



Ofsted Subject Conference Report: English

Title: Does it matter? Developing wider reading at Key Stages 2 & 3

Venues: 6 July 2004, Institute of Education, London
8 July 2004, Hilton Hotel, Sheffield

Speakers:

- John Taylor, former HMI
- Kathy Lemaire, School Library Association
- Amelia Foster, National Literacy Trust
- Philip Jarrett HMI, Specialist Subject Adviser for English

Synopsis

The two conferences were attended by around 100 delegates in total. Invitations were processed through LEAs who were able to request two places each; one for an LEA adviser/consultant (who could promote developments within the authority) and one for an effective classroom practitioner, from either the primary or secondary sector. Some school/LEA librarians also attended. The main aim of the conferences was to share evidence from the English subject inspection programme for 2003-04 on how schools promote wider, independent reading. A second aim was to use the conference to share existing good practice. This was realised in two main ways: by involving effective teachers from schools visited by HMI; and by the use of speakers who were able to talk with knowledge about the promotion of reading, such as good library practice.

Summary of conference sessions

(1) *Reading, pupils and learning*: key-note talk by John Taylor

John Taylor opened the conference with an inspiring and thought-provoking talk, arguing that the reading curriculum is at the heart of any school and that "schools make readers". He expounded on the teacher's role and reminded delegates of the impact of language, and reading in particular, on life and learning; he said that, "books are humanity in print" and "teachers are bankers of the mind".

(2) *Review of Ofsted evidence about how schools promote pupils' wider, independent reading at Key Stages 2 and 3*, Philip Jarrett HMI.

Delegates were given evidence from Ofsted's subject inspection programme for 2003-04 on how schools promote wider, independent reading. Some of the key findings were shared with delegates.

- A high proportion of pupils claim to enjoy reading and recognise its value.
- Attitudes to reading decline as pupils get older and pupils in secondary schools find it harder to choose books they enjoy.
- Provision for promoting wider, independent reading is better at Key Stage 2 than Key Stage 3.
- Parents value reading highly and family attitudes have the strongest influence on children's reading habits.
- English teachers in both primary and secondary schools continue to place a high value on pupils reading for pleasure.
- A minority of teachers manages to find time to read widely for pleasure and these teachers frequently become powerful advocates for reading within the school and department.
- The study of particular whole texts and authors in primary schools frequently makes a very positive contribution to pupils' personal choice of reading.
- The study of whole texts in secondary schools too rarely has any positive impact on pupils' reading outside school or their own choice of reading material.
- Many schools provide a wide range of additional activities to support reading.
- Too few schools have considered sufficiently how to promote wider, independent reading as part of a whole school approach to reading.
- Too few secondary schools have successfully introduced whole school approaches to reading, including wider reading.
- Many pupils have a limited understanding about the benefits and pleasures of reading.

Areas that schools might wish to consider in attempting to improve provision included:

- management and curriculum issues: such as policies which include how wider reading will be promoted; schemes of work; evaluation of current provision; links with parents; and links between KS2 & KS3
- teacher intervention and support
- the role of school libraries and librarians in promoting independent reading
- issues for class teachers including: the teaching of whole texts, genres and authors; how teachers and departments keep in touch with new writing; and pupils' perceptions of the value of reading.

(3) *How school libraries can support pupils' wider reading in school*, Kathy Lemaire (School Library Association)

Kathy Lemaire talked about recent research findings which show that the school library can have a significant impact on student learning outcomes. She gave information about recent relevant publications and useful websites and provided copies of *School Libraries – making a difference*, which features case studies of successful practice and guidance on 'taking your library forward'. She referred to the recently published DfES advice on library and learning resource centre self-evaluation in primary and secondary schools.

- (4) *Reading for pleasure? A whole school priority*, Amelia Foster, (National Literacy Trust)

Amelia Foster also referred to research findings which show the educational advantages of being an enthusiastic and frequent reader. She talked about how the National Literacy Trust initiative, *Reading Connects*, can support schools to create opportunities for reading for pleasure and she gave numerous examples of ways to get pupils reading, including reluctant and unsuccessful readers.

- (5) Group sessions by phase

Primary

- a) *How effective primary schools promote reading*, Paul Wagstaff HMI

Paul Wagstaff, from the primary division in Ofsted, shared initial findings from recent research into the teaching of reading in primary schools, especially where it related to the issue of wider reading. He enumerated the factors, such as: the headteachers' interest; the involvement of parents; the availability of a wide range of books; and the use of libraries, which were commonly found in schools which were successful in teaching reading.

- b) *What one school does to promote wider reading*: presentations by Carole Hinstridge (Summercroft Junior School, Bishop Stortford) at the London conference and Caroline Caille (St Patrick's RC School, Mansfield) at the Sheffield conference

Carole Hinstridge and Caroline Caille explained the key features of their schools' successful practice, and the thinking underlying their approaches to teaching and promoting reading. Both stressed the study of class texts and the involvement of parents. They spoke of a focus on the authorial process and the importance of purposeful 'book talk', dialogue with pupils and engagement with texts.

Secondary

- a) *Wider reading and the Key Stage 3 Strategy*: talk by Daphne Denaro (London) and Morag Charlwood (Sheffield), regional consultants for *the Key Stage 3 Strategy*

Daphne and Morag talked about some of the ways in which the Key Stage 3 Strategy is seeking to emphasise the importance of wider, independent reading and shared

suggestions from consultants about recommended texts in primary and secondary schools.

- b) *What one school does to promote wider reading*: presentations by Liz Hanson (Crown Woods School) at the London conference and Mel Nasen and Sandra Dixon (Sidney Stringer School, Coventry) in Sheffield

Liz Hanson spoke about the whole-school measures taken by Crown Woods School to develop reading for pleasure, including the use of reading conferences, the development of the school library and links with parents. Mel Nasen and Sandra Dixon focused on the practical measures they were taking, as newly appointed head of department and librarian respectively, to develop reading for pleasure in Sidney Stringer School.

(6) Small group exchange of good practice

Delegates were given two opportunities during the day to discuss issues raised by any of the speakers, to talk about aspects of wider reading that concerned them and to describe what worked in their own school or LEA. These sessions were enthusiastically received and a great deal of productive networking took place.

Outcomes and next steps

- All delegates were required to identify the action they planned to take as a result of the conferences.
- Selected LEAs will be contacted during the school year 2004-05 to see what progress has been made in relation to the promotion of wider, independent reading.
- More details about Ofsted's evidence on wider, independent reading at key stages 2 and 3 will be contained in the subject report to be published next Spring.
- One theme of this year's subject inspection programme in English is likely to involve the identification of good practice in relation to school library provision.
- Information about a range of reading initiatives, together with case studies of good practice, can be found at www.readingconnects.org.uk.

Further information

For further information, please contact Phil Jarrett HMI, specialist adviser for English (philip.jarrett@ofsted.gov.uk)