



Diversity in the National Curriculum - English KS2

Reading beyond the literal with bilingual pupils

In Newham, the Ethnic Minority Achievement team (EMA) has developed a programme of professional development for 2007-2008 which specifically addresses the need to include multimodal texts in the reading and writing repertoires of bilingual and multilingual children. Jane Bednall (EMA, Newham) worked with Leanne Cranston, a year 5 teacher, on a pilot project.



From their earliest years children are surrounded by multi-modal texts—films, magazines, advertising leaflets and hoardings, books (multimodal texts can be made up of any combination of: gesture and/or movement; moving and still images; spoken words, sound effects and music; writing.).

These texts combine images, words and sound, on screen and on paper, in the home, in the street and in school. This means that children bring a great deal of experience of complex texts to their classroom reading and writing.

This project began with a focus on one of the most familiar types of multimodal text—picture-books.

Jane comments: *We're hoping that the programme we're planning for next year will enliven teachers about reading, and get them to look again at the books they use, affirm the need to read aloud to children, set up good class libraries, make links between home and school reading... to encourage teachers to get children to enjoy the range of different kinds of reading and the joys it can bring. Through our work in supporting teachers to develop more culturally inclusive ways of working we have identified some key learning processes that we want to encourage: visual literacy; critical literacy (questioning how texts come about: who made this text? how I am being influenced by it?...), enquiry based questioning for learning and cross-cultural awareness.*



One of the aims of the EMA team is to create a classroom environment of openness and recognising and celebrating cultural diversity. Based on previous work aimed at raising teacher awareness of cultural difference, a thread in the project was to understand how children's reading experience is influenced by their cultural experience. And equally, to consider how their own experience shapes their understanding of the text, so that they feel comfortable to share that experience in the classroom. In this project we found that because they felt comfortable with Leanne they could say what they brought to the text.

The project

The class involved was a year 5 mixed top set for literacy. At the end of year 4 their reading levels ranged from high level 3 to low level 4 and their writing levels were between 2a and 3b. The school is a four-form entry with classes from Nursery to year 6 and is culturally mixed with 15 languages spoken.

The five-week unit involved the children keeping portfolios of their work so that they could return to ideas and build on them. In the first few sessions the emphasis was on becoming familiar with multimodal texts and how authors and artists have made meaning in multimodal ways: hieroglyphs, cave paintings, aboriginal art, story scrolls and music and dance. Teacher modelling suggested how authors use different devices to engage the reader, including font style, size and colour, characters' posture, the combination of words and images.



Fig 1: Mazeeda and Labiba annotating a double page spread

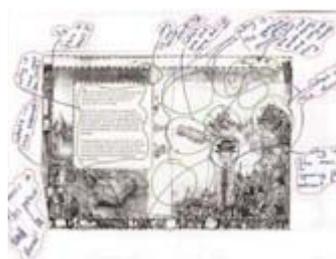


Fig 2: Mazeeda and Labiba's annotations of a double page spread from *The Paperbag Prince* by Colin Thompson

The children annotated double page spreads, asking questions of the pages and suggesting music which might accompany the images (see Figures 1 and 2). After this introductory work, the chosen book

The Red Tree by Shaun Tan was read and re-read, looking for mood created by colour, posture and gesture and the meaning carried by the words. Any unfamiliar vocabulary was explained and given a context. This book was chosen for its demanding content—the central character’s sense of isolation—which is explored through images rather than print. It offers bilingual learners the chance to discuss and debate, thus extending their use of a reflective vocabulary. Complex picturebooks are ideal for developing language in this way.

The children were able to bring their own interpretations to the text as they read the book. One of the boys, Parthik, responded strongly to a double-page spread with an inner city image and a collage of fragments of different types of script and newsprint and an image of an aeroplane. He commented:

I liked this book because it showed how people feel—how people feel inside and how when the war’s happening... I drew some pictures of the United States and Great Britain to show they’re at war... For him, current events informed his interpretation of the images and he was able to discuss these ideas with

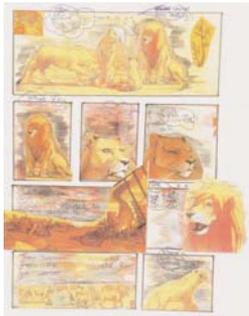


Fig 3: The Pride of Baghdad graphic novel cut-outs
© DC Comics

his teacher in a secure environment where opinions were shared—and challenged. Alongside work on *The Red Tree*, as a way of exploring the visual elements of making a text, the second section of the plans focused on layout and features of comics/ graphic novels. This was a way of exploring how frames and panels move narrative on. The children cut out images from a graphic novel to make their

own story with a moral, using the conventions of establishing frames, multi-panel layouts, transition shots, long shots, close ups and details, and creating mood through colour (see Figures 3 and 4).

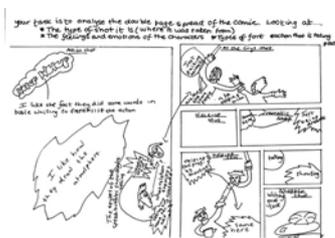


Fig 4: Plan for a framed double page spread

Writing poetry

Returning to *The Red Tree*, the children then created their own poems using the ideas taken from their earlier annotating of double-page spreads from the book. They used different artistic techniques, particularly the use of inks and black and white tree drawings as a basis for collage dou-



Fig 5: Mazeeda's poem, based on *The Red Tree*

I am so confused, as confused as a never ending maze
I am a lost piece of a puzzle of happiness
I am trapped with locked doors everywhere I turn....

I have not done anything to people
But they are still against me
I wish I had my own world with kind and generous friends in it
Life is dull with no light
I am so tiny that nobody notices me
What will happen in the future? Can I get out of this?

ble page poems. Following the themes of isolation, despair and renewed hope of *The Red Tree*, the children planned and wrote poems based on emotions. They used digital photography to capture a sense of how body language and actions reveal mood. Language then became a focus as the children made their own poems composed of statements about their feelings. Figures 5 and 6 show poems by Mazeeda and Aniq Begum.



Fig 6: Aniq Begum's poem, based on *The Red Tree*

I'm never happy or excited.
Life is so unfair.
Why is the world a ball of hatred?
When are the tears going to stop falling from my eyes?

Life is not to be lived.
Why does my heart not beat but I still live?
Can't I just live in another world instead of living here?

All the children were able to identify with the central character’s sense of isolation from their personal experience but their responses were developed through role play rather than necessarily reflecting their feelings at the time. Indeed although Mazeeda writes ‘People don’t understand me because of my language’ she is a very cheerful girl and deliberately portrays herself smiling because she did not want to appear sad. Another girl, identifying the girl’s sense of being alone, drew on her personal and cultural sense of family time spent happily together which the girl of her poem longed for:

*I wish I was with my family
Celebrating the festival Eid.*

One of the boys, who was a less experienced writer, used his knowledge of music that he likes to interpret the emotions portrayed in the book. Part of his ‘Red Tree rap’ goes:

*She feels like a magician who has lost her tricks
She's always picked on and never gets picked.*

The project began with a desire to understand how children's reading experience is influenced by their cultural experience. From the evidence of these children—and all the others in the class—it is clear that cultural experience contributes significantly to response to text and allows for discussion of differing views.

The Gazi Bengali scroll

After sharing and enjoying their poems the work moved on to drama based on the story depicted in the Gazi Bengali Scroll in the British Museum (www.britishmuseum.org/explore/highlights/highlight_objects/asia/s/scenes_from_the_legend_of_gazi.aspx). This is a scroll whose origins are unclear but which shows, through a series of panels, images of Bengali society from some centuries ago, depicting the people of the time—Muslim and Hindu—saints, warriors and ordinary people, going about their lives. This final section of the multimodal unit was designed to help children analyse pictures and borders/frames in order to read and interpret a story and to become aware of how their readings are facilitated by the knowledge they bring to the text from their cultures and faiths. An important aspect of this work was to emphasise that the full story of this scroll is not known so that everyone is a researcher.

Many of the children were able to bring their own cultural knowledge to their interpretation of the images on the scroll. Tasnia commented: *...the scroll, it's just got a little picture but it can explain so much... like at the end of our one that we've got there's a book and there's man sitting next to him and there's like a teacher and we thought that the man was saying the wedding vows...*

Rashida saw the interpretation of the scrolls as a chance to appreciate diversity:

The Bengali scrolls... it's really fascinating because there's lots of pictures but in the pictures you don't really know what's happening so there's no right or wrong – you can just have your own opinion. If it's a picture of an elephant going somewhere that looks like a mosque or a Hindu temple, you can just guess it's say ... a church... then it's not right or wrong... that's why I like it.



Fig 7: Bengali scroll freeze-frame

Most of the pupils in the class came from Muslim and Hindu backgrounds and they had drawn on teachings from their experience in Qur'anic schools and temples to read the tiny detailed pictures of the scroll. They brought their own cultural understanding to the reading of this text.

The class made their own version of the Bengali scroll using drama, drawing and photography of their tableaux. Figure 7 shows a freeze frame of people eating and drinking based on one of the panels.

Reading for inference – behind the pictures

When they were interviewed after the project, the children explained which parts of the project they had enjoyed most:

Rashida: *The Bengali scrolls because they're really ancient stories, like myths... the borders are interesting because they tell you different things. You have to take a guess at it and figure out the whole story for yourself, which is why I like it. It's a kind of challenge and I like challenges. You have to read the person's eyes and lips.*

Tasnia: *I liked the picturebooks. It was something new because we thought that picturebooks were for babies and they don't have any words... but now we know that there's more in literacy...*

Muhammad: *The Bengali scrolls were really fascinating because in the pictures you don't really know what's happening so that there's no right or wrong—you can just have your own opinion.*

Jane Bednall (Newham EMA team) and **Leanne Cranston** (Elmhurst primary school, Newham)
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This is an edited version of an article that first appeared in the Spring 2008 issue of *English 4-11*, a journal published jointly by The English Association (www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/) and the United Kingdom Literacy Association. (www.ukla.org)

Additional Resources

The **Real Histories Directory** has a number of resources that might be of help to teachers wishing to introduce more diversity to their teaching of English and to further encourage their students to read more widely.

National organisations include **The National Literacy Trust**, (www.literacytrust.org.uk/) an independent charity dedicated to building a literate nation. The Trust's website has information on literacy policy, practice and research in the UK. This includes details of literacy skills among those who speak English as an additional language, and where to find support. **Booktrust** (www.booktrustchildrensbooks.org.uk/) is an independent national charity that encourages people of all ages and cultures to discover and enjoy reading. Their website contains a database of hundreds of children's book reviews, searchable by keyword and age range along with interviews with many children's authors and illustrations. Teachers can access free educational resources on authors from Satoshi Katamura to Bali Rai. Children's books resources include the Best Book Guide.

The free leaflet, **Literacy: The Global Perspectives** (www.dea.org.uk/uploads/4453d22a64a184b4f76a113996448fcf/literacy.pdf) briefly explores opportunities for developing global awareness within the Literacy Hour framework—not only in the reading and writing of fiction and non-fiction texts, but also through listening and speaking, oral traditions, word level approaches and within each of the main text types or genres, as well as some useful resources.

Apart from a large number of storytellers that will visit schools, there are a number of publishers and booksellers across the country that specialise in multicultural texts. **Jubilee Books** (www.jubileebooks.co.uk/) has a number of resources for school; they supply dual-language books, can arrange tailor-made book fairs or book weeks for schools; they can also arrange for authors, illustrators, storytellers and performers to visit schools. They can also supply book boxes with a collection of books specific to the individual school's needs. **Rainbow books** (www.rainbowbooksonline.co.uk/) sell quality multicultural books, posters, puzzles and other resources direct to schools, colleges, nurseries, playgroups and parents. **Roving Books Ltd** (www.rovingbooks.com/) specialises in quality book events and school supply, including multicultural and dual language books that show positive images of different cultures, and minority and disadvantaged groups. They also organise book fairs and they help to set up book clubs run by parents. **The Willesden Bookshop** (www.willesdenbookshop.co.uk/) has multicultural children's books for each of the key stages including Cinderella stories from around the world, story quilts, alphabets and counting books and festivals and celebrations. Resources include books from Poland and Eastern Europe. **Worldlanguagebooks.com** (www.worldlanguagebooks.com/) is an internet-based bookshop that provides books in a wide range of European, Asian, African and other world languages for children and young adults. **Badger Publishing** (www.badger-publishing.co.uk/) has Reading Boxes that pull together the cream of newly published titles. There are now over a hundred for primary schools and another thirty for secondary schools. They include boxes on Africa and the Caribbean, Russia, China and the East and

Polish collections, containing books rich in information about the culture and countries—poetry, recipes, maps, history, folk tales and more.

For students who are looking for inspiration, **Cool-Reads** (www.cool-reads.co.uk/) was created by Tim and Chris Cross in 2001 when Tim was 11 and Chris 13. Reviews were sent in by readers around the world aged between 10 and 15. The results are archived here. Channel 4's **Book Box** (www.channel4learning.net/sites/bookbox/home.htm) hosts background information on favourite writers, poets and illustrators including Malorie Blackman, Jamila Gavin, James Berry and Benjamin Zephaniah as well as book extracts and writing tips. The British Council's **Contemporary Writers in the UK** site (www.contemporarywriters.com/), a searchable database, contains up-to-date profiles of some of the UK and Commonwealth's most important living writers—biographies, bibliographies, critical reviews, prizes and photographs.

encompassCulture (www.encompassculture.com/) is a worldwide online book group for adults, young adults (12-18) and children (3-12). You can download booklists, read and write book reviews, join in discussions with readers around the world on the web board, meet authors online and link up with reading groups around the world.

Kids on the Net (www.kidsonthenet.com/) was one of the first websites on the internet to invite children to submit their writing. Now there are thousands of Kids on the Net writers. You can send in your writing—poems, stories, articles and reports, opinions, writing about yourself—whether you write it at home, in a library or club, or anywhere else.



The Real Histories Directory

The **Real Histories Directory** (www.realhistories.org.uk) has been created as a resource tool for teachers, parents, pupils and the wider community to support them in their teaching and learning about cultural diversity in the UK. The website helps you to locate **resources** in your and other LEAs, such as storytellers, dual language books, culturally diverse toys and relevant **events** taking place in the UK. There are also items of **news** that may be of particular interest to schools and teachers.

You can also submit resources that you would like to include in the directory free of charge by visiting the site, clicking on 'Submit an entry' and following the on-screen instructions.

As well as the varied resources available, each month a new **Topic of the Month** is added with suggestions for using the Directory in the classroom and at home.

We are interested in hearing your views on our Topics and the Real Histories website. You can email comments and suggestions to: realhistories@runnymedetrust.org.