

Evaluation of the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) *Power of Poetry* Training Programme

Final Report July 2017

Introduction

The Power of Poetry was a yearlong programme of workshops, co-delivered by CLPE, four poets and an anthologist as expert tutors. The project was designed to highlight the importance of poetry as a vehicle for improving children's engagement in and enjoyment of reading and creative writing in schools.

Project Structure

The project ran over two terms of an academic year, from February 2017 – July 2017. Each poet involved co-developed and led one of the days. These were team-taught sessions with the CLPE Learning Programme Leader, and involved a focus on a different aspect of poetry to give the participants a wide and varied experience of poetry in all its forms. These sessions were designed to be highly practical, focusing on the poet's inspirations and processes and involved listening to, responding to, reading and writing poetry. The sessions lasted from 9:30am until 3:30pm and were held in the CLPE's teaching rooms. The rooms had impressive and engaging displays of books of poetry from a range of poets. Participating teachers browsed these collections during breaks and at lunchtime. The programme included access to a rich collection of resources, including academic and professional publications. In addition, participating teachers received complimentary copies of the works of the poets contributing to the programme. Videos of poets performing their work were available on the web page and were received very favourably by the participating teachers. Teachers were asked to engage in activities between the sessions, known as 'gap tasks'. There is plenty of evidence that these gap tasks were undertaken and the teachers learned from them. Teachers were also provided with teaching sequences related to the poets on the programme. These were engaging ideas for using the work of the poets in their classrooms. In addition, the participating teachers were given access to a Google communication system to share enthusiasms and report on their activities in their classrooms. All the teachers were asked to complete a 'case study' describing and evaluating an approach which they undertook to teach poetry in their classroom or school.

The five sessions focused on:

- Language and wordplay (led by a poet);
- Poetic forms and structures (led by a poet);
- Poetry across a range of cultures (led by a poet);
- Extended forms of poetry; verse novels, rhyming texts and lyrical language (led by an author);
- The final session focussed on anthologies and compiling the course anthology (led by a poetry anthologist).

The evaluator of the programme is Professor Andrew Lambirth. Professor Lambirth has 25 years' experience of devising, leading and researching teachers' continuing professional development programmes in literacy and in the teaching of poetry. He has published a number of articles and books about teaching poetry and has been the President of the United Kingdom Literacy Association during 2015 – 2017. Professor Lambirth's role in evaluating the programme is to act as a 'critical friend', drawing on his own experience and knowledge of continuing professional development (CPD) in poetry, alongside the data collected from evaluation materials.

This evaluation of the project will include, by consideration of the data collected:

- the quality of the sessions provided as part of the *Power of Poetry* project
- the impact on practitioners who have received training from the poets and the anthologist on the *Power of Poetry* project
- the quality of the teaching resources provided by the project
- the quality and importance of the project in order to provide indicators of how the project can be further improved and enhanced

In order to address these aims, Professor Lambirth will draw on a range of complementary evidence:

1. Participants' on-line pre-programme surveys (15)
2. Participants' session evaluations (86)
3. Informal conversations with participants, tutor and poets
4. Interviews (2) with participating teachers in their schools
5. Observation and field notes (5)
6. Participants' on-line post-programme surveys (9)
7. Scrutiny of course documents

Summary

From the observations and the data collected from interviews and programme evaluations, this is a well-designed and resourced programme which has inspired teachers to use poetry in their classrooms on a more regular basis. From the session evaluations, all the teachers enjoyed each of the sessions that they had experienced and all declared their enthusiasm for the ideas and poems to which they had been exposed. From the nine post-programme surveys submitted, eight teachers said they felt 'confident' or 'very confident' to teach poetry and that the programme had made the difference to their confidence. This evidence supports the data from the session evaluations, interviews and informal conversations with participating teachers. A number of teachers highlighted 'working with published poets' as providing much of the inspiration on the programme. In addition, a pattern of response emerged from the post-programme surveys that indicated the teachers' recognition that poetry was now seen 'as an art form' and that the 'richness and pure joy' of poems was to be simply enjoyed.

Poetry in the Primary Classroom

There is currently little work that has evaluated professional development programmes which take poetry as a focus. Yet over the last 30 years, concern has been expressed by educationalists about the quality of the teaching of poetry in primary schools (for example Carter 1998, Dymoke 2003, Ofsted 2007) and teachers' capacity to teach it well (for example Ofsted 2007, Cremin et al 2009). In the last Ofsted report on the teaching of poetry in primary and secondary schools, the authors write:

Many teachers, especially in the primary schools visited, did not know enough about poetry and this was reflected in the limited range of poems studied. Classic poems and poems from other cultures were rarely studied and too many of the poems chosen lacked sufficient challenge. Weaknesses in subject knowledge also reduced the quality of teachers' feedback to pupils on the poetry they had written.

(Ofsted 2007:4)

The authors go on to recommend that provision should be made to 'provide training for teachers on poetry, including long-term planning, the choice and range of poets to be studied, and ways of assessing poetry effectively' (Ofsted 2007:5).

In the conclusion to a recent book highlighting good practice in the teaching of poetry in primary and secondary schools, (Dymoke, Barrs, Lambirth and Wilson 2014) the authors point out that one of the main challenges facing poetry teaching in schools is the lack of confidence that teachers experience in negotiating the medium. It should also be conceded that the current assessment measures in primary school that attempt to combine the summative assessment of children's learning with accountability measures of teachers and schools have meant that teachers are forced to prioritise other aspects of literacy teaching. Poetry's status as a means of monitoring children's progress in writing within the current context was commented upon by one teacher attending this project:

We have been focussing on Year 6 writing moderation. We did write one poem to include in our recent evidence, but this was ignored by the moderators. They felt the poem would not provide enough evidence that the writing would meet the demands of the KS2 interim framework. I think this is real shame.

Dymoke et al (2014) recommend that teachers must place an emphasis on play and to draw out the opportunities that poetry offers to experiment and manipulate language. In addition, they suggest that teachers need to emphasise the aesthetic experience of reading (Rosenblatt 1978) encouraging readers to enjoy the experience of simply reading a poem and to relish the uncertainties of meanings and the nature of the knowledge that poems invoke.

The participants

Around 20 teachers participated in the programme. In some sessions, schools had sent 'substitute' teachers when the official teacher-participant was unable to attend. The pre-programme surveys (15/20 returned their surveys) suggest that the majority of teachers came from Key Stage 2 classrooms and had been teaching from between 1 and 10 years.

Most of the participants had some kind of leadership position for literacy teaching within their schools.

Only two of the teachers who returned their pre-programme surveys stated that they were confident about teaching poetry, but six stated that they felt 'Quite confident'. The rest felt 'A little uneasy' or 'Very uneasy'. In the post-programme survey 8/9 stated they were now 'confident' or 'very confident' to teach poetry. 1/9 said s/he was 'quite confident'.

Four of the participants had a degree in English Literature and four had an 'A' level in English Literature.

In the survey most of the teachers could name five poets. The five most cited being Rosen, McGough, Zephaniah, Ahlberg and Dahl. Two participants skipped this question and one could name only one. The majority of poets mentioned were poets who wrote for children.

Most teachers stated in the pre-programme survey that they only read poems for their own pleasure 'Sometimes' or 'Never'. Out of those, most read poems (mainly written for children) for a combination of pleasure and for professional reasons. In the post-programme survey all the teachers said they read poems sometimes or often.

The poets presenting on the programme were well-known and respected in their field, one has particular 'celebrity status'. Most of the poets were unknown to the majority of the participating teachers.

The session observations

The sessions consisted of rich opportunities for the group to listen to, read and perform poems. In addition, the poets introduced engaging ideas about poetry and art. All the sessions were prepared with great skill and precision by the tutor and the poets.

Most of the participants indicated in their initial survey that they hoped to gain more 'ideas', 'tools' and 'strategies' to teach poetry. Some stated they wanted to expand their subject knowledge.

Two of the poets in sessions 1 and 2 stated very clearly at the beginning of the session that they were not teachers. One declared that he intended to read a lot of poems and that if what he says can be utilised by the group then 'all the better'. This approach was in many ways refreshing and highlighted the distinct role the poet had from

the tutor's. The first poet in particular spent the first half of the session showing how poetry and art can 'make the world strange'. He demonstrated how poetry and art can subvert 'meaning' and what we normally take to be knowledge about the world. At one point the same poet presented a painting to demonstrate the capacity of painting to represent the world in new and different ways.

These were powerful lessons about the affordances of poetry and art. In all the readings and discussions of poems, most of the poets implicitly stressed what the evaluator wishes to call a 'disinterested' (Scruton 1998) aesthetic approach. The idea of 'disinterested' engagement draws on the philosopher Kant's description of the aesthetic experience and has been championed more recently by Scruton. From this perspective, the pleasure that one takes from the poem answers to no

empirical interest; it is interest in the poem (or any work of art being observed) for its own sake and that alone is of most importance. The poem or work of art provides no direct interest in the normal representations, attentions, utilities and logic of our understanding of the world. This perspective of aesthetic engagement can be linked with the way Rosenblatt (1978) differentiated between what she called ‘aesthetic’ and ‘efferent’ readings which each form poles of a continuum in the process and experience of reading. In aesthetic readings the reader adopts a reading stance which attends to what is being lived through during the reading of the poem (Rosenblatt 1988). During the reading, readers’ attention is directed to the private and emotive elements of the meaning-making. For efferent reading stances, on the other hand, attention is given primarily to what will remain after the reading (Rosenblatt 1978). With this stance, there is an interest in what is explicitly provided by the text – sources of information, instruction and so on which has direct utility in the world. However, Rosenblatt argued that any text can be read from either a predominantly aesthetic or efferent stance and that most reading events fall somewhere along the aesthetic/efferent continuum and, indeed, that readers’ stances may fluctuate as they read (Pantaleo 2013).

The poets clearly emphasised a more ‘disinterested’ aesthetic stance to the reading of poems. There were a number of examples when they demonstrated how poems subvert or distort our day-to-day understanding of the world and represent it in an empirically ‘disinterested’ way. In Session 1, the poet demonstrated how poems can ‘break the rules’ of meaning-making, by surprising readers by their approach to subjects. In this session, the poet began with a reading of Edwin Morgan’s *The Loch Ness Monster’s Song* to show how meanings can be made using the most unusual methods. This poem was followed by an item on nonsense poems that demonstrated the way they subvert what we know about the world. In Session 2, the poet offered an idea based around the André Breton idea of writing as ‘a stream of consciousness’. Teachers were asked to pick up their pens and ‘let themselves go’ for ten minutes ‘removing that part of the brain’, the poet said, ‘that makes sense of things’. Some of the participating teachers were sceptical about if this would work with their children in their schools, but generally, teachers enjoyed the exercises and ideas that the poets provided. In evaluations of Session 2, teachers commented about what they had learned that day about poems:

Playing with readers’ expectations is very clever.

and

Poems provide different ways of conveying meaning.

That it is about imagination not information.

All these examples provided by the poets challenged what could be called the day-to-day positivist discourses that dominate schooling and are distinct from aesthetic engagement.

Throughout the sessions, the CLPE tutor demonstrated her own great enthusiasm and knowledge for poetry. She often related what the poet had been saying to the world of classrooms. The tutor provided examples of what the ideas being conveyed could mean for classroom practice and within the current contexts of the curriculum and assessment. There was a clear distinction between the role of the poet and the tutor, the tutor drawing on her knowledge of primary school discourses and accompanying practices. Generally, it was rare for the poet and the tutor to share parts of the session and this emphasised the distinct nature of their individual contributions.

Across the sessions, teachers participated in the reading, performing and writing of poems. In addition, there were opportunities for teachers to write poems (for example in their writing journals). Some poets combined music with poems, performed their own work in dramatic ways and the teachers were asked to dance, perform and memorise poems for ensemble-recitation in front of the group.

Teachers' evaluations of the sessions have been universally positive. Comments range from: 'Really enjoyed the day, learned a huge amount', to comments which suggested a more thoughtful engagement with the sessions: 'I learned about the importance of hearing the internal strings of poems, rhyme, assonance, alliteration and so on'.

Other comments about their own learning emphasised their understanding that poems could 'break rules' and are about 'enjoyment'. Freedom and the encouragement of play are also mentioned by many of the teachers in relation to what poems offer as well as more anarchic readings of the messages being relayed by the poets - 'anything goes as long as it sounds right'. From the evaluator's experience these comments are common as feedback from teachers undertaking poetry CPD and it is often difficult to determine from these types of comments the depth of learning about poetry that has occurred. On their session evaluation sheets they tended to conflate what they learned *about* poetry and what they learned about *teaching* poetry.

What teachers said they learned about poetry, how to teach it and the techniques and activities they used in their session evaluations (86).

Numbers in brackets indicate the number of teachers who identified them

Session 1	Session 2	Session 3	Session 4	Session 5
What the teachers learned about poetry	What the teachers learned about poetry	What the teachers learned about poetry	What the teachers learned about poetry	What the teachers learned about poetry
Poetry can be different things (2) Poetry is simpler than expected (2) Poetry plays with words (3) It is ok to make mistakes (2) Poetry exploits language diversity (2) Drafting of poems is important (2) Poetry is about freedom (6) 'How much I like it' (3)	Different forms of poetry (5) Poems are about imagination not information (3) Importance to write freely (4) Form can offer a framework (2) Hearing poems is important (2) There can be no rules (1) Easier to teach than thought (4)	The importance of performing poems (13) Using poems form different cultures (1) The power of using poems with different dialects (4) Linking poems to music (1) Making poems visual (1) How poems from different cultures creates inclusive environment (1) Listen to voices in poems (1)	Finding a personal response (5) Importance of editing time (7) No need to use an existing published poem as example for children to write from (1) Poetry is for everyone (2) Don't be afraid of poetry (2) Link music to poetry (2) The role of memorisation of poems (1) Importance of the pulse and rhythm (2)	The process of building an anthology (8) Power of listening to the voice on recordings of poems (1) Good quality poems (1) Anonymising poems as a way to encourage critique (1) How poems can work together (3) Using discussion to assist editing (1)

What the teachers learned about teaching poetry	What the teachers learned about teaching poetry	What the teachers learned about teaching poetry	What the teachers learned about teaching poetry	What the teachers learned about teaching poetry
Poetry should be part of the school day (10) Poetry breaks the rules (6) Ways into poetry (4) Poetry is play (4) Opportunities for GPS (1)	Play with words (1) There are no rules (1) Embed poetry in schools (1) Give freedom to children (3) Hearing poems is important (1) Give freedom for children to write (3) Create a love for poetry (2)	Using performance to teach poetry (7) Celebrating language (4) The importance of time to prepare for performance (1) Don't be afraid of different dialects (5) Do things out of one's comfort zone (1) Become the poem (2)	Time is needed to write and edit poems (9) We memorise in different ways (1) Be brave about using the poems that were shown (1) There must be freedom from constraints (2) The use of rhythm and pulse of the poem (3) Build in performance to teaching (2)	Reflecting on the titles of poems (1) Filtering appropriate texts (1) Using audio (4) Importance of rehearsal (1) Making an anthology (3) Importance of children listening to poetry (2)
What techniques will the teachers use in their classrooms	What techniques will the teachers use in their classrooms	What techniques will the teachers use in their classrooms	What techniques will the teachers use in their classrooms	What techniques will the teachers use in their classrooms
Create a children's writing journal (2) Removing vowels (2) Kennings (3) Making up new words and putting them in poems (7) Breaking traditional forms of poetry (9) Allowing children expression (2)	Play with form (1) Importance of poetry journal (4) Importance of hearing poems (1) Linking drawing with poems (5) Stream of consciousness idea (2) Time capsule idea (8) 'What I love' idea (2) Using the poems read today (2)	Use of choral recitation (4) Bringing actions into performance (3) Importance of children watching performance (1) The power of performance (9) The digging song (1)	Papering of poems idea (6) Rapping idea (7) Moving around to songs idea (2) Drafting is important and should be encouraged (3) Memorising poems (5)	Collaborative decision making when making an anthology (2) The use of digital audio equipment (6) Importance of children listening to poetry (1)

Gap Task Evaluation Forms

These evaluations asked teachers how their thinking had been changed over the gap between one session and the next and what they had been doing with poetry. Once again, the responses from teachers were positive. Many of the teachers reported that their confidence to use poems in the classroom had been raised along with their general enthusiasm for poems. In addition, one of the main

themes of their responses was that they wanted poetry to have more of a place in their own classrooms and across the school. They wrote that they had realised how much pleasure one could find in reading poems. As a consequence of this change of thinking about poetry, many took steps to give poetry more prominence in the classroom. This came in the form of ensuring poetry was read on a daily or weekly basis in the class. In one case a poetry club was started and in another a long-term 'summer of poetry' was introduced in the school to promote poetry. The prominence of poetry was also increased by planning units of work on poetry for their own class or with others. There were reports of poetry assemblies and whole weeks in which poetry was promoted. In addition, many teachers reported reading more poems themselves – mainly for teaching purposes – but not always. Some teachers found writing their own poems very challenging. In a number of cases they felt uncomfortable sharing personal poems with the children in their classes and one teacher said how nervous she was of sharing poems in programme sessions. On the other hand, there were a number of teachers who reported overcoming fears of writing poetry and enjoyed being asked to write them. In the post-programme survey 6/9 teachers said they had enjoyed writing poems as they saw it as a creative challenge, allowing them as one teacher said: 'to explore and process feelings'. Another teacher said of writing poems in the same survey: 'It has been a good way to de-stress at the end of a busy day. It is also good when just observing everyday life'. In the post-programme survey teachers reported writing between three and fifteen poems over the course of the programme.

Working on editing poems with the children presented a challenge for some of the teachers. Some felt the children 'just did not get it' and would do very little revision of their original drafts. One teacher said that children are so unused to 'revisiting their work' and 'just wanted it done'.

The difficulties of finding the time to use poems in the classroom was a regular complaint made by the teachers across the evaluations. There are other priorities for classroom activity which often challenge teachers.

Most teachers did not participate in the Google poetry forum which was established. Some read the comments of others but did not contribute. Those who did contribute enjoyed the opportunity to communicate with others from the programme.

Informal discussions with the participating teachers

All of the teachers the evaluator spoke to during the programme declared that they were thoroughly enjoying it. In Session 1, a group said how the morning section had made them realise that they had a lot to learn about poetry.

Since then there were many positive indications about the impact of the programme, for example one teacher said that she did not know about kennings before the last session. Since then she had introduced kennings to her class. She brought along some of the poems the children had completed.

One teacher reported:

Since I have become more enthusiastic about it (poetry) the children are more interested. I have been reading a poem everyday with no work connected to it.

Another teacher spoke about her close observations of her children when she used one of the contributing poet's work:

I really like watching the children mouthing the last word of the poem as they get the rhythm and pattern of the poem.

One teacher commented on the impact of the programme on her own feelings about poetry: Before I would think 'poetry schmoetry', now I'm bringing in poetry wherever I can, as I see it as being important.

There was a lovely anecdote one teacher related to the whole group about a poem she had written that she had shared with everyone travelling home on a night bus. She said she was given a round of applause by fellow passengers for her rendition.

Another teacher had related in conversation that she was enjoying the readings she had been given. She said how it had really stimulated her thinking about poetry and helped her see where she needed to go next. This was a very animated conversation at coffee time which demonstrated a passion and interest in improving the teaching of poetry.

There were some examples of teachers expressing some of the challenges of working with poetry in their classroom and how that in order to establish poetry in the curriculum they need to make changes to their own and colleagues' attitudes. One teacher commented that: *'I had to take my ego out of the lessons. I had to step back a bit'*. She was referring to the use of writing journals which she introduced to her children in her class. The introduction of these journals made the teacher accept work from the children that was not necessarily linked to any learning objective.

Another teacher commented about attitudes to the nature of how colleagues perceived children's written work

I had to 'fight my corner' in the school; the children spent a long time trying to get their haiku poems right.

She had to argue with other teachers about the nature and extent of the hard work that was put into these poems, despite the poems' brevity. This may be an indication of how poetry is often misunderstood and can appear alien to normal working practices.

Interviews

Two hour-long semi-structured interviews of participating teachers were undertaken by the evaluator. Both teachers interviewed teach in Ofsted graded 'outstanding' schools in two distinct areas of the South of England. Layla is in her 20s (pseudonyms used for both teachers) and teaches in a larger than average primary school in south east London. Her school has much larger than average numbers of pupils who come from a range of minority ethnic heritages. The number of pupils receiving free school meals is well above average and there are above average numbers of pupils with special educational needs and/or disabilities. Layla has been teaching Year 2.

Amy is in her 30s and her school is also larger than average. There is a small number of pupils coming from minority ethnic backgrounds. There are below average numbers of children with learning difficulties and or disabilities. Amy teaches Year 6.

Layla and Amy were selected to be interviewed because they both declared that, before participating on the *Power of Poetry* programme, they knew little about poetry and did not have any interest in poetry as a form of writing. They both read a great deal of fiction at home for their own pleasure but would never have considered reading a poem for pleasure.

Both teachers said they had thoroughly enjoyed all the sessions they had attended (they each had missed one session). In addition, they both contested to how the programme had changed their attitude to poetry. They both attributed this change to their contact with the poets on the programme. Layla was sceptical at first and was resistant to the way the poets in the first two sessions appeared to her to be simply reading their poems. She described the poets as 'going on a bit and I was ready to do something a bit more practical'. Yet as the sessions developed she realised that poems could move her:

I realised that there were poems that could really speak to me. One of the poems gave me goose-bumps on my arms.

Layla said that the poets had 'turned her around' to poetry by hearing so many poems read. Amy said she had been conscripted onto the programme and that she was 'terrified of poetry. I didn't know how to approach it in the classroom. I didn't like poetry', but she too realised over the course of the programme that she did like poetry and wanted to do more with it in her classroom. For Amy, it was a combination of hearing poems being read and enjoying them in the session along with the ideas that the poets provided. Amy appreciated the ideas given by the poet in the first session and was interested by the positive effect they were having on her pupils in class.

Amy and Layla had both introduced more poetry into the classroom. Layla had started a poetry club where most of her poetry teaching took place that used ideas from the programme. Both teachers now used poems in their guided reading sessions as part of usual classroom activity and Layla was attempting to read a poem every day to her class, but she had not been able to achieve a daily reading of a poem yet. Both teachers used the videos produced by the CLPE of poets reading their poems – Layla using them in her poetry club and Amy using them in classroom activity. Amy and Layla were convinced that the children in their classes were experiencing much more poetry since they had attended the programme.

Both Amy and Layla felt more confident to encourage responses from children to poems they gave to them. Layla valued the 'Aidan Chambers method' of 'like-dislike-puzzle-pattern' that was introduced to her on the programme. For Layla and Amy, they felt much less need to rush to move on to writing poems, as they recognised that reading poems was of great importance. Amy and Layla said that they were confident about developing children's writing of poems and what to say to children to encourage the development their work. However, both said they have always felt confident about this aspect of poetry pedagogy. Layla said:

To be honest the level the children are writing at, changing a word here and there can improve them.

Amy too said she was confident about making suggestions, due to her experience of working alongside children writing poetry. This is often an area of poetry pedagogy that teachers have contested to being the most problematic (Wilson 2005) and the teachers' testimony of their confidence would need further exploration to discern the extent of their capacities to develop children's poems.

Both teachers were challenged by the case study task. Both said they thought all the teachers needed more structured encouragement and support throughout the programme to achieve the task.

Case Studies

This evaluation considered the completed case studies that were submitted before submission of this report. The case study task asked participating teachers to reflect upon aspect(s) of the course that shaped their thinking about poetry in their own setting. The case studies were to include:

- Pen portrait: a short description of you, your role and your school
- What you focussed on and why
- What supported your thinking and actions?
- Evidence of impact:
 - Children's responses to poetry
 - Children's own poetry writing
 - Building an environment to support the teaching, learning, appreciation and enjoyment of poetry

12 case studies were completed, three of these were produced jointly by teachers from the same school. The case study examples approached the task in one of three ways: a description of a specific focus for poetry teaching; a general reflection on the effect the programme had on the children and the individual teacher's approach to poetry; an interview with one child about his attitude to poetry since the programme had begun. All three variations included the teachers' reflections on the effects of being on the programme for themselves as teachers and for the children they teach. Teachers describing a specific focus described the units of work they had planned and taught or an initiative, for example a 'summer of poetry'. Teachers reflected on the programme's effects in general terms.

These sometimes included honest and searching comments:

The sessions have helped form some honest reflection of my own practice. How often am I actually asking the young people to work as a writer? How often do I give them ownership of the writing process? How often do I genuinely allow access to their own voice? Not as much as I thought. Not as much as I hoped.

Another teacher highlighted the tensions and issues around the school curriculum and poetry:

Unfortunately, our most recent curriculum does not promote poetry and this coupled with most primary teachers feeling less confident about teaching poetry, means there is little exposure to poets and their work for many of our children, particularly in KS2. Whilst our youngest children in the Early Years are exposed to nursery rhymes and opportunities to memorise and recite them frequently, as they get older, they meet such opportunities far less often.

All the teachers described how they found space for poetry in the school day. Many teachers wanted to give children much more experience of poetry and in one case the approach surprised the children:

Exposure to a range of poetry was necessary. It was important, then, that I developed a habit, myself, of reading poems to the children without any expectation of a formal response. They found this strange at first, but I could tell they relaxed once they realised there was no written task involved! I had to overcome some of my own hang-ups too; SATs were looming and reading poetry just didn't seem to be the best way of getting evidence for that ITAF writing checklist...but I went ahead and focused on animal poems for fun and, eventually, we used these as part of our topic on endangered species.

As one can see from this example, the normal everyday rigours of more formal assessment procedures and practices made some of the strategies for introducing poetry that the programme recommended seem unusual to the children and teachers. In this case the children were simply being asked to listen to and enjoy the poems as they were read. All the case studies celebrated successes, including disseminating practices across year groups:

Staff in year 3 have adopted some of my approaches and handed out poetry journals and have commented on how much their classes loved having them and use them frequently. They have also said they enjoyed teaching the poetry unit in English as they enjoyed the variety of poems that were used. These are poems or poets we discussed on the course.

In some of the case studies, the teachers included examples of children's written work that celebrated the children's engagement.

Summary of key findings from across the case studies and gap task evaluations:

1) It is important to provide time and opportunity to hear poetry read aloud.

- Through repeated experience of this throughout course days, teachers felt that a deeper level of response was gained by listening to poems read – particularly when read by the poets themselves.
- They built on this by sharing audio and video resources in their classrooms to ensure a similar experience for their children. This helped both the teachers and children hear and take in the poet's voice and therefore start to pay attention to their own when writing their own poetry.

This also highlighted the importance of hearing poetry read and performed in different ways and in different dialects to broaden children's perceptions of poetry and poets.

2) It is important to give the time and opportunity for children to enjoy reading poetry for pleasure without the need for a concrete response.

- The frequent exposure to poetry throughout the project enabled teachers to realise the importance of allowing children to bask in poetry as a regular part of the school day to provide a wide exposure to poets, styles and forms and increase their enjoyment of poetry.
- The poets dropping poems into the days 'simply to share' demonstrated the power of reading poems at any point without a pre-conceived agenda on engaging them and, in turn, their children with the enjoyment of poetry when this was replicated in the classroom.
- Simple techniques demonstrated on the course like papering a room with different kinds of poems and giving time and space to read and reflect on poems of their choice enabled teachers to see the importance of allowing themselves and their children a wider degree of choice in what they read.
- The range and breadth of poetry covered and displayed on course days and highlighted through booklists compiled by CLPE was not reflected in most school's stock of poetry. Teachers worked to ensure a wider range of poetry stock is available for teachers and children to draw on (see below).

3) Teachers benefit from being readers of poetry and having opportunities to share responses to poems read.

- The course and associated readings allowed teachers to explore and expand their knowledge of adult poets that they may enjoy and could reflect on at their own level.
- Through a wider exposure to a range of poetry, teachers understood what types of poetry appealed to them and which did not and used this to think about how different children may enjoy different kinds of poetry and the need to expose them to a wide range so that they can develop their own individual tastes and preferences.
- Important lessons were learned in terms of teachers allowing themselves to read poetry for pleasure rather than 'seeking lessons' from poems.
- Exposure to reading and responding to a wide range of poetry through their own reading experiences enabled the teachers to understand that ambiguity is ok – there is no need to understand every word or concept and it is not a quest to work out or find the answer to a poem.
- The teachers left the project appreciating poetry as an art form.

4) Teachers have limited knowledge of poets, poems and forms and need access to training and resources that help them expand this.

- Many teachers, even those who were confident in teaching poetry or professed to being 'well-read', commented on how little knowledge they had of poets and the vulnerable position that this put them in as educators.

- The course demonstrated many forms that teachers were not previously aware of or had experience of using in their classrooms. Verse novels were a new genre to many. Lots of the teachers highlighted the importance of free verse and, in turn, poetry not being bound by rhyme and how to recognise the rhythms that occur in free verse. Blackout poetry was a form lots of the teachers had not experienced but were keen to try out in class. It provided a good way in for lots of children and was new form for some of the teachers to teach.
- Teachers learned a great deal about using form to enhance meaning or for effect on the reader. For example, making a distinct decision to use concrete poems, growing from the subject matter, not for the sake of building 'shape poems'.
- Many teachers learned much more about the origins of certain forms. For example, the story of haiku and how it makes most impact when used in the way it was intended, not just to fit the 5,7,5 syllable pattern.
- The inclusion of spoken word poetry throughout the days legitimised this as an important form and encouraged teachers to share examples back in their classrooms. Many of the children were engaged by the lyricism of the form and were keen to replicate this in their own writing.
- Through examples shared, teachers were able to investigate the benefits and limitations of rhyming verse and, in turn, pass these on to their children: 'The children could clearly articulate why they had chosen to use certain structures (e.g. syllable patterns); most chose not to rhyme and their poems were more successful as a result; and they identified what helped them create rhythm in their writing'.

5) Poetry is an important vehicle to explore individual identity and the identity of others.

- Teachers understood the importance of picking poems and poets that reflect the lives and experiences of their children. Using video performances back in the classroom helped children identify with poets more deeply: 'I didn't know poets can be black people too. I thought Valerie Bloom was white.'
- Teachers realised that giving ample time for children to explore and make personal choices, exploring what resonated with them personally through activities like the poetry papering was an important investment and heightened engagement with and response to poetry.
- Teachers realised that rather than looking at a poem as a puzzle that needed to be solved, or to be mined for specific language and technique, they needed to encourage a personal and emotional response as a way in to looking at what it was about the writing that garnered the response following this.
- Through activities shared on the course, teachers realised that poetry was an important vehicle for enabling empathy, with teachers and children back in their classroom being able to recognise and respond more deeply to emotion in poems read and being able to use poetry as a vehicle for expression, often as cathartic writing.

6) Personal reflection and personal response are the most effective starting points when studying poetry and this enhances more traditional analysis.

- Before the course, many teachers reflected on over analysing poems too early on and recognised the importance of starting from the impact on the reader.
- Through doing this themselves on course days and in gap tasks, teachers understood the importance of personal engagement and reflection from their own perspective, allowing time and space for many readings of poems; with the eyes, ears and heart before discussing with others to consolidate and broaden these perspectives.
- Through such activity, teachers and children were uncovering deeper layers of meaning through repeated readings, discussion and creative responses like art and movement. 'I also noticed that their understanding of poetry improved – we completed some practice SATs papers which included sections where the children had to read and answer questions about poetry. They all scored more highly than they had in previous tests of a similar nature, in particular on the poetry sections and when we discussed the tests, many said they felt like they 'got' poetry now.'

7) Poetry provides a means for children to find and develop their own voice.

- Before the project, many teachers were taking specific poems as direct models to imitate and 're-write'. The course activities and reading enabled the teachers to gain a wider view of the importance on sharing poems as widely as possible, engaging in rich discussion around the decisions made by the poet on form and structure in relation to the subject, sharing what poetry is and can do to influence teachers' and children's own writing.
- Through their own writing activity as part of the course, the teachers understood that poetry writing is a means of personal expression and were able to communicate this to children by replicating similar activities in their classrooms.
- The course activities enabled the teachers to think more about how they are actively encouraging young people to work as writers, giving them ownership of the writing process and genuinely allowing opportunities and experiences that encourage them access to their own voice. Effective ways into writing explored included starting from conversations, observations, stream of consciousness writing.
- There was significant impact in teachers and children having their own poetry journals to collect ideas, giving time and space for children to engage with and explore language and play with words prior to writing, write freely and work up poems for publication and for them to gain responses to writing they wanted to share.
- Teachers understood the importance of giving time to be able to play with and develop ideas for writing before making decisions about form and structure and were able to communicate this to the children: 'His playing with cantering text let him see the shape as a tree, he played with line breaks and repeated the last line to make the trunk.'

8) Teachers benefit from the opportunity to see themselves as writers of poetry.

- Writing poetry in journals as part of and between the course days allowed the teachers to understand the tentativeness of exploring ideas as well as the anxieties, challenges, successes and euphoria of writing.

- This also provided lessons about an authentic writing process, for example knowing and understanding that some ideas are the right ones to develop and some can be abandoned without labouring or shame.
- Through writing alongside the poets, teachers understood the importance of them writing alongside the children – rethinking ‘shared writing’.
- The teachers gained a greater understanding of the process of writing and therefore the ability to model and teach this more effectively; in particular how to respond to and develop ideas and about redrafting and editing.
- Teachers realised that what was important in writing poetry was not always leading or directing the writing, but being engaged as reflective learners alongside the children, developing authentic communities of writers of poetry.

9) Working with professional poets provides important understanding of the inspiration and process of writing poetry.

- The course being co-developed and team taught by practising professional poets allowed a unique window for participants to understand why professional poets write and what inspires them. They could then use this to provide a window into the possibilities in and joy of writing for themselves and their children.
- Through looking at a professional poet’s process, and following this for themselves in the writing activities, teachers had an understanding of the stamina needed to build a poem from initial idea through to publication and could appreciate this as a valid process for writing in the classroom and for the assessment of poetry produced by the children.
- The poet’s insights into drafting were taken on by teachers in the classroom being confident to share what is meant by drafting, and how to make clear how and why drafts are reworked. Children could then communicate their own understanding of the process, e.g.: ‘I like how the layout starts like this (he indicates a draft) ... it kind of looks like a story ... then this (he indicates 2nd draft) it starts to look like a poem ... then this ... (a third) this looks like a proper poem ... something I can type up ... something I can show my mum and other people.’
- Specific activities by the poets led to a greater understanding of how to work up ideas for publication including paring down language, finding and improving the rhythm by reading aloud and moving, considering how the poem looks on the page, the importance of line breaks and their impact on meaning.
- Poets reading their own poetry regularly as a core part of the course days cemented the importance of reading finished poems aloud, lifting the words from the page and hearing the tunes and patterns created by the writer.

10) Poetry is an important branch of literature in its own right and the reading and writing of poetry needs to be a wider part of the whole curriculum.

- Teachers understood the importance of the whole school community creating a shared culture and acceptance that poetry is important and is valuable and has a similar prominence to other forms of writing in the curriculum.

- Through self-reflection, teachers learned that they needed to guard against the over-analytical response that was a consistent part of the current practice in the schools.
- Through the activities provided teachers were clear that it was important to make sure that learning in the classroom doesn't move too quickly into discussion of technique, form or devices before children have had time to respond personally and emotionally.
- Teachers understood a need to make poetry a wider part of the whole curriculum, not just teaching it in discrete, isolated blocks. Ensuring time is given for the sharing of poetry as well as time and space for children to write poetry freely in journals (as had been given to the teachers in the sessions) were highlighted as particularly effective in engaging pupils' enthusiasm to read and write poetry.
- Making poetry present in the classroom, through displays, collections of poetry in book areas and libraries, poetry tables, displays and collections of children's own poetry was cited by many of the schools as a transformational activity, as had been modelled throughout the course days and in the related reading.

11) Opportunities to practise and perform poetry adds to the understanding and enjoyment of poetry.

- Poets regularly reading poetry, by themselves and by others, enabled participants to clearly understand how much this could add to the intensity of the meaning and, in some cases, how the reader could become the poem through performance.
- Specific exercises around language and wordplay delivered by the poets enabled the teachers to see the importance of giving time and space to encourage children to play with, learn and own language.
- Poets reading aloud published poets enabled an understanding that performance is an outcome to occur – 'poetry is made to come off the page'.
- Having a specific performance goal, such as submitting an entry to the CLPE CLIPPA shadowing scheme competition to win a slot performing at the prize ceremony at the National Theatre was a real motivator and cause for celebration across a school: 'Taking part in the CLPE Poetry Award shadowing competition also encouraged enthusiasm and whilst all classes had submitted entries, children across the school were delighted for the Reception children who won.'
- Hearing poems performed, both live and through audio and video recordings allowed participants to understand the importance of pace, tone, pauses, line length and to pass this knowledge on to their children.

Key findings:

1. This is an excellent professional development programme for the teaching of poetry. It has been well-designed, planned and executed by the CLPE. It offers teachers multiple opportunities to learn about poetry from an arts-based perspective.
2. The structure of the programme, its aims and the session foci correspond to many of the teachers' expectations for what they wanted to learn by the end of the programme.

3. Teachers enjoyed meeting and listening to the poets. One teacher described what the poets provided as being a form of 'nourishment'. The poets' unique contribution to the programme made a significant difference to the nature of the teachers' learning and development.
4. Resources available to participating teachers were of high quality. The teachers enjoyed reading academic and professional papers provided for them. There was a strong background reading culture developed by some of the gap tasks which complemented the sessions very well. The participating teachers were provided with a pack of poems and resources at the beginning of every session. The videos of poets reading their own work were used by all the teachers on the programme. All the teachers that were spoken to for the evaluation appreciated this resource in particular.
5. The input provided by the tutor has been of very high quality. This is a crucial role; the tutor often providing a contextualising meta-narrative for teachers that connect the ideas being provided by the poets with the everyday pedagogy of the teachers. This needed to be undertaken (and was) with great skill so as to avoid trivialising or negating the poets' artistic contribution. One teacher described the work of the tutor in the post-programme survey as 'masterful... drawing the threads together to make it transferrable to the classroom'.
6. The poets provided an inspiring emphasis on the aesthetic value of poems by reading and/or reciting and discussing their and others' work. Their detachment from schooling and the teaching of poetry in contemporary educational settings (often declared by the poets at the start of the day) provided an aesthetic and 'disinterested' (Scruton 1998) approach to reading and writing poems, making the poets' contribution unique and thoroughly justified. This artistic approach taken by the poets corresponded to the artistic aims of the programme overall.
7. There is plenty of evidence that the teachers benefited from this programme and that it has and will create a positive impact on their practice.

The evidence suggests that the participating teachers thoroughly enjoyed the *Power of Poetry* programme and were engaged in learning about poetry and how it can be used in the classroom. The content met the aims of the programme. The teachers have been energised by what they learned about poetry. The participating teachers have been inspired to provide a place for poetry in their everyday teaching.

Andrew Lambirth
July 2017

References

- Carter, D. (1998) *Teaching Poetry in the Primary Classroom: Perspectives for a new Generation*. London: David Fulton
- Cremin, T., Mottram, M., Collins, F., Powell, S., and Safford, K., (2009). Teachers as readers: building communities of readers. *Literacy*, 43(1) pp. 11–19.
- Dymoke S. (2003) *Drafting and Assessing Poetry: A Guide for Teachers*. London: Paul Chapman
- Dymoke, S., Barrs, M., Lambirth, A. and Wilson, A. (Eds.) (2014) *Making Poetry Happen: Transforming the Poetry Classroom*. London: Bloomsbury Academic
- Ofsted (2007) *Poetry in schools: A survey of practice, 2006/07*. London: Ofsted Crown copyright

- Pantaleo, S. (2003) Revisiting Rosenblatt's aesthetic response through 'The Arrival' *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy*, Vol. 36, No. 3, 2013
- Rosenblatt, L. (1978). *The reader, the text, the poem: The transactional theory of the literary work*. Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press.
- Rosenblatt, L. (1988). The literary transaction. In P. Demers (ed.), *The creating word* (pp. 66–85). Edmonton, AB: University of Alberta Press.
- Scruton, R. (1998) *An Intelligent Person's Guide to Modern Culture*. London: Gerald Duckworth
- Wilson, A. (2005) 'Signs of progress': reconceptualising response to children's poetry writing' *Changing English* Vol. 12, No. 2, August 2005, pp. 227–242