The only caveat to this would be that extended writing was not tested*).
- We were also impressed with the pupils' concentration levels, their retention of knowledge and their enthusiasm. (*As we move on to*

teach Primary 7, it will be interesting to see if there is any change as it seems likely that puberty has a role to play in this).

- We were impressed by the pupils willingness to risk answers and by the high quality answers we received to testing questions. *(During one of the final lessons I felt the class were not as attentive as usual - it was near the end of term - but when I moved on to ask them more challenging questions in the final part of the lesson, they immediately became more responsive).*

We also feel that we have learned from our teaching approach:

- Creating a systematic approach to teaching textual analysis skills designed to benefit all pupils has made us focus clearly on what we define as the basic requirements in terms of knowledge and skills. We also had to plan carefully to build a sense of progression into our lessons so that each lesson adds to the previous lesson. We felt this compared well with textual analysis teaching we had experienced in S1/2, which was often reactive to a particular text or made assumptions about pupil knowledge.
- We feel the use of pair work was extremely productive. Primary pupils were used to working in pairs and were very focussed when doing so. This greatly aided pupils in their understanding and progression. There was also continuity in that pupils worked with a particular partner for this aspect of the curriculum. Although Pair work existed in the Secondary, it was less frequent and less likely to be based on working with a regular partner.
- The use of highlighters was also an extremely effective method of teaching textual analysis - time effective, easy to understand and highly visual. Using highlighters in a variety of ways to enhance lessons is now common practice in the Secondary.
- Another positive was the creation of laminated prompt cards to allow pupils to retain a reminder of their learning. These could be taken from P6 to P7 and on into S1. They would act not only as a reminder to pupils, but also as an indication to teachers of previous knowledge. This contrasted with classes being taught the same terminology year after year but retaining no permanent record of this.

Ultimately, if we can achieve a common grounding in basic knowledge and skills across our associated Primaries, our pupils will be able to make faster progress in S1.

Difficulties

Any difficulties we encountered tended to be related to the problem of trying to combine our already existing teaching and management commitments with the work of the project. Unlike the Assessment Is For Learning projects, for example, we were not working with our own classes which meant that planning, preparation and teaching were all additional commitments. Preparation and assessment for classes on our timetables naturally tended to come first. This often left less time than we would have wished for the project. Even keeping communication open between the two Secondary teachers could be problematic at times as other priorities took hold. The P.T. English was in his first year in the post and the Building Bridges project was not the only major initiative being undertaken.

The involvement of two schools also obviously made meetings more complicated to arrange. Secondary teachers would have preferred more meetings outside the school day, but, with limited non-contact time, this did not suit Primary colleagues. Secondary staff were reluctant to take time away from classes as almost any time of year was a particularly important time for at least one year group. When meetings did occur they were effective. The team worked well together and, often, a lot was achieved in a short space of time.

In retrospect, we would have benefited from giving the project higher priority, feeling less guilty about taking time away from classes, and arranging more frequent meetings to monitor progress.



APPENDIX 1

Pupil Questionnaires Building Bridges in Literacy P6-S2

45 pupils were asked about their experiences in English language. They were asked what they thought and how they felt about different aspects of the subject.

Pupil feedback English language lessons 1 What do you enjoy?

To the question 'I enjoy English language as a subject'

4 strongly agreed
37 agreed
3 disagreed
1 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy talking in groups'

22 strongly agreed
20 agreed
3 disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy working with a partner'

29 strongly agreed
1 disagreed
1 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy working on my own'

14 strongly agreed
21 agreed
13 disagreed
1 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy listening to others in groups'

21 strongly agreed
22 disagreed

2 disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy listening to poems being read aloud'

19 strongly agreed

20 agreed

4 disagreed

2 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy reading poetry in class'

7 strongly agreed

23 agreed

11 disagreed

3 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy reading poetry by myself'

15 strongly agreed

12 agreed

16 disagreed

2 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I find poetry easy to understand'

2 strongly agreed

18 agreed

21 disagreed

4 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I find it hard to know why a poet has used certain words and phrases'

12 strongly agreed

16 agreed

11 disagreed

6 strongly disagreed

To the question 'I enjoy highlighting, annotating and marking texts'

10 strongly agreed

18 agreed

12 disagreed

6 strongly disagreed

English language lessons 2

What do you find difficult about English language?

Spelling, reading (Pathways) and grammar include some of the activities pupils would like to do more often.

When asked 'What do you find difficult about talking?'

5 answered 'nothing'

16 answered 'speaking in front of the class'

5 answered 'working in groups'

14 answered 'presentations'

5 were miscellaneous

When asked 'What do you find difficult about listening?'

5 answered 'presentations'

8 answered 'nothing'

20 answered 'in groups'

3 answered 'instructions'

5 answered 'texts/stories'

4 were miscellaneous

APPENDIX 2

A Poem to be Spoken Silently

It was so silent that I heard
my thoughts rustle
like leaves in a paper bag...

It was so peaceful that I heard
the trees ease off
their coats of bark...

It was so still that I felt
a raindrop's grin
as it trickled the window pane...

It was so silent that I heard
a page in this book
whisper to its neighbour,
"Look, he's peering at us again..."

It was so quiet that I sensed
a smile crack the face
of a stranger...

It was so hushed that I heard
the morning earth roll over
in its sleep and doze
for five minutes more...

Pie Corbett

APPENDIX 3a

After watching the first video recording the following observations were made:

1. None of the pupils in the two classes read the poem aloud
2. Although they were in pairs, they did not read the poem to their partner
3. They did not read the poem twice through
4. They did not really know how to work in their pairs and so did not really work as a pair, sharing ideas and asking questions, etc...
5. They did not even think about looking up words they did not understand using a dictionary
6. There was no highlighting of text
7. In general they were easily distracted and not fully engaged with the task they were given

APPENDIX 3b

Now the pupils were using the poetry prompts there was a big difference as to how the poetry work was being attempted. It was noted that:

1. In pairs they read the poem to themselves
2. The pupils then read the poem to their partner
3. They pupils worked together and focused on tackling the poem as a pair
4. The pupils used dictionaries for the vocabulary they found difficult or unusual
5. The poetry pairs were highlighting or annotating the text and using a key
6. Together both classes were much more focused on the task
7. The poetry pairs were much more confident when attacking the poems

APPENDIX 4

Poetry Prompts 1



- Read poem
- Read poem to poetry partner
- What is the subject of the poem?



The title
should help

- is is about a person or an animal?
- does it describe a place or an object?
- does it tell a story?

- Read the poem again
- Underline words or phrases you find difficult



No more than
five !

- Discuss these with a partner
- Look up any words you still don't understand in a dictionary

APPENDIX 5

Poetry Prompts 2

Follow points in poetry prompt1



Read each verse aloud one at a time and circle any onomatopoeic words.

Remember that is any word that sounds like the word it describes



- Highlight any rhyming words



Rhyming words sound alike but may not look alike e.g. joys noise

-Does the poem have a rhythm ?

In another colour highlight the loudest syllables

-can you hear a pattern?

-Can you clap a beat ?

Your partner could clap the rhythm whilst you highlight



APPENDIX 6a

This is an example of the kind of things the pupils found interesting when they first attempted the task in February:

- The description
- The way it is spoken
- All the similes
- It makes you imagine the poem
- He changes the first line all the time

Compared with what they found interesting when they were asked to redo the task in May.

- Use of metaphors and similes e.g. *like leaves in a paper bag*
- Using the same words in every verse (repetition)
- The description and use of language
- He only puts in bits of onomatopoeic and rhyming words
- The verses were short and sweet

APPENDIX 6b

Here is an example of some of the questions the children composed to ask other poetry pairs in February:

- What was the poet called?
- What are the little paragraphs called?
- What are the dots (...) called?
- Can you spot two similes
- What way would you say the poem?

And, in contrast, examples of some of the questions the children asked other poetry partners in May:

- Where and why did he put similes and metaphors?
- Where is the rhyme located in the poem?
- Without the metaphors do you think it would be better or worse?
- Does the poet put an image in your mind?
- How would you compare this poem to another?

The pupils attempted this task exactly the same way both times, on their own in and in pairs. However, the second time, the pupils were using the poetry prompts that had been introduced to them during their poetry lessons.

APPENDIX 7

Overview of Lessons

Sound

- **Onomatopoeia**
- **Rhyme**
- **Rhythm**
- **Alliteration**
- **Repetition**

Shape

- **Stanza**
- **Rhyme scheme**
- **Lines**
- **Concrete poetry**

Imagery

- **Similes**
- **Metaphors**
- **Personification**