CASE STUDY REPORT

The poetry of podcasting

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This study was originally published in 2010 as part of the 'What Works Well' initiative, part of the National Strategies for Education in England.

Abstract

Background: The purpose of the study was to motivate students to study poetry, build their confidence in using critical terminology, and deepen their understanding of poetry by creating podcasts.

Aims: The main aim of this development work was to motivate students to engage with poetry, build their confidence in using critical terminology, and deepen their understanding of poetry.

Methods: The participants in this case study were teachers, pupils, parents, carers, subject leaders, and a colleague with expert knowledge in the field. The methods used included providing an 80 minute training session on how to use movie-maker to link words and images, recognizing different levels of confidence in using technology, preparing staff to guide students, and providing mp3 players for podcasting.

Findings: The main findings are that podcasting has improved student engagement and confidence in exploring poetry, and that staff have widened their repertoire of ways of responding to poetry. It has also enabled staff to build more independent working into GCSE.

Implications: The findings suggest that podcasting can be an effective way to engage students in the study of poetry, build their confidence in using critical terminology, and deepen their understanding. It also shows that teachers need to be open to learning new technologies in order to support student learning.

This abstract was generated by Camtree using a large language model (LLM) and added to the original report in 2023.

Keywords: Secondary education; English - reading; English - speaking and listening; English - writing

Introduction

What were your reasons for doing this type of development work?

The need to motivate students over the study of poetry, to build their confidence in using critical terminology and to deepen their understanding of poetry.

(A podcast is an audio recording for playback in a digital musicplayer)

Who might find this case study useful?

- Carer
- Parent
- Pupil
- Subject leader
- Teacher

Description

What specific curriculum area, subject or aspect did you intend to have impact on?

- English - reading
- English - speaking and listening
- English - writing

How did you intend to impact on pupil learning?

The specific curriculum area was:

- GCSE poetry analysis with regard to language, structure and effect on the reader.
- Competence in creating and interpreting media texts with particular reference to awareness of the impact of images.
- Group discussion of poetry.

To impact on learning in these ways:

- To take away the fear of having to analyse poetry in writing before they have had the chance to explore it verbally and visually.
- To build critical confidence through group work focused on the production of podcasts.
- To make preparation and revision for the poetry examination a more enjoyable and rewarding process.

What were your success criteria?

- Students would enjoy studying poetry more than before and demonstrate a greater degree of engagement and understanding.
- Students whose mock examination results showed under-achievement would achieve their GCSE target grades.
- Staff would extend their skills in relation to podcasting which developed pupils' independence and critical confidence.

What information or data did you use to measure progress towards your success criteria?

- Periodic teacher assessment
- Test results

Describe the CPD approaches you used

- Provide an 80 minute training session, led by a colleague within the school, on how to use movie-maker to link words and images
- Recognise the different levels of confidence in using technology amongst staff and offer drop-in sessions as follow-up to the initial training.
- The training on Windows movie-maker (which was new to most colleagues) included the practical application of it within the session: teachers were expected to produce mini-podcasts of short poetic extracts.
- Ensure that staff appreciated the need to sequence student learning experiences via discussion and storyboarding before starting on movie maker
- Prepare staff to guide (some) students towards a productive choice of poems and suggest ways of checking on progress prior to moving to the computer suite.
- Use any space available for recording, however unsuitable, such as corridors and cupboards.

What CPD materials, research or expertise have you drawn on?

The colleague presenting the training session was an experienced and expert teacher of diploma students. He was able to show the work of his students as exemplars and to model the use of movie maker for colleagues.

Windows Movie Maker (free download; search online for Windows Movie maker)

Who provided you with support?

- Senior management

How were you supported?

Funding was provided by SLT for several mp3 players, costing £50 each, to facilitate the making of podcasts.

Impact

What has been the overall impact on pupil learning?

- Students report that they have appreciated being able to explore and present what they see in a poem, rather than merely to explain what the teacher has helped them to see in a poem.
- Students claim that confidence in their ability to write critically about poetry has been enhanced by the opportunity to talk about poems in the comparative comfort of a small group with a practical task.
- Many students feel that they have made progress since their mock examinations and that their ability to write about poetry has been improved by having the opportunity to talk informally about what the poems mean to them.

Thoughts you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

- The desire to improve engagement rather than results was the main reason for this initiative, although some of thestudents involved were under-achieving in relation to their potential inEnglish. This is a strong English department with a tradition of GCSE results that compare well with those of other core subjects in the school and are above national averages. What teachers wanted to do was to

boost student independence and to give them a more satisfying experience of GCSE poetry.

- The timing was far from ideal, coinciding as it did with the pressures of coursework moderation. This meant that there wasno opportunity to carry out a baseline assessment by which to judge progress.

Quotes you think are relevant to overall impact on learning

"It was good to have pupils talking about what they could see in the poems rather than what the teacher had taught them to see." Subject Learning Mentor

"Developing the storyboards was especially helpful to visual learners." Teacher

"Instead of just reading and analysing it together as a class, we were in a group sat down and talking about different ways we could read the words." Pupil

"The least able could build their confidence through talk." Head of English

Quantitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Test results

Qualitative evidence of impact on pupil learning

- Observation outcomes
- Pupil consultation data

Describe the evidence of impact on pupil learning

Student target grades and mock examination results were taken into account when identifying classes for involvement in the project, but it was never going to be possible to attribute progress solely to the poetry podcasting. Evaluation is based on their eventual grades (Summer 2010):

All students do Literature as well as English and approximately two-thirds of the 200 Year 11 students were involved in podcasting. The English proportion gaining A* – C was 70%, a rise of only two percentage points, but results for the year overall rose from 61% A*- C to 81% in Literature. Every student entered for higher tier in English Literature gained C or above and poetry performance on English Paper 2 improved significantly by comparison with previous years. Boys taking tier F did as well as girls in 2010 on Paper 2 with its multicultural poetry. On the higher tier 87% of boys and 95% of girls gained C or above for English.

45 students out of 200 made at least two grades of progress in English or Literature during Key Stage 4 alone and the Key Stage 2- 4 figures for three levels of progress exceeded the FFT upper quartile figure.

Qualitative evidence via pupil comments is that their enjoyment of exploring poetry has been greater and their confidence in putting forward their own critical opinions has increased markedly.One pupil commented that, "I wouldn't have had the confidence to read a poem and annotate it for myself."

What has been the impact on teaching?

Teachers have widened their repertoire of ways of responding to poetry: previously most most had not considered podcasting as a possible way of engaging with poetry, but now they recognise its potential for improving motivation and understanding as well as student confidence.

Quotes you think are relevant to the impact on teaching

"This was alien to me, but luckily I had students in the class who knew about movie-maker."

"I didn't know anything about podcasting, but I'll certainly be trying it again, and not just with KS4 pupils."

"I was surprised how deeply the discussions went in terms of exploring meaning through images."

"It made it natural for students to talk about why the writers made the choices about language that they did."

Evidence of impact on teaching

- Teacher perceptions

Describe the evidence of impact on teaching

The chance to stand back from the student groups and to observe (and evaluate) how they worked collaboratively has offered new perspectives on pupils' abilities and pointed to ways of building more independent working into GCSE, something that will be vital in the new specifications.

Staff interviews and comments were the evidence for impact on their professional development.

What has been the impact on school organisation and leadership?

There was no intention to have major impact on school leadership or organisation, but the support from the Deputy Headteacher who line manages English means that the lessons about learning can and will be shared more widely if there is convincing evidence of improved standards.

Evidence of impact on school organisation and leadership

Knowledge of the positive experiences associated with the podcasting project has enabled SLT to encourage staff in other areas to consider how they too can use ICT creatively.

Summary

What is the crucial thing that made the difference?

The readiness of teachers to be learners in the interests of their pupils. This meant that they were prepared to attend the departmental training session and to take the risks associated with using a technology in the classroom that was new to them although it was not new to many of the pupils.

What key resources would people who want to learn from your experience need access to?

• Time for training with a trainer who is credible and can draw on experience of using podcasting to support learning.• Access to PCs with movie-maker software or its equivalent.• GCSE poetry texts

What CPD session and resources were particularly useful?

As previously stated, the initial training session led by a colleague with expert knowledge and a sure trainer's touch was crucial. It was only one hour, but it gave people the confidence to try.

If another individual or school was attempting to replicate this work, where would they start and what would the essential elements be?

- Looking at a GCSE specification to identify whether and where the skills of interpreting texts (not just poetry texts) are most important.
- Deciding whether a podcasting approach would be appropriate for particular groups of pupils.

- Planning when podcasting would fit in to the scheme of work.
- Checking the suitability of equipment (i.e. movie-maker software or its equivalent.)
- Arranging training with an effective trainer for staff uncertain about podcasting.
- Making baseline assessments to enable progress to be measured.
- Finding which pupils are already familiar with podcasting so that they can offer support ot others
- Sampling via pupil voice to see what pupils think of the experience.
- Planning celebration and dissemination.

What further developments are you planning to do (or would you like to see others do)?

Reviewing impact in the light of improved results was complicated by the fact that podcasting was just one initiative amongst many, but staff have no doubt that student engagement and confidence in exploring poetry have improved.

Plans for the year ahead are intended to be flexible enough to take account of staff enthusiasms as well as student needs: podcasting will not be a universal expectation, but the particular groups most likely to benefit (e.g. lower-achieving boys) will be able to do podcasting at more appropriate points in their course.. Some staff will be exploring the potential of podcasting in relation to other types of text.

Students preferred the direct access of a poetry blog system rather than using the less accessible VLE systems with their gatekeepers. The department has now set up an English blog to support students on the new specifications and in relation to podcasting. This has meant a major expansion in terms of teacher-pupil dialogue, and also facilitates the monitoring of activity with a gender dimension if so required.

Supplementary Materials

This report is accompanied in the library by the following supplementary material:

- About the poetry reading and podcast samples
- Reading of 'Catrin' (a poem by Gillian Clarke)
- Podcast commentary on 'Catrin'

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About 'What Works Well'

This case study was originally published as part of the 'What Works Well' section of the National Strategies for Education in England. The National Strategies were professional programmes aiming for improvements in the quality of learning and teaching in schools in England. 'What Works Well' involved teaching practitioners from all phases and areas of education sharing accounts of real developments which had improved learning and teaching, and made a difference to pupil progress. 'What Works Well' case studies were designed to support practice transfer and include sufficient detail and resources to enable others to implement the effective practice described. They were reviewed by experts prior to publication as 'User Generated Content' (UGC) under a licence which encouraged reuse and derivative works, but which precluded commercial use.

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