Virtual Poetry Slam

## #ELPoetrySlam

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Context

Goresbrook School, Winston Way Academy, Salisbury Manor Primary School and Walthamstow Academy are part of the United Learning, East London Cluster. We are passionate about our children becoming life-long readers and lovers of poetry.

Across our cluster we have been responding to the challenges presented by the COVID-19 pandemic by developing a reciprocal and interactive reading community online. We have previously shared our work to encourage reading at home during the school closures with our #ELReadAtHome hashtag and previously with a #GoresbrookExtremeReads hashtag.

When organising the Virtual Poetry Slam I was working as the KS1 Phase Leader and Reading Lead at Goresbrook School.

We know that poetry can be a useful tool to support children to develop their skills of reading and spelling (Hacking, 2020). However, we also recognise and value poetry as form of reading in its own right (CLPE, 2017) and wanted to celebrate.

OU Research inspiration and rationale
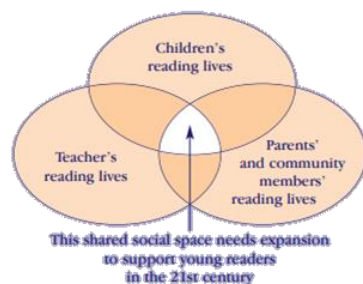
Reading for Pleasure (RfP) is high on our agenda due to the social justice implications and wider benefits. OECD research has demonstrated that RfP was the biggest indicator of a child's future success (OECD, 2002).

The implications of the OU and UKLA Teachers as Readers (TaRs) research highlight the importance of **reciprocal and interactive reading communities** and **developing teachers' knowledge of children's literature**, when encouraging children to read for pleasure (Cremin et al., 2014).

The TaRs also emphasised the value of 'synergy between teachers', children's and parents' reading lives and practices' (Cremin et al., 2014) when building reading communities (see diagram).

Aims

At Goresbrook, we had previously held a Poetry Slam to celebrate National Poetry Day. With a physical event becoming impossible due to the pandemic, we decided to move our celebrations online. Rather than seeing this as a setback, we decided to seize upon opportunities to develop collaboration between staff within our cluster schools and strengthen our online reading community.

We wanted to develop both teachers' and children's repertoire s and knowledge of poetry and poets. This was partly in response to OU/UKLA research on teacher's knowledge of children's literature. When asked to name six good children's poets, many teachers participating in the survey struggled to do so; 58% of respondents named one, two, or no poets with 22% naming none (Cremin et al, 2014, p. 42).

We also wanted to raise the profile of poetry and ensure that children recognised it as a valid and enjoyable form of reading.

Outline

To launch our poetry celebrations, Goresbrook School and Salisbury Manor Primary School enjoyed a visit from award-winning poet, Neal Zetter. Neal performed his poems (socially-distanced!) to children, answered their questions and held a book sale after school. This created a tangible buzz and interest around poetry.

Next, a virtual assembly was sent to each class for them to watch. The assembly included video clips of different teachers performing their favourite poems. The children were introduced to the #ELPoetrySlam hashtag and invited to record themselves reading and performing a poem.

Each child was sent home with a booklet containing examples of poems they might like to perform and signposting them to where they could find more; including websites and their school library.

Impact

The hashtag has encouraged teachers and adults to share videos of themselves performing poems. This provided opportunities for **children to see adults as reading and poetry role models** as they model reading and performing poetry for pleasure.
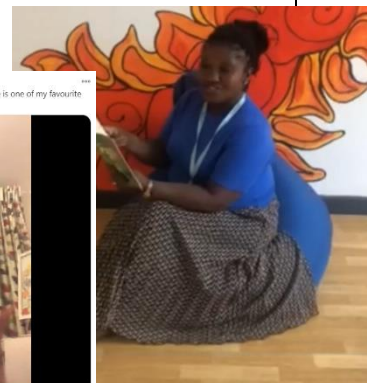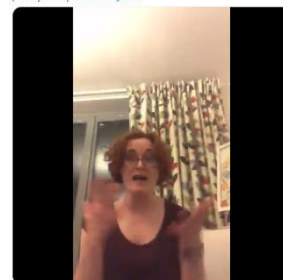
It has also been a useful tool to **raise the profile of poetry** and to **encourage children to perform at home.** Many videos were uploaded to Twitter and shared with the #ELPoetrySlam hashtag.

Dagenham pupils take part in inter-school 'virtual poetry slam'

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The six winners of the interschool 'virtual poetry slam' held by Goresbrook School, pictured in front of the literary vending machine. Picture: Goresbrook School

Dagenham pupils showcased their love of words in an inter-school "virtual poetry slam".

The profile was raised further when the Virtual Poetry Slam was featured in the local newspaper.

Teachers and children both began to **develop their knowledge of poetry and poets** by reading and selecting poems to perform. Some children were also inspired to write their own poems. We hope this will continue and our school community will ensure a diverse range of poets and poems are enjoyed.

We are continuing to strengthen our **reciprocal reading community.** Children shared poems with their families and across our cluster via the hashtag.

Reflections on impact the TaRs research had on practice

The TaRs research provided a useful framework to focus our work. The emphasis on widening repertoires of known texts and developing reading communities has been useful to focus our efforts and ensure our work has been informed by research.

Reflecting on the research and our next steps, we hope to continue to develop children's and teachers' knowledge of poetry and poets, ensuring we are promoting a diverse range of poets.

In comparison to the pupil population of the four schools, there has been a relatively small number of families engaging with the online community. We hope to raise the profile of our online reading community, involving more families, and therefore raising the profile of reading and Reading for Pleasure. We will continue to strive to reach and include all children in our reciprocal reading community.

References

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