

# Research Report October 2001

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**Date of Research :** November 2000 to July 2001

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**Research Topic :** Poetry Analysis and ICT in English (Text Reversioning)

**Pupil Age Range :** Year Nine

## What were our original aims?

The initial focus for our research was to be on text reversioning (the physical reorganisation of an existing text so as to explore form, content genre, etc) We had identified two classes to involve in our research - two Fast Track Year Nine groups, both single sex groups; Mary Martin (MM) taking the boys' group and Oliver Shelley(OS) the girls'. We felt that a focus on text reversioning could be included as a logical, useful adjunct to the work we would be doing to prepare students for their KS3 tests. This was especially important since the main phase of our research, when we would be producing and trialing the majority of lessons and resources, coincided with the stage in the Year Nine course given to exam preparation. Our key aims, then, were as follows:

- Aim 1 :** To improve pupils' capacity to examine texts, identifying the techniques by which writers persuade and affect
- Aim 2 :** Use provisionality function of ICT to explore ideas of structure, register and lexis
- Aim 3 :** To develop awareness of how text works at word, sentence and text level

## In what ways did we refine our aims?

**Aim 1 :**

We maintained this aim but we decided to refine it by focusing on poetry only including Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (this as a consequence of the students' preparation for the KS3 exams). We decided that it could be productive to create a poetry course designed to teach

effective use of poetic technique; to help pupils remember how and why techniques were used effectively, we decided to try to marry the incidence of each technique with a group of poems by the same writer. Listed below are the poets we chose and the technical effect exemplified in their poetry:

Heaney :	Sound - Alliteration, Assonance and Onomatopoeia
Lawrence :	Metaphor
Plath :	Extended Metaphor
Williams :	Blank Verse
Frost :	Narrative Verse

### **Aim 2 :**

Maintained - the provisionality function of ICT was, consistently, a chief motivation and focus of interest in our research.

### **Aim 3 :**

Maintained but refined to include word, *form* and text level - essentially, we shifted from prose to poetry.

## **Research processes we found helpful and what we learnt**

### **Lesson Observations**

1. We noticed where individuals were working and where pairs were working. We monitored "screen task" progress. We learnt that we needed some system monitoring both individual "on-taskness" and actual learning gains and progress.
2. We examined teacher-pupil intervention and teacher-whole class interventions. In teacher-pupil intervention, we had pupils complaining that there was not enough. This was in part due to the noise generated in the room and this led to inefficiencies in that we had to repeat instructions and directions for pathways. The range of questions around, for example, a poem is often extensive and complex and not necessarily neatly sequenced and often naturally arises from dialogue with the pupil. This kind of subtle interaction is not permissible to any productive degree, with either individuals or groups, in the environment of the ICT lab. We both discovered that it was only in the traditional whole class discussions, as an adjunct to work in the ICT lab, that the level of deep understanding and appreciation we hoped for was achieved. We feel that it is the very provisionality and speed of ICT that inhibits the natural gestation and growth of ideas that one witnesses in the ordinary classroom dynamic.

3. We monitored the quality and level of oral collaboration within groups. In the initial lessons we found that the dialogue between pupils focused on the ICT function or produced mechanical responses to the task set which involved little reflection on the meaning of the text. This forced a redesign of lesson tasks to include specific timings tied to explicitly stated task stages.

## Interviews

A sample of six to eight students from each class at two to three week intervals were interviewed in pairs. We wanted to ascertain how interested they were in the lessons and what they thought they were learning.

## Research Diaries

A small number of students in each group maintained research diaries. They worked in response to a questionnaire provided by us. The questions and a sample of their responses are set out below.

1. What were your expectations for this particular lesson?

- *To improve my skills of analysing poetry.*
- *To use computers instead of making notes.*
- *To do something different to normal English.*
- *To make the lesson easier and more interesting.*
- *To learn about the technical devices\ of poetry.*

2. What was the task in outline?

- *To analyse a particular poem*
- *To highlight features of text*
- *To highlight important parts of the poem*
- *To explanations about effect.*
- *To learn how to create hypertext*
- *To comment on our own analysis*
- *To investigate atmosphere in a poem*

3. What actually happened in the lesson? If you can narrate and identify particular stages this would be helpful.

- *We read through the poem.*
- *We identified different features of text using colour coding.*
- *We followed on-screen instructions or worksheet instructions.*
- *We created text boxes and analysed what was happening in the poem.*
- *We discussed ideas with our partner.*
- *We gave reasons for our choices of highlighting.*
- *We chose good examples of assonance, alliteration, etc, to highlight.*

4. Try to log any specific moments of LEARNING.

- *I was surprised by how well the time system worked as working to deadlines for each topic let people know where they stood.*

- *The thing that surprised me was how much alliteration and assonance there can be in writing.*
- *I was amazed to find how much alliteration and assonance goes unnoticed in a poem by the uncritical reader. I found it much easier to manipulate the poems on a computer than on a printed page.*
- *It interested me to realise and learn how detailed the composition could be and how the individual meaning/effect that each minor letter, whether a sibilant or not, could influence the perception of most of the main qualities picked up through the poems.*
- *I was surprised and pleased by the fact that we were allowed to work freely or in pairs and that way we could share ideas and argument for/against them.*
- *I was pleased with the systematic way we worked through the poem.*

5. How could the lesson structure have been improved?

- *Class could have been split up into areas of different tasks so that more could be done.*
- *I think it was fine how it was - different people working at their own ICT pace and leaving the decision of what to do when was better left to the students.*
- *The lesson structure was fairly organised but maybe it would have been enhanced if as well as highlighting the phrase you suggest why you have and what importance and relevance it has to the poem and the task.*
- *The lesson today was very open. The teacher just gave out the instructions, expecting us to be able to work without assistance. as far as I know, numerous pupils find it difficult to work sufficiently without pressure.*

6. Comment on the pros and cons of collaborative work in this particular exercise.

- *The pros of pair-work were that you could improve on one another's ideas and vision of the piece. You could also get a better quality of work. The cons were when we had conflicting ideas and lost time working out whose to use*
- *I think working together as a pair helps as you can both put your points forward about the poem and help each other understand the poem.*
- *or advantages: letting pupils discover why poets may use assonance and alliteration. Giving the chance for pupils to use their own initiative when looking out for technical effects and thus helping them to use this skill in the future.*
- *Disadvantage: low interaction with the rest of the class leading to lack of helpful information from sharing independent views with fellow pupils.*

**Research processes our pupils found helpful.**

Pupils found the research log useful initially but then they found it repetitive.

Pupils found the interviews helped formulate and shape ideas about the use of ICT in poetry lessons.

The learning points we gained from undertaking the research and what evidence we had to monitor this.

### Lesson Observation

1. Both boys' and girls' groups *seemed* to be engaged and enjoying lessons. However we feel that it is important to state that there is undoubtedly a fashionable "buzz" factor about ICT lessons which lends them an air of pupil engagement whether or not learning is being moved on through the work or not. Our project benefited from the pupils' natural enthusiasm for what is still currently perceived as a desirable teaching strategy.
2. Productive oral collaboration. Our observations, as well as the research diaries and interviews, provided us with evidence of some effective group work in response to tasks.
3. Imbalance of pupil hands-on practice at the keyboard.
4. Pupils needing guidance in content and skills. We discovered at different times that the skill base was uneven; some pupils did not have the technical skills or they were slow and this, of course, had an impact on how much they got out of the lesson.
5. Great variety in rates of working and products. For example, technical virtuosity did not necessarily mean that the work produced was insightful

### Interviews

- We discovered that there was a skill deficit among perhaps half of the boys which was masked by the pair work. This came to light when alternative "sugar-paper" analysis was offered to decongest computer use; to our surprise we found that almost half of the boys declared a preference for this non-ICT collaborative analysis. We had to acknowledge our own prejudice in assuming a skill base in the boys that turned out to be less comprehensive. It became apparent to us too that many boys had deliberately hidden this lack of facility to avoid embarrassment.
- Both boys and girls said that the "sugar-paper" analysis aided their understanding of the exploration of the poems in a way that the ICT work hadn't. A particularly clear example of this occurred when we did work on assonance and alliteration. (See also point below).
- It was in our interviews with the girls that we identified one of the key findings of our research; the clear difference between the way boys and girls seem to respond to ICT.
- We found that students expected there to be a greater variety of ICT tasks; *they* thought that the emphasis was to be on the acquisition of ICT skills whereas *we* were very clear that we wanted the ICT to enhance English learning strategies. (link to variety stuff)
- Recognition by teacher and pupil that the poem needed to be read aloud and heard in the room.

- In general, these diaries were not kept in a consistent fashion and in general they were kept by only a thirty percent sample who varied each time but had a recurrent core of four or five pupils. Time for completion close to the lesson was difficult to find and we did not want to sacrifice lesson time for completion.
- Ideally, pupils needed more training time for more thoughtful completion of the diaries and ideally they needed to be completed straight after the lesson.
- As we have already mentioned, complaints in the earlier lessons about repetition of lesson tasks and strategies.
- An emphasis in their perception of outcomes on technical tasks accomplished.
- Recognition as the lessons progressed that the text under scrutiny needed to be short so that the whole could be viewed on the screen at one time.
- Complaint about the lack of discussion in the lesson.
- Complaint about the lack of individual teacher help.
- Pleasure at seeing the tightly-wrought nature of a poem.
- Failure in the earlier lessons to appreciate the overall meaning of the text.<sup>1</sup>
- Students enjoyed the provisionality that ICT use brought to the tasks.
- Some students felt that ICT use improved their understanding of the poems.

### Questions for my future practice.

- How to systematise the grouping of texts by particular authors so that poetic devices can be taught using small textual repertoires. Students would then appreciate the place of *specific* techniques and devices in achieving *overall* effects.
- How to create class groups so that there is one student per computer.

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<sup>1</sup> *By focusing on "mechanical" devices and features of text analysis we have found that using the similarly mechanical features of ICT only complicates the application of these features to the overall sense of the poem, script, etc. They identify alliteration, for example, but are - apparently - even less inclined to relate it to the writer's overall purpose. Because this has always been a key weakness in students' understanding and application of literary devices and terms, these lessons were clearly not successful.*

*Having said that, it seems clear to us that the fault, where it existed, lay in the structure and impetus of the particular lessons. ICT in itself is sufficiently flexible and powerful to facilitate any and every type of learning. The key consideration, however, must be what part it places in the achievement of particular learning outcomes; whether it makes up the bulk of the lesson or is merely a component of it.*

- Where pairs or groups are using a computer, how to monitor systematically individual use to ensure that all students are practitioners.
- How to enable students to continue work begun in lessons online at home using the school website.
- How to create an analytical toolbox using the formatting facilities of ICT, particularly Microsoft Word.
- How to ensure progression in the text analysis course.
- How to add a creative dimension to the analytical work so that students practise modelling and disrupting the model to create their own poems
- To explore further manipulative function of ICT in relation to text organisation.
- To explore the use of hyperlink creation as an annotative tool.

#### **Questions for my school.**

- How to improve access for all classes.
- How to improve students' ICT skill-base.
- How to facilitate inset so that the work we have done can be shared.
- How we might be allowed further inset time to collaborate and develop new ideas and ICT based resources.
- How to develop staff and pupil use of hyperlinks as an analytical tool.

#### **Questions for further research.**

- How to enable students to develop their own personal response to texts.
- To explore further gender differences in approach to ICT.
- To investigate the effectiveness of students' learning as they use specific functions of ICT whilst engaging with texts.