

For the Love of Poetry!

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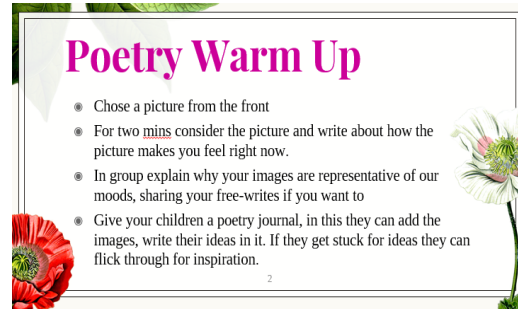
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Context

I work for the University of Manchester as a lecturer in Primary Education, teaching mainly English to Primary PGCE and Teach First PGDE trainees. Each year I also work within the Greater Manchester area and Derbyshire schools offering CPD in aspects such as teaching English in a cross-curricular manner, using picture books to develop global citizenship, reading for pleasure (RfP) and poetry.



I also lead the OU/ UKLA Teachers Reading Group (TRG) in Greater Manchester.

During my time teaching students and working with teachers it has become apparent that whilst they find it easy to suggest and understand how to promote RfP with fiction, their knowledge of poets and how to engage others with poetry was an area in which they lacked confidence. Therefore, over the year I have promoted a love of poetry through poetry-based activities in group and led a poetry workshop at the UKLA International Conference.

OU Research inspiration and rationale

During my first TRG session I asked my group to undertake a short survey that asked them to reflect on how they felt about poetry as well as how it was used in practice and if they could name any poets. The results showed a limited knowledge of poets, either a love of poetry or a dislike due to the potential of 'getting it wrong'. Poetry was not shared as often as stories and was very rarely engaged with outside literacy lessons.

This led me to consider how I could foster RfP in poetry linking to the TaRs findings that would help to develop:

- *Considerable knowledge of children's literature*
- *Social reading environments*
- *Informal book talk* (Cremin et al 2014)

In addition, I felt it was important to develop knowledge of how to teach poetry so that they would feel confident in being able to understand and talk about poetry.

Aims

The overall aims for the year were to:

1. Widen teachers' knowledge of children's poets.

2. Develop teachers' confidence and skilful use of poetry in the classroom, from teaching to sharing.

Outline

In each TRG session the teachers were involved in mini-activities based around poetry. For example, creating an A-Z of poems, poetry blanketing – where poetry books were spread over tables and they selected ones that spoke to them, identified specific poems and the poet and shared why they had chosen. We looked at the CLIPPA shortlisted poets, watched videos of poets performing on the CLPE website and held regular discussions around the wide selection of poetry books in our TRG book box. All the schools of the teachers involved in the study were invited to a poetry inset where we engaged in a variety of poetry reading and writing activities. All teachers left with their own poetry journal.

Poetry blanket



For our final session we were very excited to welcome the poet Matt Goodfellow who gave us an exciting poetry performance and offered valuable advice of how to reach children who may be switched off from poetry.



In addition, a poetry workshop on *Playful Forms: Challenging the Traditional* was held at the UKLA International Conference 2019 in Sheffield. It saw participants such as teachers, Initial Teacher Education lecturers from both the UK and as far as Japan, Australia and the USA. It also featured Forward Arts Foundation's manager of National Poetry Day, Andrea Reece, who joined in reading, creating and sharing poetry that had their foundations in art movements, such as modernism.

Impact

The teachers undertook an OU/UKLA poetry knowledge survey both at the beginning and at the end of the 6 sessions to assess knowledge and feelings about poetry. Evidence from this showed a 100% increase in the knowledge of children's poets. This built on traditionally known poets such as Roger McGough to include AF Harrold, Eloise Greenfield, Valerie Bloom, Joseph Coelho and many more. More teachers were reading poetry at the end of the day and sharing in assemblies. Attitudes were more positive 'As I've engaged with more poetry I feel more confident,' with 'Teaching it and reading it aloud to children,' helping with positive engagement. In particular one teacher said the greatest impact was found by 'Using it with my class, seeing how much they enjoy it and performing it with children'.



Teachers discussed innovative ways of sharing creating poetry alongside the children. One of the members of the group had taken her children outside to write poetry in the playground, enabling other members of the school, both children and staff to read and enjoy their creations. The children felt empowered and the teacher reported that poetry is going to be a real focus over the next academic year in her RfP practice. There were poetry book swaps between schools where a reception class and KS1 class wrote letters to each other and recommended reads. Children found this really engaging and were excited to receive their packages!



Both the inset and the conference session offered positive feedback. It was a delight to see nervous participants becoming more confident in sharing their poetry. They could see how by using simple stimuli such as pictures and objects this could scaffold poems. In addition, by using poetry forms such as the Cento or Golden Shovel, it opened up their knowledge of different poets and the different genres covered.

Golden Shovel

- A form of scaffolding for poetry writing
- Originally you take a line (or lines) from a poem you admire, but could translate to a piece of narrative or about a subject, you use each word in the line (or lines) as an end word in your poem, so if you pick 6 words, each word would be the last word in a 6 line poem
- You need to keep the end words in the order they appeared in the original poem or prose
- The new poem does not have to be about the same subject as the poem that offers the end words & you need to give credit to the poet/author who originally wrote the line (or lines).

Golden Shovel

- Poem- Don't put mustard in the custard Michael Rosen
- Line - don't put mustard in the custard

Please take it away from me, NO! **DON'T!**
 I won't have it near me, don't **put...**
 I only like ketchup on my hotdog not **mustard!**
 Find something else to put it on or **in,**
 Don't chase me with it or I will put it in **the..**
THAT'S IT! It's going in your **CUSTARD!**

RSH

Cento – the patchwork poem

- A poetic form made up of lines from poems by other poets, or you can take one poet but draw from different poems. A cento is composed entirely of lines from other sources and no other words are added. Simply cut out the lines of different poems to create a new one. When they create a cento they must acknowledge the original poets in their completed work.
- You can use them to get your children excited about different poets and poetry forms. What interest them? What would go together well or create a juxtaposition?

Drawn from the work of poet Joseph Coelho

The Giant

I am the awareness of the trees
because I hear the wind.

Five children clasping mittens
could not hug the entire trunk.

The biggest berries are in the centre
of a tunnel of thorny bushes.

Crenellations of a faded fort,
ivy-scattered and wing-aged

Leaves beckoning.

Conkers swelling.

RSH

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

Personally, I found that focusing on the TaRs research and widening teachers' knowledge of children's poets and their confidence and skilful use of poetry in the classroom, enabled me to also extend my own knowledge of poetry and its forms. I wanted to give the TRG members something different than they may have previously experienced. Delving into art history and looking at how it influenced poetry of the time opened my eyes to how they influenced one another.

Reviewing new forms of poetry and then using their structure to write my own examples extended my knowledge as poet and practitioner as they challenged the way I usually engage with poetry. Reflecting on my own knowledge of children's poets showed that in the past I had been reliant on anthologies so it was really enjoyable to familiarise myself more closely with the work of new poets and poetry forms using the new poetry books provided in the RfP book box as a catalyst.

I made an effort to follow more poets on twitter and was really excited when AF Harrold announced he would send a postcard with a poem on to a child of your choice if you replied to his tweet within a set time. My son was ecstatic to receive it in the post the next day and it led me to think about how valuable social media is as a tool to inspire children in the love of poetry.



Listening to the poet Matt Goodfellow describe his own journey, his literary loves and how he motivates reluctant poetry readers was inspirational and I found myself repeating his advice to my trainee Teach First teachers during their summer poetry sessions.

For the coming year I'd like to build on the success of the activities used in the RfP group to include more with the new set of practitioners coming. I will be moving the group into central Manchester as this will allow me to reach a wider range of teachers /students/librarians etc... I'd also like to engage the trainee teachers on the courses I teach beyond the lectures and seminars that they attend. I'd like to hold a student shadowing for the poetry CLIPPA award alongside my usual UKLA book awards group. I also intend to host one drop in session each term focusing solely on poetry for RfP practices and how they can engage children whilst they are on placement and beyond.