



Poetryclass – Exeter Model

Teacher Training Project

*“I would never have had the confidence to teach poetry had I not taken part in this,
but now I can't wait to teach it again!”*

– Claire Sapiano, Trainee Teacher

In partnership with the School of Education at Exeter University, Poetryclass worked with teachers right at the start of their careers. One of our poets, Ann Sansom, worked with a group of 12 PGCE students and their partner teachers on teaching practice. Together they explored creative ideas and methods for approaching poetry in the classroom at key stages 1, 2, 3 and 4.

Each student/teacher pair planned a series of linked poetry lessons, which they delivered during the Summer term 2001. They carried out observations and all the work was documented and evaluated. Featured here is a sample project, carried out at Knowles Hill School, where student teacher Claire Sapiano worked with Year 8 teacher Erika Denham.

This was a pilot project, the first of its kind. Staff at Exeter University conducted a full evaluation to determine its effectiveness, and carried out a second phase in Spring Term 2003.



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INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

*Claire Sapiano, trainee teacher at Exeter,
working at Knowles Hill School with Year 8 teacher Erika Denham*

We introduced the scheme of work by telling the class of Year Eight students (aged thirteen years) that they had been specially chosen to take part in the pilot scheme of Poetryclass. We told them that the work we were going to do would help decide how poetry writing should be taught, and would help to train teachers.

Lessons were conducted in silence unless the teacher said so. It was stressed (and reinforced where necessary) that laughing at or making fun of other students would not be tolerated; this produced an atmosphere in which all students felt relatively relaxed about reading their work aloud. The atmosphere was workmanlike but fairly relaxed.

Students were each given a private notebook for their writing. They were told they could decorate their jotters, something that is not usually allowed. These were not graded, although they were marked with plenty of helpful comments. Students told us which poems we could read and which ones we could not. Each book was flicked through but not read, in order to check that enough work was being done.

Poems were only read with the writer's permission; this was in order to build up a sense of trust, and worked extremely well. In fact, the evaluation frequently emphasises that the privacy factor was one of the most encouraging aspects. We started each lesson with at least one session of free writing, with the teacher giving the first line. This is not the students' favourite part of the lesson, but on one occasion, we missed this starter session out and the standard of writing was considerably lower. Opening lines such as 'As I felt the daggers' bite...' and 'As I felt the feathery softness envelope me...' have been more successful than titles for the poem or less guiding first lines.

To allow the teacher to check progress without marking the notebook students handed in one complete poem per week, which they could present in any neat form they chose.

We noticed a problem with the redrafting of work. Students were extremely reluctant to redraft. We think there are two main reasons. Firstly, the students had only just written the poems, and were too close to them to want to cut them up. Secondly, these poems were probably the first they had ever been proud of, and they may have been frightened of ruining them. We found that peer evaluation was more effective. We also encouraged the use of dictionaries and a thesaurus to widen the vocabulary in the work.

Students worked to produce a class anthology, with each student contributing at least one poem. The final anthology was printed up and distributed to each member of the class.

During one of the final lessons we held a Poetry Celebration. Each student was given an invitation the week before. During the lesson they had orange juice and chocolate brownies, and were presented with their anthologies and a certificate congratulating them on being chosen for the course. The certificates were presented by the Principal, and students read a selection to the class. The local press were invited, and the students were featured in the *Herald Express*.

One change from our original plan: we had intended to have one or two poems read aloud for fun at the beginning of every lesson. Students were to be given at least a whole days notice to allow them time to choose a poem. This poem was not to be analysed, apart from the student who chose it being asked what they liked about it. Unfortunately this was never fully up and running for a number of reasons. However, if I ran this again I would certainly re-introduce this feature.

POETRYCLASS SCHEME OF WORK

Knowles Hill School: Year 8
Student Teacher: Claire Sapiano
Teacher: Erika Denham

LEARNING OUTCOMES

EN1: To engage an audience by telling a poem to the class.

EN2: To understand how language is used in imaginative, original and diverse ways

EN3: To exploit choice of language and structure to achieve particular effects and appeal to the reader.

EN3: To analyse critically their own and others' writing.

ASSESSMENT

Poetry reading:

EN1: To engage an audience by telling a poem to the class.

Wk 3 homework and lesson 10:

EN2: To understand how language is used in imaginative, original and diverse ways.

Each week homework:

EN 3: To exploit choice of language and structure to achieve particular effects and appeal to the reader.

Each lesson:

Drafting and class feedback at end of lesson - formative: EN3: To analyse critically their own and others' writing

SEQUENCE AND CONTENT OF LESSONS

1. Objective. Use talk to question and develop thinking about complex ideas.

Explanation of the half term to come. Talk about the concept of a writing workshop, and the fact that professional writers pay a lot of money for them. Notebooks handed out. Brainstorm the question 'what is poetry?'. Have a selection of poems ready to tackle ideas such as subject matter, rhyming, language, dead/male writers, only written in English, have to make sense etc. If time start with the concept of free writing, making it clear that this writing will not be read out, and will not be marked. Start free writing following the sentence "All that winter..." and others of your own choosing.

2. Objective. Begin to develop confidence and a sense of individual style in students' writing.

Continue with free writing. Write putting the word 'blue' in every line, or ask each student to put their name at the beginning of each line. Students can talk about themselves in the third person. Discuss concept of "show me, don't tell me" and how this can be done.

3. Objective: Continue to develop confidence and a sense of individual style in students' writing.

Follow on from last lesson's work on the idea 'Show me, don't tell me'. Students are going to produce their first finished poem, which will be between five and ten lines in length. Start by choosing one of the subjects I put on the board, and then writing what it is/does/feels like, just like the colour poems from last week - can finish that one if they want. Don't worry too much about redrafting at this stage, the object is to just do it. Students then need to copy it into neat, decorating the page if they want. These are to be handed in, but will not be given a level.

4. Objective: Continue to develop confidence and a sense of individual style in students' writing.

Free writing in notebook. Give title and develop a list of words associated with the subject. Then ban all of these words. Titles could include Autumn, Water, etc.

Homework – Pick a few lines from their free writing (min 5, max 10) and rewrite these until they are happy with them. Present them nicely.

5. Objective: Continue to develop confidence and a sense of individual style in students' writing.

Talk about their free writing as a source of ideas. Choose one line from any of their writing so far. Use this as the first line of a new poem. Also. Discuss how to interest listeners when you are reading to them (follow on from first readers – give lots of praise).

6. Objective: Reread work to anticipate the effect on the reader and revise style and structure with this in mind.

Discuss editing and drafting – what are they? What problems did the class have when they had to redraft for homework? Are they now 100% satisfied with their work? Show a couple of poems in draft. Hand out a boring poem and redraft as a class. Introduce idea of sharing work for constructive criticism, what language is suitable and what is not? What should be said? Make students aware how their comments might make others feel.

7. Objective: Begin to explore the visual and sound effects of language in a variety of poetic forms and styles.

Introduce Kennings, using 'The Moon' by Sue Cowling. Ask pairs to make up a few Kennings for my suggested items. Build up to writing a Kenning poem, with a final, complete draft finished – remember to redraft as necessary.

8. Objective: Continue to reread work to anticipate the effect on the reader and revise style and structure with this in mind.

Students read through their work so far and choose one of their favourite pieces of work. They read through it in silence, changing anything they are not happy with. Then they swap poems with someone

else in the class, who adds comments in pencil, bearing in mind the rules we have already discussed. Remind class about dictionaries etc. They need to write their poem up neatly, to be handed in by the end of the lesson.

9. Objective: Continue to reread work to anticipate the effect on the reader and revise style and structure with this in mind.

Continue with drafting process.

10. Objective: Continue to explore the visual and sound effects of language in a variety of poetic forms and styles.

Explain what haiku are. Explain syllable count, but don't insist on it. Discuss implications of only using a few words, and having to choose the right word – how a correct one can say what ten wrong ones say. Use one of my haiku to demonstrate this, and the effect different words can have, e.g., 'swam' changed to 'flicked'. Individually write Haiku, using pictures as stimulus. Swap poems for constructive criticism, make adjustments where necessary.

11. Objective: Develop experience of different language choices to establish tone.

Introduce the concept of personification. Brainstorm emotions on board, then close eyes to think what emotion would be like if it were a person. Ban the name of the emotion. Students have to SHOW us who their emotion is. Make notes on their character so they know him or her very well – essential to write poem well.

12. Poetry Celebration.

13. Objective: Develop experience of different language choices to establish tone.

Continue from lesson II. Work into a finished state, using peer evaluation as a tool while rewriting the poems.

14. Objective: Develop a knowledge of how to convey a sense of character and/or setting through the selective use of detail, imagery or implication.

Divide the class into two. Each student is given a character and told they have a secret, which they will make up themselves. The two poem titles are: 'Half an hour before the mutiny' and 'Half an hour before the school burned down'. Students have to write from their character's point of view 'half an hour before. ...'

15. Objective: Develop a knowledge of how to convey a sense of character and/or setting through the selective use of detail, imagery or implication.

Continue.

DIFFERENTIATION

- Using short as well as long poems, and some with a tight structure allows everyone to shine.
- My suggestions of subjects allows me to cater to the needs of the individual without it being obvious to the whole class.
- The drafting and suggestion process allows peer help, but in a controlled environment. Students will probably choose to work with someone they are comfortable with, so allow them the choice.

STUDENT EVALUATION

Over a five week period at Knowles Hill School, the teachers and pupils concentrated on writing poetry. But not very many schools teach poetry writing. Through the Poetryclass scheme, teachers are able to learn how it can be fun to teach students how to write poems. But can the students be persuaded as well?

The students at Knowles Hill School wrote articles to persuade other teachers and students that writing poetry is both enjoyable and valuable. Here are some excerpts from their articles.

Explain to the teachers and students of these schools why you think they should do the work that we have been doing.

- *What will they get from it?*
- *Why will they enjoy it?*

1. When my teacher first told us we were going to be doing a Poetryclass I immediately thought yuk, how boring; little did I know how much my view was going to change over the weeks.
2. In Poetryclass I have enjoyed free writing. Also I have enjoyed having a poetry diary because nobody is allowed to read it so you can write anything in it. Teachers are only allowed to read pages that you let them.
3. I would advise anybody to take part in this scheme as it is a great experience. I also think you learn a lot about yourself when writing poetry.
4. The children will get a new sense of understanding words, become more descriptive in their writing, and extend more vocabulary. They will enjoy the poetry class because you are with your friends so you can share your work.
5. Before [this project] I really didn't know anything about poetry and things related to it... [the teacher and trainee teacher] have taught me loads, like when we do free writing. Don't think, just

write anything that comes into your head, it doesn't matter if you even write the same word 3-4 times. After about 2 weeks you get the hang of free writing very well.

6. We have done free writing which is a good way. You can write poems re-draft them and then they become good. This is even if you don't think about what you're writing.
7. Poetry does not have to rhyme and poems can be as long or as short as you want them to be.
8. I have come up with some good ideas of my own. Also some not so good ideas.
9. We learnt how to put crazy ideas that were in our heads down on paper no matter how strange they sounded.
10. Poetryclass is good because you can practice your poetry and it lets you improve your vocabulary and help you get better English grades.
11. You will enjoy Poetryclass because it's interesting, you only have to read out things if you want to. Also, because it is fun and you do things that other people don't normally get to do.
12. To convince other schools to teach poetry you could do short classes, like two lessons, and then let the class vote on it if they want to be taught poetry.
13. Before doing Poetryclass I thought poetry was just words that had to rhyme, but now I understand the poetry is a collection of emotions and feeling described in a new sensational way.
14. I feel honoured to have been a member of that class and to have been chosen to write poetry. Using poetry helps release your emotions, anger, happiness, hate, love.
15. We also learnt a little phrase which will stay with me forever, "Show me, don't tell me".

Many students, particularly boys, may think that writing poetry is boring or 'girly'.

- *Why should boys write poetry?*
- *What could they write about to make it interesting for themselves?*

1. Poetry is not 'girly' in fact some of the boys wrote some of the best poems.
2. Boys should write poetry because like girls boys should express their feelings and emotions. Boys can write poetry from football to girls and true loves. They just have to write whatever comes into their heads...
3. To be honest with you... it's fab yeh maybe it's girly and so on but hey maybe it will improve your

love life... so get involved it's great fun and very relaxing (apart from freewriting) and even if you don't do a Poetryclass write some anyway – get your mates involved and exchange ideas. And trust me, you won't regret it... just give it a go, write about wrestling or music or bikes, whatever interests you and be a part of it.

4. Boys might not like writing poetry, but they should write poetry because it will help them when they get older and they can make it more interesting for themselves by writing about things they're interested in like football or other sports.

You need to really persuade your audience that writing poetry is fantastic and worth doing.

- *What have you enjoyed about the work?*
- *Has your view of poetry writing changed over the last few weeks?*
- *Do you think you will keep writing poetry in private after the work has finished?*

1. After taking part in this pilot scheme I am much more confident and have found a new way to express my feelings and opinions.
2. I thought that free writing would be really hard because I thought whatever came into my head would be really stupid. My first few poems were really pathetic and didn't make sense and they were really meaningless but now my poems are meaning something.
3. I like the way that during free writing you are given a first line and you can do what you like after that. This meant that no two people had a similar poem... everybody has developed their own individual and unique style, which is easily distinguishable.
4. I think I will keep writing poetry after the class has finished because it's really fun.
5. It made me appreciate poetry so much more, my view of poetry has changed tremendously as I never really liked it but, after this work, I have changed.
6. I really liked the fact that we had our own personal poetry books...also liked the way that they were very private and no-one else read my poems unless I gave permission.
7. Writing poetry is a good way of using up any free time. I will keep writing poetry, privately, in the future, as I love it now.
8. I think that because the poetry was private, I could write poems about my feelings without knowing that someone either a teacher or a student was going to read them and judge them. My poems are very personal and I liked the respect that I was given for wanting to keep them that way.

9. I think I will definitely keep on writing poems... I will probably keep them private for a while until I am ready for people to read them.
10. I found out that I could write poems and use my writing skills in a new way.
11. Anyone can enjoy writing poetry – all you have to do is write about something you love.
12. Before starting the class I'd already had 2 poems published. I now have some more poems to work on and send off. I have learnt some new tactics of writing poems.
13. I have learnt in this lesson that poetry can be fun as well as rewarding.