



Journeys from images to words

Examining the efficacy of visual meaning-making strategies in the development of inclusive communities of critical readers

Executive Summary

This project involved researching, testing and evaluating a new approach to teaching and learning in order to enhance the language and literacy of children from diverse backgrounds and improve learning support at a time of changing educational needs. The increasing number of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds, many of them New Arrivals, presents both challenges and opportunities to schools in terms of teaching and learning. This new approach builds on the potential of image and visual strategies, often overlooked in the curriculum, as a means of addressing the complex issue of literacy development.

Funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation, this project was based in the School of Education, University of Glasgow and was an extension of previous research, *Visual Journeys: Exploring children's visual literacy through intercultural responses to wordless picturebooks* (funded by the University of Glasgow and the UK Literacy Association, UKLA, 2009-2010). Following the success of the visual strategies in previous projects involving small groups of readers (Arizpe 2009 & 2010) teachers were keen to explore the approach in a whole class setting with children of mixed ability literacy and language levels.

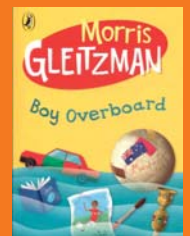
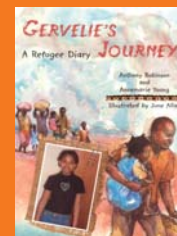
Project Aims

1. To adapt and advance the previously successful strategies to reading a variety of texts with different combinations of words and images to extend language and literacy in a whole class context (including EAL/ immigrant pupils and struggling readers).
2. To investigate children's visual and text-based home literacy practices through a visual medium to find the points of convergence and divergence with school literacy practices.
3. To approach the themes of migration, journeys and intercultural encounters in an inclusive manner through meaningful texts.
4. To involve all the participants in evaluating the efficacy of these strategies, through focus groups with children, interviews with teachers and the invitation to parents/carers to comment on a visual display of the children's work.



Project Organisation

This evaluative research project took place in two upper primary classrooms in Glasgow with a high multiethnic population, including asylum seekers and refugees. Workshops were held in collaboration with class teachers, EAL support teachers and the expert consultant to plan and evaluate the sessions. Three books were selected during the first workshop which reflected the theme of migration and journeys and had different combinations of words and images: from a picturebook to a chapter book with no images. Sessions were held in the mainstream classroom with between 25 and 32 pupils. The evaluation methods included classroom observation, teacher interviews, focus groups with pupils and detailed analysis of book talk data as well as pupils' work.



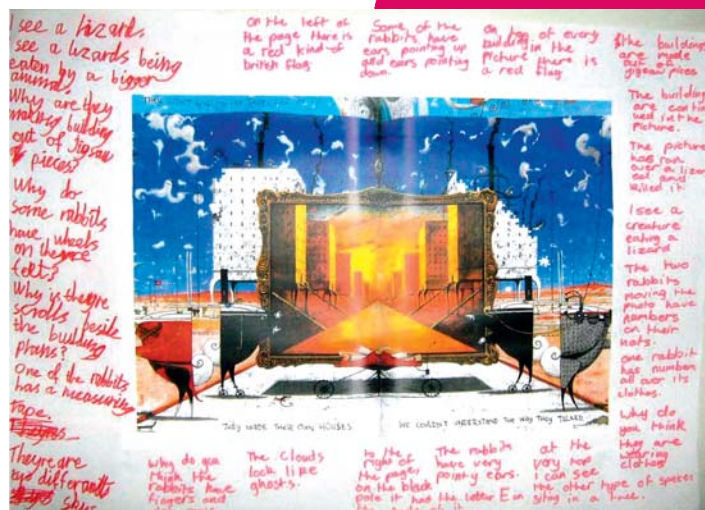
Descriptive Summary of Findings

Using visual strategies

- The children expanded their communicative language competencies, including the use of new vocabulary, in order to describe what they saw in the images and to express their ideas and feelings about the story, characters and other visual and textual aspects.
- The strategies provided a level playing field because there were no prior expectations about success or failure based on their traditional reading and writing skills and they made material more accessible and engaging to EAL pupils, visual learners and struggling readers.
- The children realised they needed to look closely, question, reflect on the role of image/text and of visual features (i.e. colours, symbols, body language) to make sense of the texts in order to construct meaning.
- The visual annotations and graphic representations of some of the figurative language provided a way into the text by clarifying concepts and feelings. Although close reading of the text (with no pictures) proved challenging, careful modeling of the task aided engagement.
- There was evidence of increased reflection on the interaction between words and images.

Building bridges between school and home community literacies

- Home literacy practices, including popular culture multimodal literacy practices for enjoyment and for functional purposes were brought into the classroom and presented and discussed so that there was a gradual emergence of home languages and cultures in the discussions and creative responses as well as a realization that these were valued in the classroom context.
- As children felt more comfortable bringing them in, multilingual texts began to be shared with peers.



Developing Intercultural understanding and empathy

- The potential and efficacy of children's literature for approaching intercultural topics was made evident as it provided a way into a meaningful discussion of issues around the 'Other', particularly different cultures, beliefs and languages.
- New Arrival pupils felt comfortable sharing their experiences and knowing they could opt in or out of the discussions or tasks.
- The impact on the affective domain could be observed as the pupils responded to the narratives and 'gave voice' to the characters in the texts and also through responses to the lived experiences of classmates. These responses revealed an increased understanding of the issues around forced migration and colonization in an affirmative and compassionate manner.
- The understanding of the reality of these situations contributed to a broadening of the intercultural knowledge base for the 'host' pupils with some moving beyond aspects of their own lives to empathise with the characters and contexts in the books and a few taking the issues 'off the page' and moving towards social action.

Developing a pedagogy for inclusion

- Authentic materials (children's literature) and real tasks for language development allowed shared and inclusive critical reading practices to emerge.
- Students evidenced an improvement in reading engagement and reading for enjoyment but more noticeably for boys and struggling readers as well as New Arrivals.
- Meaningful contexts helped develop intercultural links between all pupils in the classroom.
- The display of pupils' work and their presentations to families, carers and members of the school community was a source of pride to the participating children and situated migration and race relations in a central role.
- Teachers noted that Newly Arrived pupils began to participate more fully in the ongoing work of the class as they felt they had valuable contributions to make to the community of learning using texts they found appealing and relevant and using strategies designed to take better account of their prior knowledge and experience.
- New Arrival pupils were excited and engaged by the possibilities of storying their own journeys after encountering varied model texts.
- There was increased incidence of the use of Pupil voice, from both New Arrival and 'host' children and unique stories emerged.
- The teachers reported the impact on their practice and their continued use of these strategies with different texts given their effectiveness and flexibility.

Implications and Recommendations

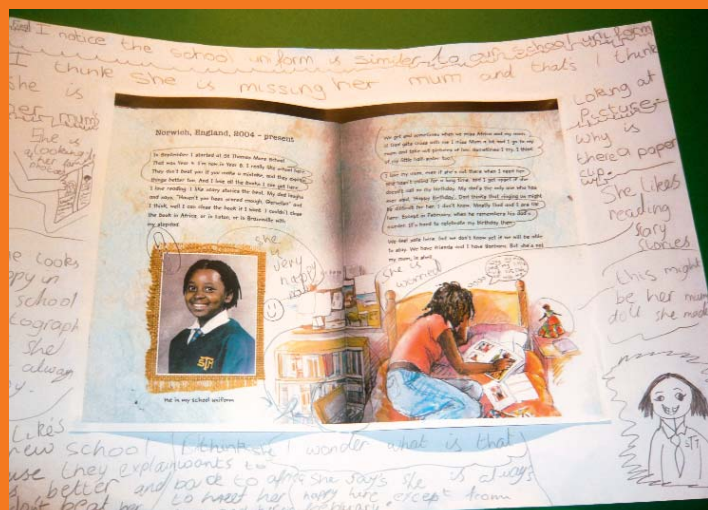
The current project suggests that in order to enhance the language and literacy of children from diverse backgrounds even more and continue to improve learning support it is important to build on the potential of image and visual strategies for encouraging multimodal responses as well as for creating reading communities which are inclusive and socially engaged.

In terms of learning support and pedagogy, it is therefore recommended that there should be:

- A wider use of picturebooks and other children's literature in the classroom that contain meaningful and contemporary themes related to children's lives;
- A more holistic vision of literacy development which includes language, emotions and the everyday home and popular culture literacy practices of all pupils;
- A wider space for critical readings of multimodal texts that includes increasing pupils' awareness of the codes of visual communication;
- A greater sense of how culturally responsive pedagogies can be used across the curriculum;
- A classroom ethos which encourages enjoyment and engagement in the learning tasks and enhances links to the community beyond the school.

In terms of further enquiry, it is recommended that this should include:

- Further research on the literacy backgrounds and needs of both New Arrival and indigenous children and how they can be integrated into the curriculum;
- Further research on the cognitive and affective processes involved in reading words and images in order to continue to develop pupil's deeper understandings of verbal and visual texts;
- Further research into potential intercultural resources, especially children's literature;
- Further research into teacher's particular professional needs in order to make the most of visual and culturally responsive pedagogical approaches.



Impact and Outcomes

***School Display of the children's work** for pupils, parents/carers and teachers in each of the participating schools

***Author Event with Morris Gleitzman** (award-winning children's author of *Boy Overboard*) and **Talk on Refugee and Asylum Seekers in Glasgow** with representatives from GRAMNet (Glasgow Refugee, Asylum and Migration Network), Scottish Refugee Council and Sandra White, MSP

***Exhibition of children's work** for academics, teacher educators and stakeholders in St Andrew's Building, School of Education, University of Glasgow

***Teaching Resource** to provide teachers with theoretically robust and practical strategies for classroom implementation

***Knowledge Transfer** to Initial Teacher Education students (Undergraduate and Postgraduate) and MEd in Children's Literature and Literacies, University of Glasgow

***National Dissemination Seminar** for stakeholders and academics hosted in the School of Education, University of Glasgow, June 2012

***Website** where Teaching Resource can be accessed and downloaded (under construction)

***Academic presentations and publications**

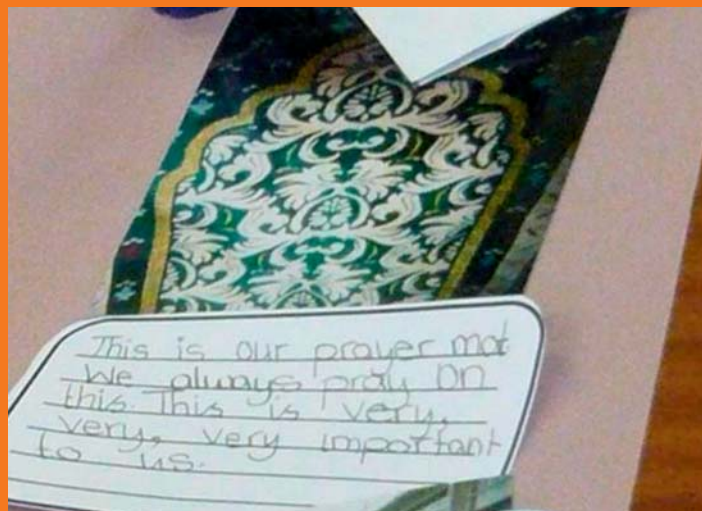
Keynote Presentation: 'Entre imágenes y palabras: la investigación que promueve comunidades lectoras inclusivas y creativas' International Symposium, *La literatura que acoge: infancia, inmigración y lectura*, Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona, Barcelona 2011.

'Journeys from Images to Words: Evaluating a collaborative visual approach to literacy research and pedagogy', UKLA 48th International Conference, Leicester 2012

'Translating the Migrant Experience into Words and Pictures: How it can work in an inclusive classroom' and 'Resilient Refugees and Empowered Readers', 33rd International Board on Books and Young People (IBBY) International Congress, London 2012

'Visualising Intercultural Literacy: Engaging with diversity and migration in the classroom through an image-based approach', *Language and Intercultural Communication Journal* (forthcoming)

'Inclusive Communities of Readers in Glasgow: A Case Study' in European Union Portfolio of Integration 'Supporting the Education and Integration of Migrant Children' (forthcoming)



Comments from Teachers and Pupils

Sylvia (EAL teacher):

" I thought the texts and visuals were a fabulous resource to have to engage the children and to get them talking and using that as a vehicle for them to share some of their experiences or even if they are not comfortable sharing them, at least they can relate to the children in the story or relate in some small way to the experiences of moving and being displaced. "

Tony (pupil):

" I don't really read a lot of books but because I've been reading these I really liked them. I'd like to get more books like them to help my reading for when I'm going into secondary school. "

Charlie (pupil):

" My favourite activity is putting all our work up and that's going to be good because everyone's parents are going to come and see how good everyone's done it. "

Shahid (pupil):

" See, I'm a refugee person, so I got lots of information about it and what did the other refugees do and that. I haven't had any story about it. And so it tells people that are not refugees how we have to survive to get to a new country and to be safer and happier. "

Janet (pupil):

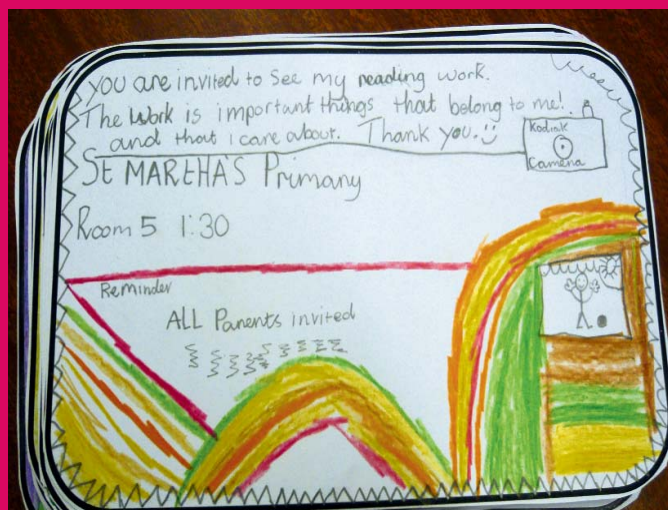
" I want to campaign. Make a campaign for refugees and see how many people would join in. "

Munir (pupil):

" I loved reading the books... It made me think about my family and our journey from Pakistan. It made me write my own journey story so that other people can know more about what can happen to families around the world. "

Patrick (pupil):

" I enjoyed this whole project [...] It's something that's you're learning and having fun at the same time [...] I've learned a lot because when you're looking at the stories, we didn't really know much about asylum seekers, you know, other people that are in need [and] the world shouldn't be like this. It should be better and everybody should be at peace so they should. "



References

- Arizpe, E. (2009) 'Sharing visual experiences of a new culture: Immigrant children in Scotland respond to picturebooks and other visual texts' in Evans, J. (ed) *Talking Beyond the Page: Reading and Responding to Picture Books*, London: Routledge. 134-151
- Arizpe, E. (2010) *Minority Voices Create Words for Wordless Picturebooks*. Paper presented at the 32nd International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY) Congress, Santiago de Compostela 2010. www.lit.org/wp-content/media/Documents/Arizpe%20comunicaci%F3n.pdf
- Arizpe, E., Colomer, T. and Martínez-Roldán, C. (forthcoming) *Visual Journeys through Wordless Picturebooks: an international enquiry with immigrant children*. Continuum Press.
- Arizpe, E. & McAdam, J. (2011) Crossing Visual Borders and Connecting Cultures: Children's responses to the photographic theme in David Wiesner's *Flotsam*, *New Review of Children's Literature and Librarianship* 17 (2) 227-243.
- Baumfield, V., Arizpe, E., Devlin, A. & Dickson, B. (2009) *Promoting Access to the Curriculum through Visual Literacy and Meaning Making in a Community of Inquiry* Paper presented at the International Symposium *Beyond Borders: Art, narrative and culture in picturebooks*, University of Glasgow, Glasgow 2009.
- Farrell, M., Arizpe, E. & McAdam, J. (2010) 'Journeys across visual borders with *The Arrival* by Shaun Tan: Annotated spreads as a method for understanding pupil's creation of meaning through visual images', *Australian Journal of Language and Literacy* 33 (3) 198-210.
- McAdam, J. & Arizpe, E. (2011). Journeys Into Culturally Responsive Teaching, *Journal of Teacher Education and Teachers' Work*, 2 (1) 18-27.
- McGonigal, J. & Arizpe, E. (2007) *Learning to Read a New Culture: How immigrant and asylum-seeking children experience Scottish identity through classroom books*. Final Report. Edinburgh: Scottish Government. www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/10/31125406/0

Research Team,
School of Education,
University of Glasgow:

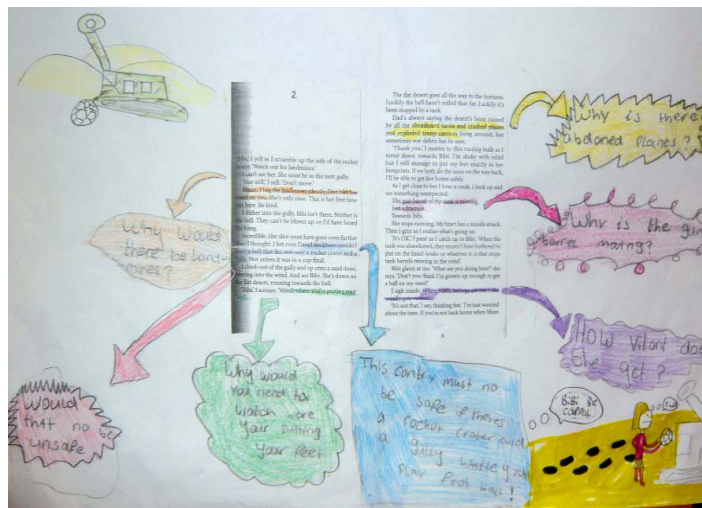
Dr. Evelyn Arizpe
Dr. Alison Devlin
Dr. Maureen Farrell
Ms Julie McAdam
Ms Caroline Bagelman



Consultant: Ms. Alayne Öztürk, President UKLA (United Kingdom Literacy Association), London Metropolitan University

For more information on publications, CPD and other courses on children's literature, diversity and culturally responsive pedagogy, please email Evelyn.Arizpe@glasgow.ac.uk

The core team also coordinate the Masters level programme: MEd in Children's Literature and Literacies www.glasgow.ac.uk/postgraduate/taught/childrensliteratureandliteracies



With thanks to Teachers and participating pupils of Holy Cross Primary School St. Martha's Primary School