



Poetry Train Executive Summary



An activity using poems and images at a Poetry Train session at the University of Roehampton



Student teachers discussing their favourite poems at a Poetry Train session at the University of Roehampton

Poetry Train

Poetry Train was a training programme designed by the Poetry Society that provided a poetry intervention to support student teachers who will go on to teach in primary schools. It aimed to improve these student teachers' ability and confidence in the teaching of poetry in order to engage pupils. Poet educators (professional poets with experience working in education settings) worked with student teachers at two higher education institutions, providing additional support, ideas and resources in teaching workshops as well as giving online mentoring over the course of an academic year (2011-2012).

Common provision included:

- sharing of poetry
- sharing/catch-up sessions with the lecturer and/or poet educator
- access to an online blog/wiki for sharing ideas, posting poems and sharing teaching experiences
- sharing of teaching activities and receiving support to enhance them.

Students came from Bishop Grosseteste University in Lincolnshire and University of Roehampton in Wandsworth. There are differences in the profiles of the two cohorts of students:

- University of Roehampton students were second year students studying for a BA in Education (B.Ed).
- Bishop Grosseteste University students were studying for a Postgraduate Certificate in Education (PGCE).

A team of researchers from the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) was commissioned to conduct this independent evaluation of Poetry Train and complete this report.

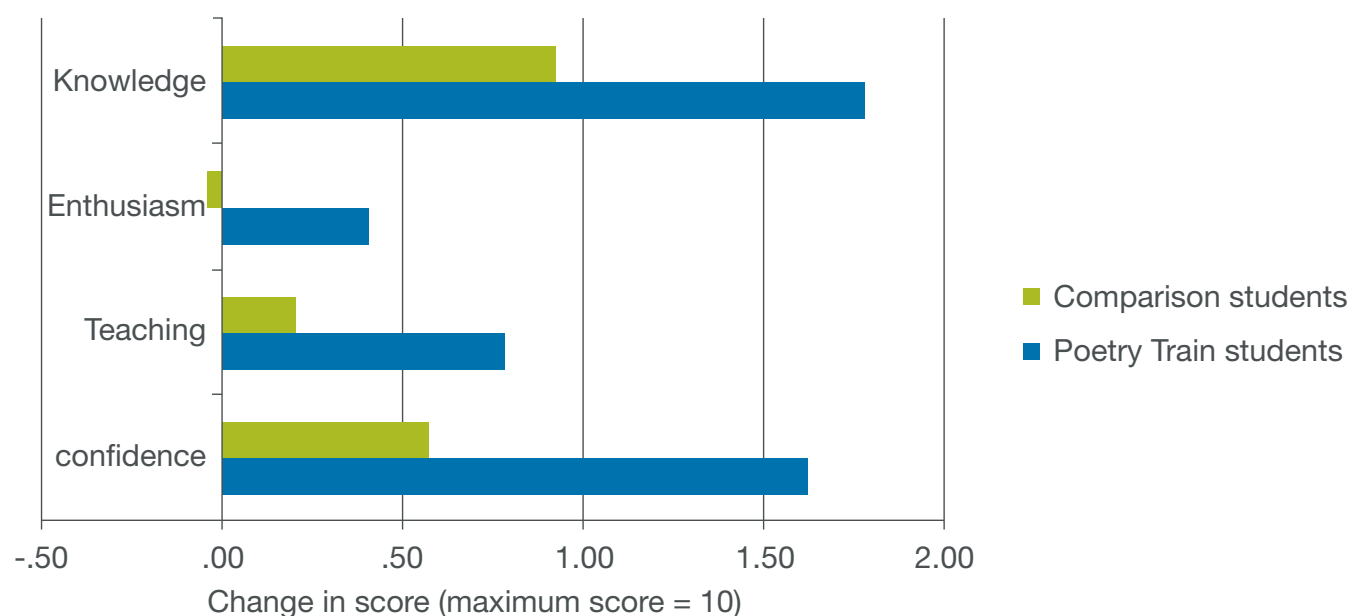
Key findings

The student teachers who participated in Poetry Train demonstrated significantly greater improvement in **knowledge** of and **enthusiasm** for poetry, **confidence** in teaching poetry, and acquisition of **teaching skills** than a comparison group.

These four domains of improvement were measured by before-and-after survey responses.

The analysis calculated an improvement score for each group on a scale of zero to ten¹, and these improvement scores are illustrated in Figure 1².

Figure 1². Improvement in score for each area, Poetry Train and comparison groups of student teachers.

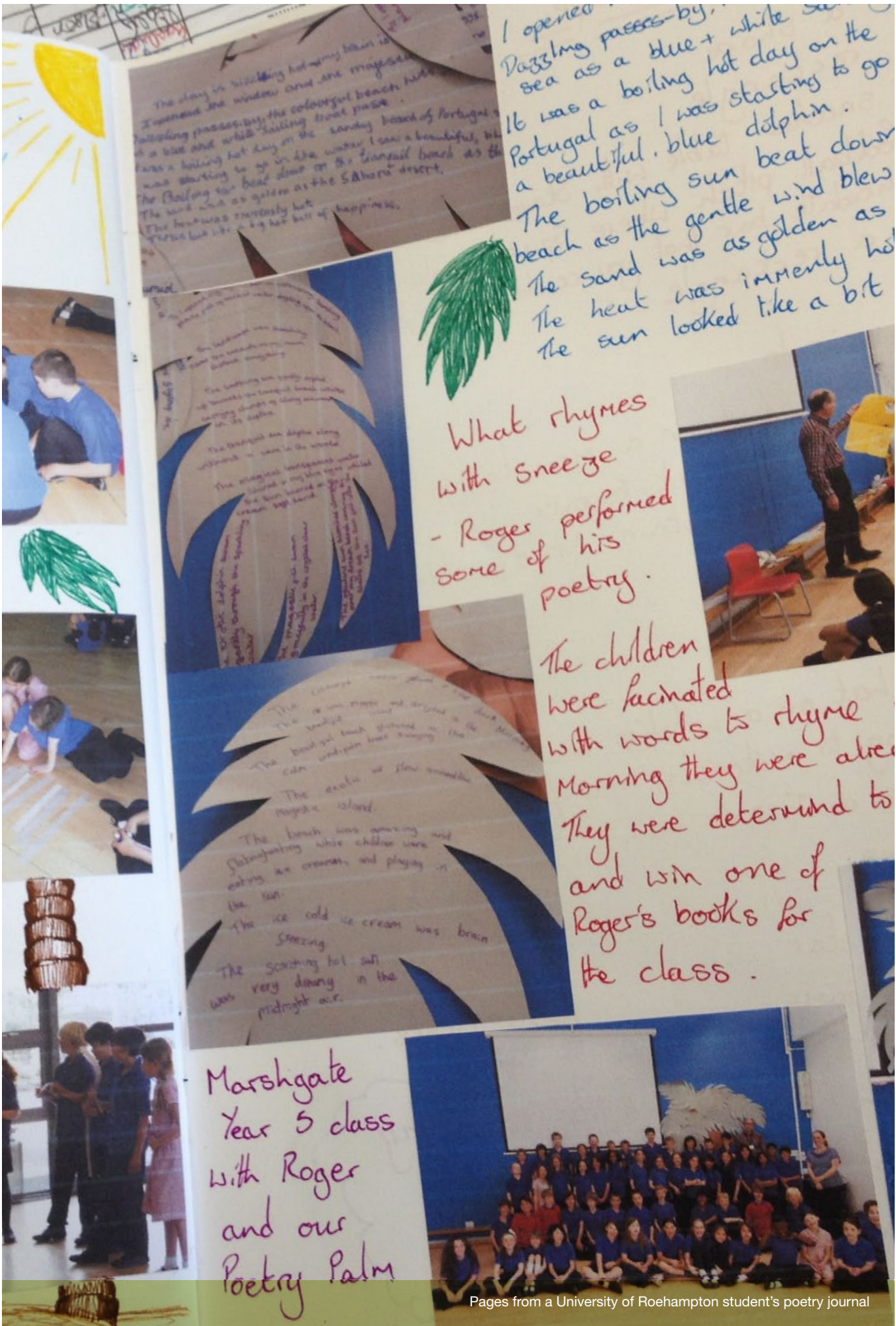


Student teachers and lecturers told the evaluators that the key factors in the effectiveness of the programme were:

- the poet educators, who motivated and inspired the student teachers with creative ways to teach poetry;
- the opportunity offered through the Poetry Train sessions for students to share ideas and experiences as a group, helping to boost the confidence and willingness of more resistant students.

¹ Each area of the survey included several questions. For each student, we combined question responses within each area to create an overall score for that area, based on a scale of zero to ten. This scale is an arbitrary measure which enabled us to compare change over time across the different areas. For instance, a score of zero in Knowledge would mean the student was unfamiliar with all aspects of poetry covered in the survey, while a score of ten would mean they were fully familiar with all the aspects of poetry covered in the survey. The average of student scores is the overall score for that area.

² This apparent decline in the Enthusiasm area among the comparison group is not significant, and as they had reasonably high levels of enthusiasm at the start of the study a gain in enthusiasm would not necessarily have been anticipated.



The day in scorching hot sunny town is
 Dazzling passes-by,
 It was a boiling hot day on the
 Portugal as I was starting to go
 a beautiful, blue dolphin.
 The boiling sun beat down
 beach as the gentle wind blew
 The sand was as golden as
 The heat was immensely hot
 The sun looked like a bit

I opened
 Dazzling passes-by,
 sea as a blue + white sea
 Portugal as I was starting to go
 a beautiful, blue dolphin.
 The boiling sun beat down
 beach as the gentle wind blew
 The sand was as golden as
 The heat was immensely hot
 The sun looked like a bit



What rhymes
 with sneeze
 - Roger performed
 some of his
 poetry.

The children
 were fascinated
 with words to rhyme
 Morning they were able
 They were determined to
 and win one of
 Roger's books for
 the class.

Marshgate
 Year 5 class
 with Roger
 and our
 Poetry Palm

Pages from a University of Roehampton student's poetry journal



Student teachers share a book at a Poetry Train session at the University of Roehampton



Student teachers discussing a group activity at a Poetry Train session at the University of Roehampton

Knowledge about poetry

Poetry Train student teachers:

- **made most progress in the Knowledge area compared to other domains, and significantly greater progress than the comparison group**
The Poetry Train group achieved 36 per cent of their potential improvement in this area, against eight per cent in the comparison group
- **were more familiar after the intervention with children's, adults', contemporary and classic poetry**
Nearly 85 per cent felt fully or quite familiar with children's poetry after the training, an increase of 27 percentage points
- **made more improvement than comparison student teachers in familiarity with a variety of styles/types of poetry, the use of language and rhythm, and with poetry terminology**
Familiarity with terminology increased by 34 percentage points in the Poetry Train group, against an increase of ten percentage points in the comparison group.

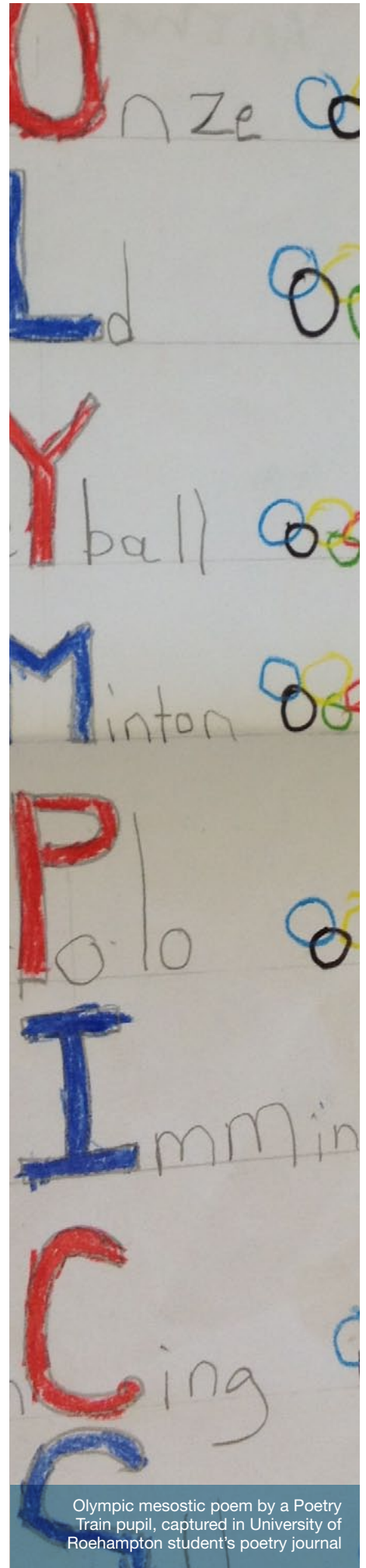
Student teachers reported that Poetry Train improved their familiarity with many aspects of poetry. For six of the nine questions in this area, over 70 per cent said they were 'fully' or 'quite' familiar; and for five of those six questions, the proportion exceeded 80 per cent. These levels of self-assessed knowledge after a relatively short intervention are promising, particularly as the research participants (student teachers, their lecturers and the poet educators) noted that student teachers' poetry knowledge tends to build up slowly.

Enthusiasm for poetry

Poetry Train student teachers:

- **made a small amount of progress in this area, having started the training with a fairly high level of enthusiasm. They nevertheless made significantly more progress than the comparison group**
The Poetry Train group achieved 11 per cent of their potential improvement in this area, while the comparison group's enthusiasm hardly changed
- **were enthusiastic about the educational benefits of learning poetry**
100 per cent agreed that learning poetry helps pupils to understand literature and genres
- **were more aware after the intervention of poetry's positive influence on pupils' emotional and personal development**
The proportion of students agreeing that poetry boosts pupils' self-esteem increased by 25 percentage points.
- **cited reading poems aloud as one of the most popular ways of engaging with poetry.**

Student teachers who had initially been unwilling to engage with poetry said that the enthusiasm of the poet educator, their lecturers and fellow students, as well as positive personal experiences of teaching poetry, helped to boost their enthusiasm.



Olympic mesostic poem by a Poetry Train pupil, captured in University of Roehampton student's poetry journal

Teaching poetry

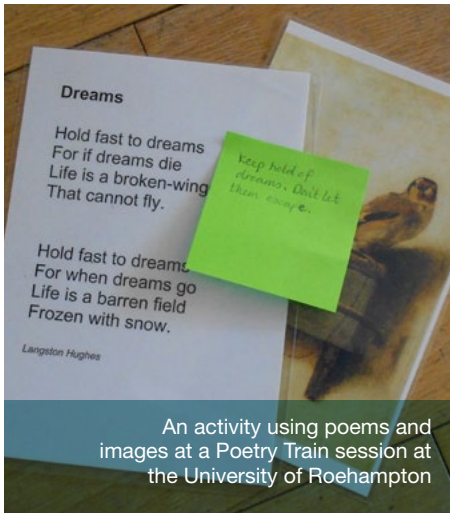
Poetry Train student teachers:

- **made significantly more progress in the Teaching Skills area than the comparison group**
The Poetry Train group achieved 24 per cent of their potential improvement in this area, against six per cent in the comparison group
- **were much less likely after the intervention to feel they need more support in their poetry teaching**
There was a decrease of 34 percentage points in those believing they needed more support
- **had a better understanding of the value of sharing poetry with their class without follow up analysis**
There was a 28 percentage point increase in appreciation of this
- **were enthusiastic about including poetry in the classroom environment and engaging pupils with poetry on a regular basis**
98 per cent thought it important to include poetry in the classroom environment
- **were much better informed after the intervention about resources they can use to support their teaching**
80 per cent said they knew how to find good teaching resources, a 40 percentage point increase
- **had demonstrated learning about different ways of teaching poetry, including using it in a cross-curricular manner and using less traditional, more interactive activities**
93 per cent agreed that it is beneficial for poetry to be taught across the curriculum.

Confidence in teaching poetry

Poetry Train student teachers:

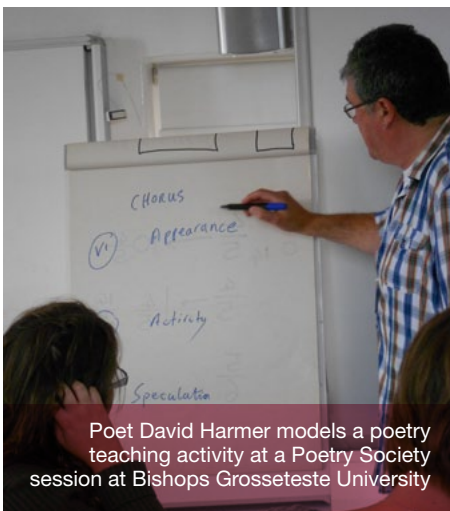
- **made significantly more progress in the Confidence area than the comparison group**
The Poetry Train group achieved 36 per cent of their potential improvement in this area, against 12 per cent in the comparison group
- **were much more likely after the intervention to feel confident in understanding, responding to and teaching poetry**
The proportion of students who felt very or quite confident about teaching poetry increased by 43 percentage points to 84 per cent
- **were more confident after the intervention in using techniques such as drama or setting poems to music**
90 per cent were very or quite confident about using drama and role play after the training
- **were much more confident after the intervention about teaching specific groups of learners, such as children with special educational needs**
There was a 43 percentage point increase in confidence here.



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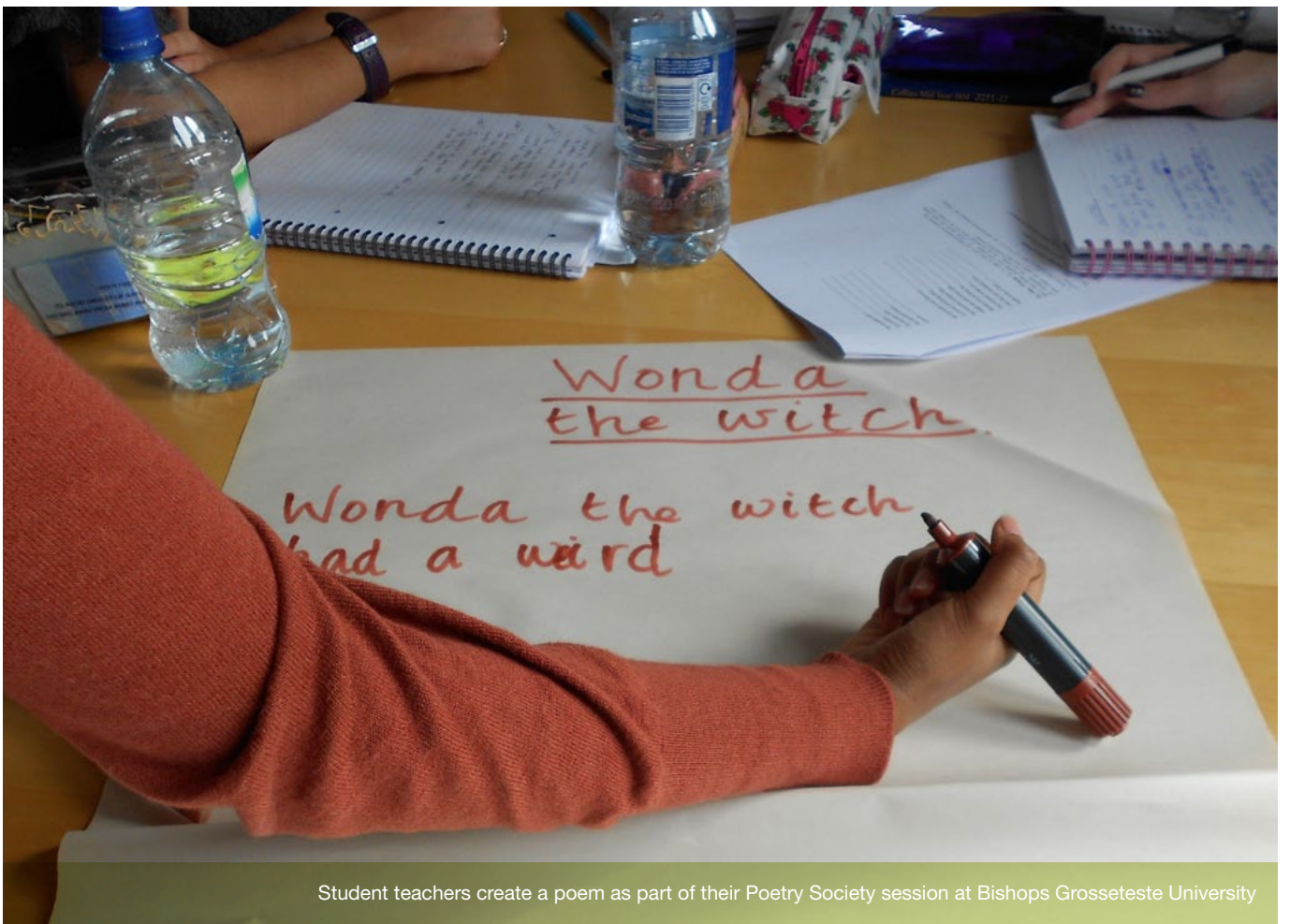
Poems in unusual places around the University of Roehampton for World Poetry Day



Poet David Harmer models a poetry teaching activity at a Poetry Society session at Bishops Grosseteste University



Primary school pupil at work



Student teachers create a poem as part of their Poetry Society session at Bishops Grosseteste University



'Real live poet' David Harmer at a Poetry Society session at Bishops Grosseteste University

Conclusion

As these students move into their teaching careers, they are more likely to try to teach poetry creatively than they would have been in the absence of the Poetry Train intervention; students in the group interviews described themselves as more ‘adventurous’ and ‘willing to take risks’ with poetry.



Recommendations

The evaluation has found that an intervention such as Poetry Train breaks down some student teachers’ resistance to teaching poetry. Resources that could be used more widely by student and newly qualified teachers would be valuable.

The Poetry Train programme was initially designed to focus on the confidence and skills of the student teachers rather than their pupils. However, the small amount of research that was carried out with the pupils of these teachers (included in the full report) demonstrated positive initial results. Further research would be useful to provide more evidence of the benefits for pupils taught by Poetry Train-educated student teachers.



About the research

This report draws on evidence from the following sources:

- Post- and pre-intervention student teacher and pupil questionnaires (referred to as 'before' and 'after' questionnaires throughout the report)
- Group interview sessions with Poetry Train student teachers
- Interviews with university lecturers involved in Poetry Train
- Interviews with the poet educators.

In order to measure the impact of Poetry Train in comparison to the usual initial teacher training provision offered by the institutions involved, a group of student teachers who were not participating in the Poetry Train sessions were also asked to complete questionnaires before and after the Poetry Train teaching period.

Fifty-four Poetry Train students and 38 comparison students completed both before and after questionnaires. Additionally, the evaluation surveyed pupils of Poetry Train students: 312 pupils completed both before and after questionnaires.



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The Poetry Society was founded in 1909 to promote a "more general recognition and appreciation of poetry". Since then, it has grown into one of Britain's most dynamic arts organisations, representing British poetry both nationally and internationally.

www.poetrysociety.org.uk

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