



# How Secondary school English teachers attend to literacy

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# Overview

Scottish Context – literacy

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# Context

- Literacy – national priority; high policy profile in Scotland, Europe, USA, Australia and NZ
- Literacy attainment in Scotland has plateaued (*OECD, 2010 & Scottish Survey of Literacy and Numeracy 2012 (Literacy) Scottish Government*)
- New curriculum guidelines (*Curriculum for Excellence, Scottish Government, 2009*) – literacy as a cross-cutting theme
- Need to increase attainment - pupils to develop strategies for tackling texts of increasing complexity

# Project Background

- Four secondary English teachers were invited to learn genre pedagogy based on ‘Reading to Learn’ approaches developed by Rose and Martin, (2010)
- Involves pupils from four first year mixed classes – three Scottish comprehensive schools and one independent school - two different local authorities
- This first phase - exploration of how English teachers address aspects of literacy teaching prior to the intervention

# Methodology

- Pre- and post-intervention standardised comprehension tests (Burg et al., 2010)
- Criterion referenced writing assessments (Rose & Martin, 2012) issued pre and post-intervention
- Administered to 108 pupils aged 11-12 yrs
- Teacher views collected through semi-structured interviews focusing on their experiences of teaching aspects of literacy

# RQs focused on:

- The actions undertaken by the teachers when teaching aspects of literacy (Reading and Writing)
- The challenges involved in doing so
- How teachers support pupils' progress
- Teachers' own professional development opportunities



"...quite a difficult question"

"...do I teach reading or do we just read and is it the same thing?"

"...vocabulary *check* that individual words have been understood..."

"*check* for understanding"  
"*guess* it from the context"

*RQ: What do you do when you teach reading?*



*"But they read all the time - they read the internet and text messages."*

*"...pull out words that contextually don't fit"  
(thesaurus)*

*"...incredibly strange things together ... struggle to make any kind of plausible fit...characters, setting, objects, problems..."*

*"they're not instantly gratified by their writing"*



## Findings - continued

- Challenges (Q2) included pupils' poor grasp of world concepts
- Pupils' weak vocabulary – linked to insufficient personal reading
- Lack of time to teach in depth
- Pedagogy employed not always supportive of progress
- Support progress (Q3) – time; training – no knowledge of how to teach reading; resources – insufficient SfL; metalanguage
- Secondary English teachers have not received any CPD (Q4) in literacy (*one had 10 years experience*)

# Analysis

- Teaching framed by texts and personal dispositions
- Lacked a strong pedagogical framework for advancing literacy development
- No link with KAL or listening/talking in their teaching of reading and writing
- Inclusion policy (*Standards in Scotland's Schools etc. Act 2002 & Equality Act 2010*) is laudable - practice in some schools seriously challenged and is failing some children
- Some English departments have an overcrowded curriculum in spite of CfE's foregrounding of *pedagogy over content*
- Need for pedagogical approaches; metalanguage; time

# Post intervention

- Follow-up tests of pupils' reading and writing attainment to be analysed to determine extent of progress
- Follow-up interviews with teachers to be analysed to establish:
  - perception shifts in their views of literacy teaching
  - views on teaching genre pedagogy
  - to what extent they have embedded genre pedagogy into their practice



# Post intervention – what the teachers said

- “I’m thrilled by the way that a sequence of detailed reading, joint rewriting and independent writing integrates... literature study, close reading and writing skills.”
- “...in reciprocal reading...they tackled it (independently in the way I had with the pedagogy)
- Loved the “democratic nature of it...children feel empowered ...what comes out at the end is a well structured, well written piece of work” – “really high quality”
- There were issues to do with the teacher-led aspect of it
- It helps pupils tackle more challenging texts “Wow this really has merit.”

# Conclusion

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Please contact me with questions or comments; I need your contributions.

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