



Developing literacy across learning in S1

Case study from Portobello High School

Introduction – Literacy as a skill for life

Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) defines literacy as *‘the set of skills which allows an individual to engage fully in society and in learning, through the different forms of language, and the range of texts, which society values and finds useful’*.

(Principles and practice: Literacy across learning, 2009).

In simple terms, this means that it is important for all learners to be able to:

- communicate effectively using their **talking and listening** skills
- communicate effectively using their **writing** skills
- use their **reading** skills for understanding, analysis and evaluation.

We used this as a starting point for our series of S1 literacy lessons. We designed the lessons to focus on the concept of literacy as a skill for life, as well as on the importance of developing these key literacy skills across subjects.

At Portobello High School, we have a dedicated working group that meets regularly to share responsibility for developing, implementing, maintaining, and evaluating literacy initiatives within the school. The working group has representatives from a variety of different faculties, and our priority is to highlight that literacy across learning is the responsibility of all teachers. It was decided that our primary focus would be learners in S1, so that we could effectively chart their progression and the impact of these lessons as they moved through the school.

After taking part in the ‘literacy across learning’ programme, the impact and effectiveness of these lessons was evaluated with a view to further develop the lessons and plan for progression into S2 and beyond. These lessons have also recently been used as a starting point for planning an S3 project where pupils will track their own literacy skills across their subjects, with the aim of gathering evidence for National Literacy Units, as well as unlocking further learning.

S1 literacy project

After carrying out junior school pupil evaluations, focus groups and tracking learners through their various subjects, it was clear that the majority of pupils associated the term ‘literacy’ with the subject ‘English’. When asked the question, ‘What are literacy skills?’ the majority of learners answered ‘English’ or ‘writing’. After these initial investigations, it became apparent that we needed to shift pupil perception that literacy is a skill that is only developed during English lessons. So, it was important

for us that this series of literacy lessons was not delivered by the English teacher during English classes, and that the literacy lessons were designed to encourage pupils to apply their literacy skills as well as make links between subjects.

We approached the English department with this proposal and it was agreed that pupils would be taken out of their English class for one period a week to participate in a series of six literacy lessons in the school library (see *literacy across learning lessons 1-6*). The school librarian would deliver the literacy lessons and the English teacher would accompany the class to the library to offer support. It was important that pupils saw the librarian as their 'Literacy teacher' instead of making that association with their English teacher. The school librarian plays an invaluable role in our Literacy Working Group and it was through close collaboration with them that the lessons were designed. When planning these lessons, the Literacy Experiences and Outcomes were consulted at the relevant level and the lessons were designed to develop the corresponding literacy skills.

The lessons were planned to focus on the following objectives:

- To enable understanding of what literacy means and its importance in everyday life.
- To practice listening and talking for learning.
- To show understanding of a text using different reading roles.
- To learn about the different ways that we can understand a source by using different thinking and questioning skills.
- To understand the difference between skimming and scanning and to be able to take effective notes
- To understand what reliability means, and to be able to assess a source of information and decide on its reliability
- To understand the importance of acknowledging sources.

Initially, we piloted these lessons with a mixed ability S1 class, to identify any immediate development needs. These lessons were well received and it was encouraging to observe pupils engaging with complex ideas and applying their literacy skills outside of the English classroom.

The programme was then rolled out and the lessons were immediately met with enthusiasm from both pupils and staff. Pupils enjoyed working in an environment outside of the classroom, where they could engage in a number of active learning activities, as well as access a variety of media. Teachers identified the importance of the work being done and appreciated being able to work with smaller groups of pupils. This enabled them to provide more individual attention and assess specific learner needs while the school librarian was delivering the lesson.

As the lessons progressed, small changes were made to the differentiation and timing of the lessons, based on observations that we conducted and feedback we received from English teachers. For small sets of pupils who required additional support, the lessons were significantly revised to provide more support when accessing texts. However, the existing differentiation in mixed sets – as well as the opportunities for teacher and peer support – meant that the original lessons were accessible and beneficial for all other classes.

Progression in S1

After the series of six literacy lessons, it was important that pupils continued to make use of their literacy skills and identify their use across various subjects. As a working group, we decided to link up with the Interdisciplinary Learning (IDL) Working Group and incorporate the literacy Outcomes within ongoing IDL projects. To facilitate the progression of S1 pupils' literacy skills, we chose to focus on the S1 *Scotland and its People* IDL project, to assess how pupils were using their literacy skills in each subject area.

The *Scotland and its People* project takes place every year in January and most subjects within the school take part, providing a different experience for pupils. Some examples of subject involvement include:

Science – Pupils spend a week finding out about the work of famous Scottish scientists through research, practical work and producing presentations.

Geography – Pupils access a variety of sources and texts to learn about Scottish farming.

Mathematics – Pupils take a tour of Scotland, learning some interesting facts about its history while allowing opportunities to practice their mathematical skills.

Home Economics – Pupils learn how to source Scottish ingredients and learn how to make Scotch broth and oatcakes.

Music – Pupils learn what makes Scottish music sound 'Scottish'. They then compose and perform a range of Scottish music.

Physical Education – Pupils work collaboratively to learn about, and perform, Scottish country dances.

History – Pupils look at life in Medieval Scotland, including: farming, homes, diet and the Army. Pupils then work collaboratively to create a 'Marketplace' presentation.

Craft, Design and Technology (CDT) – Working with the History department, pupils produce a Coat of Arms using a 3D modelling package.

English – Pupils learn about, and practice, Scots vocabulary in order to write and perform a short piece of drama or a song in Scots.

Religious and Moral Education (RME) – Pupils explore the ancient world of Celtic Scotland; its people, beliefs, stories, music and art. They then research the arrival and impact of Christianity on this Celtic world.

Art – Pupils design illuminated letters based on the *Book of Kells*.

Computing – Pupils work together to create a group Wiki on the computer games industry in Scotland.

Modern Studies – Pupils research and study Scotland's place in the world, as well as in Scotland.

At the launch of this IDL project, pupils were told that they would be using their literacy skills in each subject. To keep this simple, we focused on the three key elements of the literacy framework, which are:

- listening and talking
- reading
- writing

It is clear that a number of literacy skills are already imbedded within classroom experiences and we asked all staff participating in the *Scotland and its People* project to inform us which Literacy Experiences and Outcomes they would be covering in their lessons. Staff were then asked to highlight these literacy skills to pupils when delivering their lessons, in order to raise awareness. The idea was that pupils should be able to make links between subjects and understand that the skills they develop are transferable to other subjects, eg essay writing skills taught in English can also be used for extended research projects in Art.

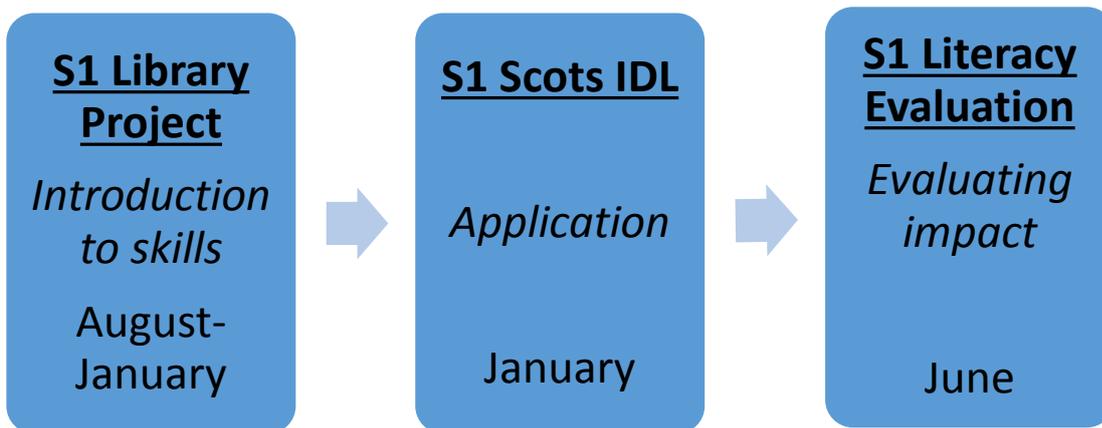
At the end of the IDL project, all pupils took part in an 'evaluation' lesson, where they were asked to identify the literacy skills they used in each subject. Pupils worked in groups to 'mind-map' their ideas and present their feedback to the class. These presentations were then assessed by the class teacher with a focus on the Literacy Experiences and Outcomes for Talk.

These evaluative mind-maps were then uploaded onto our 'literacy across learning' blog, along with examples of some of the activities the pupils participated in.

Examples of evaluative mind-maps



Literacy progression across S1



Evaluations

At the end of their time in S1, pupils were asked to complete the following evaluation:

S1 literacy lessons evaluation

1. In your library lessons you developed your literacy skills. What is literacy and how do you use it in your everyday life?
2. Please rate how much you think your skills have improved:

	My skills have		
	improved a lot	improved a little	stayed the same
Finding a book in the library			
Finding information in a book			
Skimming and scanning			
Bloom's Taxonomy			
Deciding if information is trustworthy			
Referencing			

3. Which of the following skills do you think have been most useful in your other subjects? Circle the ones you find most useful.

Skimming and scanning

Reading roles

Bloom's Taxonomy

Referencing

Using a book

Using a website

Reliability of information

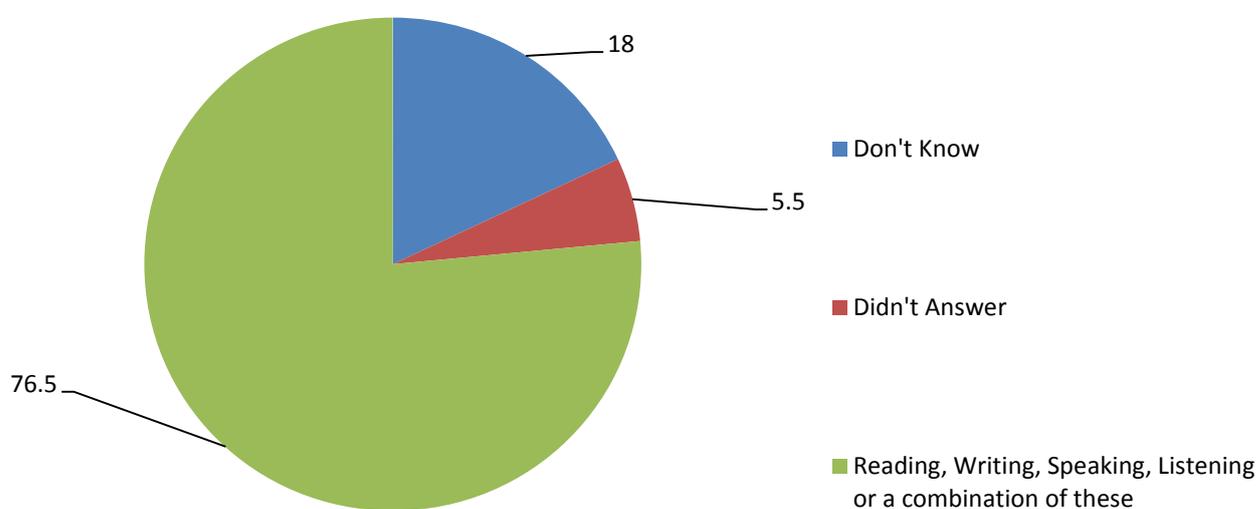
4. Where would you be able to use these skills in other subjects? Give examples.
5. What did you enjoy about the library lessons?
6. Is there anything else you would like to see included?
7. Because of its important role in our daily life, our literacy skills affect our confidence, career prospects and social skills. Why do you think that it is important to develop your literacy skills?

Impact of 'literacy across learning' lessons

The results were then collated in order to measure the impact of this project.

Pupil evaluation feedback

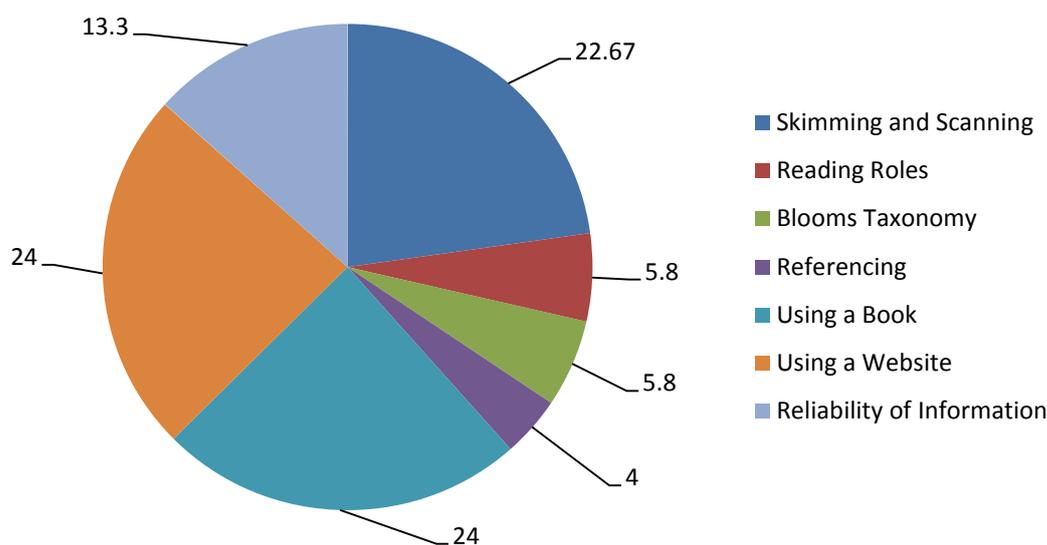
1. What is literacy?



2. Please rate how your skills have improved

Finding a book in the library			Finding information in a book			Skimming and scanning			Bloom's Taxonomy			Deciding if information is trustworthy			Referencing		
improved a...																	
lot	little	stayed the same	lot	little	stayed the same	lot	little	stayed the same	lot	little	stayed the same	lot	little	stayed the same	lot	little	stayed the same
47%	38%	15%	42%	43%	15%	46%	32%	22%	20%	48%	32%	35%	54%	11%	34%	48%	18%

3. Which of the following skills do you think have been most useful in your other subjects?



4. Where would you be able to use these skills in other subjects?

When we used a book to find information in science	English, RME, HE, History and Modern Studies – because you read things
When we scanned text in French	Finding a statement or a quote in a book quickly. Finding the book you're looking for quickly
Taking information from text	Understanding problems in Computing and Maths
Reading and writing in text and exam. Also skimming through information and tackling tough questions in order	Using a website in Computing Science
Finding information, statement or quotes in a book	History when finding information
If you were doing a talk you skim through the information and choose the key points	Whilst writing essays in all my subjects
Looking for information in the text	Working together and reading in Science
Reading a piece of information in History	RME for reading through paragraphs to answer questions
In RME we had to pick out information in a long text	Skimming and scanning could be used in a lot of subjects like French and Maths

French because if you didn't understand a text you could use skimming and scanning to find words you know	When reading texts of information, Business Education, Science
Reading a book in English and reliability in Maths	Science for finding textbook information and Business Education to use websites
Reading a book in English. Reliability in Maths	When making an essay or a project that needs info
Writing an essay or a short book	In maths looking for information
When you need to find information for a project, so any subject	Computing and CDT when using a website
Finding information for a poster	Sharing ideas in other subjects
Tests, revision, essays	English – book review, close reading. History – finding a book, picking out information
Looking for facts in history, science	Working in groups in English and Computing
English when analysing books	History – reading and referencing
Finding information in some subjects	Finding information in textbooks

Pupil feedback

- “Literacy is important in our daily life as we use it almost all the time. We use it in schools, work and also in our free time (reading, texting, talking to our friends etc.). I am using literacy right now as I am typing this comment. Literacy is especially important in the 21st century as some jobs have changed and some have never existed. Schools are now educating us for jobs to come, ones that don't exist now. Who knows what qualifications we will need in the future?*

In school we use literacy in many different ways. In English for example we use it to write essays, communicating with peers and reading books in class. A subject that you might not expect us to use literacy in is Music. In Music you use literacy for group work and again communicating with other peers. Outside of school you use literacy for talking to friends, texting, reading and many other things. Without literacy life would be very different.”
- “I think that one of the main reasons literacy is so important in our lives is because words have power. The words you use can convince someone to see your side of the story, they can tell someone why you would be a good person to work for them, they can start wars. Speeches like Martin Luther King's famous ‘I Have a Dream’ can resonate through history, or change the way people think forever. Words can inspire a person to do amazing or terrible things, they can tell us about what life was like hundreds of years ago or on the opposite side of the world. I think that all these things are why we have evolved to use literacy so much, why it is a part of almost every aspect*

of our lives. As humans literacy is what makes up our past, present and our future.”

- 3. “To me, literacy means being able to communicate with people, read instructions, interpret pictures into words, write out something, browse the internet and research something of personal interest. I think it is especially important in the 21st century because just about everything from simply texting someone or talking over the phone to writing a long report or creating a spreadsheet on a computer involves literacy. I probably use literacy more than I use any other skill throughout any of my subjects. I use it to copy information in subjects such as Mathematics, history, R.M.E, Geography, Science and Modern Studies. I use it to write out reports in all my subjects except Maths and the same goes for using literacy to finish homework for those subjects. When I am outside of school I still continue to use literacy for most things. I use it to read signs on the way home from school. I use it to search for a specific video on YouTube. I use it to read song lyrics. Even during the times that I play video games I still use these literacy skills.”*

Lessons learned

After collating this feedback, it became apparent that pupils had engaged with and learned from these lessons. However, it was clear that there were a few areas that we needed to adapt and improve. The evaluation questionnaire and pupil focus groups showed that pupils were not fully engaged with the Bloom’s Taxonomy lesson, nor did they feel they could effectively judge the reliability of a source.

The lessons were then adapted accordingly to break down some of the more difficult concepts for pupils and also to include a wider variety of texts. The new lessons have less emphasis on written texts and incorporate more listening and talking activities to sustain pupil engagement and introduce these key components of the National Literacy Units. These adapted lessons have been delivered this year and we plan to conduct the same evaluations to assess the impact of this change.

Future plans

This series of literacy lessons focuses on the skills which are fundamental to all areas of learning. This learning experience in S1 is designed so that pupils are given opportunities to develop their critical and creative thinking, as well as their listening and talking, reading, writing and team-working skills. After the S1 evaluations, it has been encouraging to see that pupils are making links between subjects and have an understanding of transferable literacy skills. As well as highlighting the importance of these skills to pupils, this is also something that, as a working group, we plan to promote to all staff within the school. All staff have the responsibility to make important contributions to the development of pupils’ literacy skills and it is clear that

many of the Literacy Experiences and Outcomes are already embedded within learners' classroom experiences across subjects. Moving into next year, it is now a priority to make sure that all staff have an awareness of the literacy initiatives within the school to ensure that they have a shared understanding and shared responsibility for making sure pupils make good progress in developing their literacy skills.

We are planning a series of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) sessions which will be delivered to all staff at an in-service day. We will use these sessions to:

- inform staff about current literacy initiatives
- show the pupil evaluations and focus group videos to staff
- facilitate a workshop, using subject exam scripts, where staff identify the literacy skills essential for their subject area

In session 2015–16, we are embarking on a project which will focus on the tracking of pupils' literacy skills across subjects. Pupils in S3 will use ICT to track and record their own learning and identify where they use their literacy skills in different subject areas. This project will also contribute to the evidence for the SQA National Literacy Units and will be published as a Case Study in 2016.

Portobello High School progress plan

