



‘Love the Words’: A discussion of  
how Literature can inspire  
successful Welsh futures

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Dr. Jude Brigley, MA, PhD  
& Literature Wales

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Llenyddiaeth  
Cymru  
Literature  
Wales

## 1. Context

“Young people’s experience at school should have stimulated their imaginations in ways that engender excitement, are personally fulfilling and foster creative thinking...”

---Graham Donaldson

This paper has been commissioned by Welsh Government as a discussion paper for use by the Languages, Literacy and Communication Area of Learning and Experience group. It is intended to:

- spark debate;
- urge consideration of the richness of Welsh Literature in Welsh and English languages;
- focus on the transformative power of reading;
- show that apposite intervention by a teacher, librarian or writer, can change a pupil’s aspirations and self-belief;
- show ways in which reading is central to successful futures;
- and give examples of available experiences in Wales which could be part of pupils’ entitlement.

It outlines:

- **core knowledge/concepts and associated skills and competencies** essential for ages 3-16
- **progression** for the above and an indication of what pupils should learn and experience at ages 5, 8, 11, 14, 16
- how the Cross-Curricular Responsibilities, wider skills and Welsh dimension/international perspectives can be **embedded in relation to oracy**

It links to the four central purposes of Donaldson’s *Successful Futures* (2015), where children and young people in Wales develop as:

- **ambitious, capable learners** ready to learn throughout their lives
- **enterprising, creative contributors** ready to play a full part in life and work

- **healthy, confident individuals** ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society
- **ethical, informed citizens** ready to be citizens of Wales and the world

Donaldson recognizes the transformative power of reading:

“Exposure to literature extends children and young people’s understanding of the power of language. It can stimulate imagination, challenge thinking and introduce new ideas”

---Graham Donaldson

This paper seeks to demonstrate what such ‘exposure’ could look like.

Clearly, reading contributes to literacy, language development and communication, but we maintain that Literature is also an expressive subject, and contributes fully to that area of study. Writing and reading are inextricably linked and the best way to understand writing is to try it oneself. The Creativity Wheel, constructed by Arts Council England (see Appendix 1) is as applicable to reading/writing as it is to other art forms such as theatre and music. We start to read a book with curiosity, wondering what will happen, but in order to find out, we have to be patient and persistent. We enter the world of imagination, achieving *flow* as we read. To read intently takes discipline and persistence but rather than being passive, we talk to characters in our heads, have dialogue with the writer, and emerge to share opinions with friends and family, and sometimes with a wider network. For this reason, and because our reading has clear links with our writing, aspects of reading lie with the expressive arts.

Similarly, Literature contributes to the Humanities through its reflections on society, history and environmental issues. It is worth mentioning the research, explored later, which shows that reading helps our sense of well-being, helps us have a place in the world, and also offers places to which we can escape. By developing empathy, it can contribute to a more altruistic and reflective world.

For these reasons, we recommend that this paper should be shared with the groups researching other Areas of Learning and Experience.

Before continuing, it is worth listing some of the premises that underpin this paper:

1. All children should have access to texts which interest and excite them.
2. Where possible the word text, rather than book has been used to include interactive texts, graphic novels, and games with clear narrative structures.
3. Libraries and librarians have a large part to play in education. They are gatekeepers to a world of imagination.
4. Meeting with writers and hearing them read is a powerful motivator, and when those writers are of Wales, they provide essential and relevant role-models.
5. Poetry is at the heart of Literature.
6. Performance brings a text alive, whether a pupil observes or takes part.
7. Talking about books enables pupils to develop critical and creative thinking.
8. Experiences such as those found through Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre, the Writers on Tour funding scheme, spoken word and poetry slam competitions etc. have a significant role in providing valuable applied learning for pupils (see section 2.3).
9. Welsh publishers encourage talent, but more is needed to support teachers to select texts from Wales.
10. Reading and writing have a symbiotic relationship.
11. Literature can provide knowledge about language and contributes to the development of literacy.

## 1.1 The unique relationship of Wales with Literature

“Literature gives language an intellectual, emotional, context-transcending home”  
---Rajvi Glasbrook-Griffiths, Literacy Leader at Glan Usk Primary School

Wales has a long tradition of writing, both in English and Welsh. Contemporary writers continue to turn a mirror on our society, and to distil, critically examine, and discuss Welsh experiences. In so doing, they contribute to the debates of the moment, offer knowledge of shared experiences, and make the familiar unfamiliar in a process of disassociation which forces us look again at things we take for granted. In our industrial past, Literature had an important role in raising the spirits and consciousness of our forefathers (and mothers) whose pennies raised libraries throughout the Valleys. Their discussions centred on the Bible as a text, but also on novelists, such as Dickens, and poets, like Tennyson. Henry Volla Morton, writing in the 1930s about his travels around

Wales, was surprised to hear miners discussing the writings of Einstein and Alexander Pope. In his study of working-class reading *The Intellectual Life of the British Working Class*, Jonathan Rose lists books by Dickens, Ruskin, Rossetti, and Shakespeare, which were available, and read in working class homes. Rose quotes a miner of the 1930s as saying that:

“At such times [when reading] we did not feel we were colliers doing menial and dangerous jobs in the bowels of the earth, but privileged human beings exposed to something extraordinary”

---Welsh miner, quoted by Jonathan Rose

The reason for reading – worth remembering – is that such practice allowed people, like Aneurin Bevan and Vernon Hartshorn, to develop the linguistic abilities that enabled them to discuss, evaluate and make sense of the world, and thus genuinely contribute to a democratic society.

The power of Literature to expand the mind, and give people dreams and aspirations cannot be underestimated. We are once again increasingly faced with widespread and increasing socio-economic deprivation in Wales. Schools are rightly concerned with closing the gap for children born into poverty. Glan Usk Primary School teacher Rajvi Glasbrook-Griffiths has spoken of her impoverished background and how the school library was “my salvation”. That word is significant as it points to the transformative power of Literature in raising aspiration, and allowing people, as Welsh writer clare e. potter states, to “escape and connect”. Former American President Barrack Obama has talked about feeling like an outsider as a child and how:

“The idea of having these worlds that were portable, that were yours, that you could enter into, was appealing to me”

---Barrack Obama

The point is that however impoverished your background, learning to read opens up new worlds of possibilities. Children in Wales are entitled to be pirates, explorers, Twm Siôn Cati, or Blodeuwedd, and they can be, through books and other texts.

Poet and performer Aneurin Karadog has described how his reading of Welsh literature, and of Welsh writing in English, has increased his knowledge of the world, Wales, Welsh history and the issues surrounding Wales. It is important to remember Jane Austen’s description of literature as:

“some work in which the greatest powers of the mind are displayed, in which the most thorough knowledge of human nature, the happiest delineation of its varieties, the liveliest effusions of wit and humour, are conveyed to the world in the best-chosen language”

---Jane Austen

An inevitable by-product of reading is greater knowledge and understanding. In Wales, we have a richness of Literature in both languages, which should be accessed by all, as our writers help to define us as individuals, as communities, and as a nation. To lose access to this is to undermine who we are personally, culturally and nationally. It is also, however, the duty of teachers to provide access to the best that has been written in English, Welsh, and other languages, so that pupils may embrace their place in the world as a whole, and open their minds to an interrogation of viewpoints, perspectives and ideas.

In Wales, literature is inextricably linked to the cultural narrative. In many places, literature is embedded in everyday life – the eisteddfodau and National Eisteddfod, community-led spoken word slams and writers themselves are very present in the cycles of daily life. This is exemplified by the Writers on Tour scheme, managed by Literature Wales, which has been running for over 30 years. However there are still far too many places where the particular literatures of Wales aren't reaching. The role of schools and libraries should be central in ensuring that all young people have equal access and opportunity to encounter and enjoy our literary heritage.

In preparing to introduce Donaldson's 2016 proposals, we have been given an opportunity to re-align and re-focus our attention on the reading of texts. English and Welsh, as subjects, are uniquely placed to contribute to the four purposes of the curriculum, as will be illustrated later in the paper. Literature, however, also contributes to the Expressive Arts Area of Learning and Experience and to Humanities. This testifies to the power of Literature as an educational force, and it is why Obama has described reading as the “gateway skill that makes all learning possible”; why George RR Martin has asserted that “a reader lives a thousand lives before he dies”.

Welsh children from our most deprived areas are still struggling with language acquisition and reading skills. It is more important than ever that children in Wales, whatever their background, have access to appropriate reading materials, and that they are motivated to improve those skills. Wales has a unique situation, since it has Welsh publishers who publish reading material for

schools, and a wide variety of writers in both English and Welsh. We have a strong tradition of oratory, and one of Cicero's stipulations for success in speech-making was to have at one's fingertips quotations from favourite writers. So equipped, it was thought, a successful speech could be extemporized.

We no longer have traditions of pulpit oratory, Bible study, and such textual analysis, and communities are becoming increasingly fractured and distanced from their heritage. It is even more important, at this crossroads, that the power of reading to shape minds, hearts and imagination is rightfully acknowledged. As Aristotle asserted, 'Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all.'

## 2. Why does Literature matter and how can it contribute to the individual's journey?

"Literature matters because . . . it allows for experiences important to the living out of a sophisticated and satisfying human life; because other arenas of culture cannot provide them to the same degree; and because a relatively small number of texts carry out these functions in so exceptional a manner that we owe it to past and future members of the species to keep such texts alive in our cultural traditions"

---F.B. Farrell

Reading, writing and speaking are inextricably linked, in a triad from which there can be no divorce without dire consequences. Our reading informs our writing. We need models and awareness of techniques to improve writing skills, as well as needing to equip ourselves with the skills to read between the lines, to understand nuances, and to be able to make discerning judgements. It is a mistake to think that it is through non-fiction and/or functional language that our awareness of fake news or manipulation is learnt best. When we read, we learn to look for implicit and inferential meaning. We start to read symbols, make connections, find themes, and learn about characters:

"Children need to become both author and audience by giving and receiving genuine responses that value their voices and choices Through these interactions they express themselves and construct identities"

---Anderson & Briggs

Reading Literature expands thinking skills, and contributes to a sense of identity, both of which are important for citizens in a democracy. In the novel by Harper Lee, *To Kill a Mockingbird*, Atticus Finch tells his daughter that:

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view  
[...] until you climb into his skin and walk around in it”

---Harper Lee

In a world of internet trolling, hate mail, and growing prejudices, it is more important than ever that the role of Literature is emphasized as a vehicle for teaching empathy, through concepts such as viewpoint, character placement, and emotional release. Literature is a marvellous stimulus for discussion and consideration of difficult material and topics. Welsh writer clare e. potter talks about encountering Vernon Scannell’s poem, ‘A Case of Murder,’ at the age of 11, and how it sparked her interest and life-long passion for reading. A poem by Welsh poet Aneurin Iwan Rhys about drug addiction is on the Welsh syllabus. As well as being a fine poem, it sparks discussion on a difficult subject. By its very nature, Literature deals with big issues of life, death, relationships, loss, triumph and social issues.

To talk is to be human, and speech is our primary means of human contact, therefore opportunities to hone and develop speaking skills are essential, and one way to do that is to encourage talk through the stimulus of reading. The success of dialogic reading in the USA, whereby young children are encouraged to tell the stories of books in their own way, by talking through the pictures, and later the details of the story, emphasizes the fact that re-telling something to another grows confidence and understanding. Through reading and discussion, pupils are able to look at topics at a remove, and they are able to talk through the trope of the character about things that would be more difficult to approach without a book. Through role-play, discussion and write-ons, pupils can deal with challenging issues, which are difficult to face in life. It is important to stress, as fiction writer Ursula Le Guin does, that reading is not passive, but calls upon the reader to enter an imaginative world, connect with characters, and use all their skills of deduction, inference and intuition to make meaning. Furthermore, the book may well stay in the reader’s head, influence writing in the future, and spark debate with others.



In a commissioned poem to celebrate 25 years of Bookstart, Bardd Plant Cymru (Welsh-language Children's Laureate) Casia Wiliam wrote:

A story's more precious than silver or gold;  
I own all the words that I've ever been told.

## 2.1 The special role of poetry

“Poetry is a wonderful discovery for less privileged students as a means of expression and a useful way to learn to read closely, find meaning and write about their lives with power and eloquence”

---Zoe Brigley

The bardic tradition, with the intricacies of *cynghanedd*, is unique to the Welsh, and to Welsh poetry. *Eisteddfodau* have been crucial in continuing that tradition, and in encouraging oral performance of poetry. Aneirin Karadog has spoken about this oral tradition, and continues it through his own work. His contribution to Nationwide's advertising campaign illustrates the power of the spoken word, where his poem in Welsh has been distributed without translation. Both Clare E. Potter and Aneirin Karadog have spoken of their experiences in the United States, seeing how literature, especially poetry, in all its forms, has transformed the lives of children living in dire poverty and deprivation. This approach has been successful in closing gaps in learning, as children are inspired to become writers themselves, and have a burning reason to look at other writers' techniques. The growth of interest in slam poetry here, and abroad, is something to celebrate and build upon. Rubinstein has written that:

“In fact, surveys, classroom observations, and interviews with students and teachers show a relationship between the poetry program and improvements in student attendance, language arts test scores, motivation, attitudes toward literacy, social skills, self-confidence, and (for English-language learners) language acquisition”

---Rubinstein

The emphasis on poetry as an oral tradition is also central to contemporary American literature, particularly in African American and Latino communities. Slam Poetry is a form of spoken word poetry which focuses on the power of the voice, in a performance which is often political and provocative, and is hugely popular in schools and universities across the USA. This is a tradition which could sit well within a Welsh context. Sion Tomos Owen has spoken of the power of slam

poetry, describing hearing the poet, Joelle Taylor deliver her poem ‘Crystal Kisses’, and its emotional effect on him. Taylor was delivering a workshop in Cardiff for Literature Wales as part of SLAMBassadors UK, which uses poetry to give a voice and a platform for young people on the fringes of society. He described the experience as:

“fostering and nurturing creativity in young people and giving them the tools to build poetry from their experiences, be it from solid foundations or the rubble of their resilience”

---Sion Tomos Owen

The message is a powerful one, as it gives a voice to those who feel powerless, and in doing so provides hope and ambition.

Poetry should be at the heart of English and Welsh teaching, as the truths of poetry are symbolic, and help us see ourselves, specifically as Welsh people in the world, in new and interesting ways. It is the duty of all teachers of Welsh and English to provide students with the techniques to understand poetry, because to make a metaphor of experience is to understand the nature of language, and to illuminate our lives. Dylan Thomas, Dic Jones and David Jones all saw themselves as craftsmen: ‘carpenters of song’. The metaphor is helpful as it recognises that texts are constructions, which can be looked at, examined, and used for the pupil’s different purposes. After studying Welsh poetry, and writing a poem in response, one of author Jude Brigley’s student wrote that he was ‘like a man, carving a shape, who trimmed and honed it until a structure emerged.’ He had understood the nature of writing through close analysis, and by learning through doing. Some thinkers name Aristotle as the ideal teacher, and he proves himself to be a pre-cursor of experiential learning when he writes that:

“Anything that we have to learn to do we learn by the actual doing of it...”

---Aristotle

As English and Welsh teachers, it is a premise we would do well to remember. There is a wealth of published material and digital resources. Some examples are listed in the Appendix.

## 2.2 The reading journey

“Children need to learn that reading is not simply words on a page but what those words mean to them”

---Adrienne Gear

Many lucky readers, when talking about learning to read, talk about having ‘caught it’ or at least *caught on* to what it involved. This is not so for everyone. If pupils ‘catch reading’ or struggle with it, there are clearly conscious strategies teachers need to introduce. Thinking constructively, while using clues and cues, is an essential element of reading well. When we connect with what we are reading, through emotion, curiosity or engagement, then reading is a key to deep learning experiences. The emphasis on literacy should not blind us to the role of imaginative literature in developing reading and writing skills.

Educationists, such as Sandy Brownjohn and this author Jude Brigley, have shown how imaginative literature, and poetry, in particular, can be used to lay bare the mechanics of language. The TwLetteratura project encourages reading to students, responding to text using writing games, and teaching how to make and care for digital content. It forms a community that reads and comments on books via the app *Betnyll*. Teachers need to consider how the models provided by reading, and the close interpretation of texts, contribute to the development of literacy. Poet, children’s writer, and educational advocate Michael Rosen has continually spoken up for the importance of encouraging independent readers who enjoy books. Many traditional Welsh folktales, legends, myths, as well as short stories, poetry, and scenes from plays—enable and reward such close reading. Choice of text is crucial in engaging a class and emphasis on the joys of reading is important if we are to encourage independent learners. The UKLA report (2010) states bluntly what, it thinks, would improve reading:

“If we want children to get better at reading and to do more of it, we have to give them a diet that is attractive, nutritious and satisfying”

---UKLA Report (2010)

This is the challenge of teaching reading. Cynan Llwyd has written that:

“I want to see children and young people being thrilled and mesmerised by the excitement and magic that stories possess: stories that will lead them to their own “dreamtime” ”

---Cynan Llwyd

The psychology of what happens when we read links the state of being oblivious to the world as being akin to a meditative state, whereby the mind becomes more open to creative activity.

### **2.3 How can contact with writers and their practices support reading?**

Although there is much to be gained from the society of dead poets and writers, having access to living writers, especially those who come from your own community, is a powerful spur to ambition. Pullman understands this when he says that:

“Making it possible for school children to meet a professional writer (I don’t say ‘real’ writer, because children are real writers too) is one of the best ways of encouraging them to think that writing has a purpose, and brings pleasure, and can be a means of exciting discovery and a source of lasting satisfaction. It is also a great stimulus to reading”

---Philip Pullman

There are many opportunities for students to meet with writers in Wales:

- **Writers on Tour**

Through Literature Wales’ Writers on Tour scheme, funding is available to invite writers to schools, in order to use workshops, lectures, readings and conferences which can inspire pupils to take an interest in both writing, and reading, when they can interrogate the writer’s methods and intentions. After hearing writer Robert Minhinnick read his work, and answer questions, one student remarked that, “I am going out to read the rest of his work, as he really inspired me”. Even without finances, writers can be persuaded into classrooms if the school makes funding such events a priority. When Zoe Brigley visited a school and was interviewed by pupils, some were so impressed that they wrote about her work for their coursework, and the impression stayed with them, as one wrote an article

for the *Oxford Student* magazine about the poet, and another went on to write a dissertation about her work. Writers recommend reading that the teacher is unaware of, and can speak directly to students. If Gillian Clarke visits a school, and mentions further reading, pupils will often hurry to seek out her recommendations.

- **Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre**

Tŷ Newydd Writing Centre is an ideal setting for writing/reading, and more schools should use its facilities. A group of year 9 pupils who worked with writers Paul Henry and Menna Elfyn, found the experience “life-changing”. They continued to write poetry, winning the group prize at the National Poetry Competition, and further prizes in competitions for Darfur and the Cardiff Peace Prize. All of them chose to study English at A level having achieved at least A grades in both Language and Literature. “I have become an avid reader because of Tŷ Newydd”, one of them remarked. Sometimes poets come to schools and read their work aloud but it is useful for pupils to have access to poetry performance. This can entail taking pupils to performance venues, but there are also opportunities to experience such words online

#### **2.4 The role of digital content and libraries**

There is some online content of poets reading their work. Aberystwyth University’s ‘Devolved Voices’ page is particularly rich and gives a flavour of what is available and could be useful in the classroom. There are fewer useful written interviews online, and most writers at the moment do not have their own website and this is something which should be addressed by the relevant individuals and organisations in order to ensure that young people have access to contemporary voices.

It is worth noting that libraries still have a large part to play in the encouragement of reading. Rajvi Glasbrook-Griffiths has spoken of her school library enabling her to ‘unfurl the world’, and how access to Literature gave her equality of opportunity.

“Google can bring you back 100,000 answers. A librarian can bring you back the right one”

---Neil Gaiman

The librarian has an important role in:

- providing suitable books;
- advising on what to read;
- and creating the right ambience for reading.

Children can, and should be part of that process.

## 2.5 How can Literature contribute to literacy?

“There are dangers in seeing literacy as the only useful part [of the subject] which has often kept the attention of teachers on the need to emphasize its controlling aspects, spelling, grammar and getting the words right, rather than on its liberating feature, the exercise of the imagination”  
---Margaret Meek.

Until recently English Literature had equal status with English Language. The loss of status has meant that some schools have dropped the subject from their curriculum for less able students, thus depriving the most vulnerable from access to their heritage and entitlement. Teacher Rajvi Glasbrook-Griffiths has commented on this by saying that:

“The Welsh Government perhaps hasn't realised the unintentional consequences of performance data measured in this way”  
---Rajvi Glasbrook-Griffiths

It is worth noting that English and Welsh Literature are two of the few, if not only, GCSEs that demands a structured essay as an answer, a clear indication of literacy in action. The situation leaves many English and Welsh teachers uncertain on how to proceed, and support through exemplar is needed to show how literacy, reading and the study of Literature are all intertwined.

This draws us to the first and second of the three areas this paper outlines: core knowledge/concepts and associated skills and competencies; and progression between these. In discussing the study of texts it is crucial to think about the characteristics of a really good reader – the finished product as it were. The list below (and see Appendix 2) is only meant to be a stimulus

to thought and is far from exhaustive. It actively draws from the pupil's relationship with the text, and avoids imposing rigid technical criteria onto them:

**Core knowledge/concepts and associated skills and competencies, in progression:**

Aged 5, I:

- Enjoy reading
- Choose my own texts for further reading
- Use clues such as headings, pictures, charts to guide reading
- Recognise emotions such as humour or pathos

Aged 8, I:

- Visualise what I am reading
- Continue the story in my head
- Become engaged and 'escape' into the text
- Am moved by words to cry, laugh, feel sadness or happiness

Aged 11, I:

- Retain what I read so that I can re-tell or teach others
- Pick out information relevant for my needs
- Discuss what I read with commitment and enthusiasm
- Connect the information to my own experience

Aged 14, I:

- Use prior knowledge of texts, or theme, to access information
- Argue with and are sceptical about what texts say
- Make inferences and read between the lines
- Recognise the writer's efforts to persuade me

Aged 16, I:

- Have internal dialogue with myself and/or the author
- Carry significant phrases or lines with me

- Use a range of scanning, skimming and close reading depending, on focus or purpose
- Use information read for another task

It should be noted that reading has the dynamic potential to teach literacy skills. Some typical examples of reading activities that aid literacy are listed in Appendix 3. It is important that in developing examples there should be a balance of studying a range of texts, from the Welsh and English heritages, other cultures, and modern texts. Only by so doing will reading reflect the pupil's own community, and concerns, but also their wider place in the world.

Reading is a skill of literacy but it is good to remember that there are four types of reading:

- Skimming
- Scanning
- Reading for information
- Reading with depth in which 'flow' is achieved.

All four aspects are part of the repertoire of a good reader, and are needed in reading imaginative fiction. Skimming is a way of having an overview of a text by looking at its shape, cover, blurb or chapter headings. It is how we assess a text when it is first given to us. We do not just sit down and read from page one. We might use scanning to look a little closer if, for example, we want to know if our favourite author is writing about a character we already know, or if the first page interests us. Reading for information is not only used for non-fiction texts, but if we are studying a novel, play or poem, having already read the text, we may look for patterns, or quotations about a character or theme. The highest form of reading, however, is when flow takes place and we are transported to the world of the novel or transfixed in meditation by the poem. All of these skills are needed in the study of Literature.

## 2.6 Pleasures of reading and learning

“A little nonsense now and then, is relished by the wisest men”  
 ---Willy Wonka, Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator by Roald Dahl

Writing and reading are not chores. They are great pleasures in life. The main reason we read and continue reading is because it brings us joy. If children do not have experiences of reading, which bring pleasure and success, then that feeling continues throughout life. This is a significant



responsibility carried by teachers. According to surveys (e.g. Jacobs Foundation, 2016), our British children and young people are among the unhappiest in Europe, and though there will be complex reasons for that, several studies have shown a correlation between happiness and reading. Australian writer, Ceridwen Dovey states:

Regular readers sleep better, have lower stress levels, higher self-esteem, and lower rates of depression than non-readers.

---Ceridwen Dovey

This is important and corroborates paper author Jude Brigley's research, which found that studying poetry actually made adolescent students happier. As one of her students put it: "It makes me happy to be creative".

It is the right of a child to have access to reading, and as Margaret Meek pointed out: "The great secrets of reading lie in imaginative literature". The pleasures of reading really creative and innovative works bring happiness, but also greater understanding of how language works. Pullman comments that:

"The writer Samuel Johnson apparently didn't say this, but someone did, and it remains true: 'The true aim of writing is to enable the reader better to enjoy life, or better to endure it' "

---Philip Pullman

Recent research conducted by the Reading Agency has revealed that reading for pleasure can increase our empathy, improve relationships, reduce depression, and improve wellbeing. It is this power that makes reading dynamic, and able to educate a person in the fullest way. For reading extends our knowledge and awareness of the play that goes on between what is said and what is meant. It enables us to see the nuances and subtleties at work in the hands of a great writer. It could be helpful to think about what we would expect pupils to be able to do after a process of learning and teaching. M. Ratcliffe has written about the psychological importance of narrative for our well-being:

"insofar as a narrative is shared by two parties, it comprises a kind of bridge between them that aids interpretation. Recognition of difference is thus embellished with a positive

phenomenological appreciation of experience”

---M. Ratcliffe

This is important to the well-being and safety of our children. In Appendix 4 is a stimulus for thinking about what pupils need to be able to say that they can do, in this examples for the end of Key Stage 2.

## **2.7 Oracy**

Wales has a unique oratory heritage dating back over a thousand years. This intangible cultural history encompasses medieval praise poetry, the great preachers of the revival, revolutionary public speaking and fiery debates. The Rebecca Rioters, Chartists, Quakers, Communists, Tonypanyd protestors, Welsh language campaigners and 1980s striking miners all rallied to their causes through their leaders’ stirring words. These traditions belong to the working class culture of Wales - from cave to working men’s institute to field to chapel to mountain to pub - you could hear passionate and persuasive speeches, all ignited by the interweaving of poetic rhythm and wordplay.

Arguably the greatest legacy of this long-standing tradition was the creation of the NHS by one of Wales’ greatest orators, Aneurin Bevan. This was made possible by another gifted Welsh political speaker, David Lloyd George, who introduced reforms which led to the creation of the Welfare State and women’s suffrage. In the late twentieth century, another great critical speaker, Elaine Morgan, introduced women and children to misogynist evolutionary histories, touring the world arguing for the recognition of the whole of society in our past. Bevan, Lloyd George and Morgan were all-too familiar with the inequality and poverty inflicted on the people of Wales, and used their own rhetorical skills as a tool to fight injustice.

Fast-forward to the twenty-first century, and there is a new rhetoric. Wales’ young people are under-performing. Afflicted by poverty and mental health issues, our future generation is disengaged with the world around them and has lost its link with the past. It seems that our unique tradition for hitting above our weight through outspoken and charismatic leaders has come to an end. The dragon, who once roared so loudly with two tongues, has been silenced.

The reality behind the rhetoric is more nuanced. In certain areas of Wales, the oratory tradition is still going strong, from Welsh language poetry recital (Urdd Eisteddfod regional rounds) to school

debating (CEWC Wales School Debating Championships). And factoring in the digital world, twenty-first century young people are arguably the most articulate generation ever. They are constantly and concurrently communicating through a maze of forms, from social media channels to online gaming, from sports banter to creating short films for You Tube, cutting songs and MCing.

In Wales, we think this explosion in the breadth and diversity of interaction provides valuable gateways. By sharpening abilities in the spoken word through the means already being used in bedrooms up and down the country, we can build self-confidence, empathy and life skills which will ultimately lead to widespread social mobility. This isn't about wealth, but it is about social, cultural and personal prosperity. And the key to it all is a much deeper, national emphasis on the power of the spoken word within every subject, not just Literature.

This draws us to the third of the three areas this paper outlines: how the Cross-Curricular Responsibilities, wider skills and Welsh dimension/ international perspectives can be embedded in relation to oracy. By deploying spoken word poetry, storytelling, song-writing, stand-up comedy, blog video shorts, political debates etc into **all of the Areas of Learning and Experience**, we will give our children and young people a means of articulating what makes them angry and why within twenty-first century Wales.

In doing so, we will empower young people to develop their own confidence in speaking out, questioning others and pitching themselves to the world. A special focus should be made to tackle the worrying increase in personal anxiety, particularly amongst young women, and the increase in bullying. Since the EU exit vote in 2016, the reported cases of hate crime have grown tenfold. Stories of abuse, both physical and psychological, are shared on social media and dozens of attacks and threats have been reported in the news. People are told 'go home', shops are vandalised, and communities are living under fear of the rise of right wing groups spreading their gospel of hatred. A worrying number of these crimes are perpetrated by young people – and many young people are, in turn, the most vulnerable victims.

Conventional media – television and newspapers – are not speaking to young people and fail to represent them. Understanding and practicing the traditional techniques of rhetoric can equip young people with the skills to be critical – to question and challenge the perceptions and assertions of the main-stream media.

By embracing the oracy in this way, we are not just looking to give the young people of Wales a voice and kick-start our oratory tradition; we will facilitate the journey for the next generation to stand up and become outspoken and engaged citizens of the world.

### 3. A Charter for Literature

“As a passionate believer in the democracy of reading, I don't think it's the task of the author of a book to tell the reader what it means”

---Philip Pullman.

One proposal to ensure provision of reading opportunities could be a Charter for Literature; a list containing what pupils could expect to experience, and what teachers could be expected to provide. What follows (and see Appendix 5) is less than exhaustive, but a starting point for discussion:

#### The Rights of Young Welsh Readers

Every child and young person in Wales has the right to expect:

- enthusiasm and a sense of joy from their teachers of reading;
- encouragement, support and celebration of reading success;
- access to writing from Wales, and the rest of the world which reflects their community, world and heritage;
- opportunities to meet and hear contemporary writers;
- access to a wide range of texts which can stimulate, interest and educate their minds;
- reading and writing of poetry at the heart of their curriculum;
- access to texts through libraries, internet, classroom provision and teacher recommendation;
- advice on what to read next and recommendations from teachers, peers, parents, members of communities;
- access to challenging texts through the support and help of teachers;
- learning about writer's techniques so as to have a deeper appreciation and a greater range of choices when writing themselves;

- opportunities to speak about books, discuss opinions and share insights with others;
- time to meditate and think deeply, sometimes in silence about texts;
- the experience of learning texts by heart and making them their own;
- a sense of their own history, identity, community and nation through the texts presented by their teachers.

On the other hand, teachers of texts have responsibilities. The following list (and see Appendix 6) is again meant to spark debate.

### **Responsibilities of Teachers of Literature in Wales**

Literature teachers should:

- share their joy, pleasure and enthusiasm for reading in the way they introduce texts and talk about their own reading;
- have knowledge about childrens' literature so that they can recommend and choose books suitable for a class;
- read literature of Wales and that of other countries in translation ;
- provide access to writing from Wales which reflects pupils' community and heritage;
- create opportunities to meet and hear contemporary writers;
- place poetry at the heart of the curriculum;
- celebrate success and create a safe environment for risk-taking with words, reading and performance;
- look for ways to provide a variety of texts for private and class study;
- provide quiet, sometimes silence, for meditating about texts;
- use a range of strategies to help pupils access challenging texts;
- give opportunities for talking about books;
- provide a range of poems for pupils to choose and encourage learning by heart;
- develop a toolbox of critical approaches to reading texts in order to give pupils a meaningful critical vocabulary
- create a classroom where texts matter.

### 3.1 Donaldson's four purposes and the role of Literature

Literature has a large part to play in contributing to Donaldson's four purposes. Much of that has been implied throughout this paper, but needs to be more explicit here. It is best illustrated by using the chart below.

The Four Purposes	How Literature contributes
1. Ambitious, capable learners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ambitious, capable learners read for themselves, ferret out information and continue to research out of interest and love of subject.</li> <li>• Reading develops intrinsic motivation for learning.</li> </ul>
2. Enterprising, creative contributors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reading is not a passive act but a creative one which finishes the writer's beginning. As fiction writer Ursula Le Guin has stated, without a creative reader, a story is only marks on the page.</li> </ul>
3. Healthy, confident individuals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Research has shown that reading makes people happier and is good for our psychological health. To read aloud, learn by heart, and give opinions raises confidence levels.</li> </ul>
4. Ethical, informed citizens who are ready to be citizens of Wales and the world.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literature deals with moral issues in a safe space, allowing pupils to discuss issues and situations 'at arm's length.'</li> <li>• 'Informed' is an interesting word which some have taken literally to mean 'facts', but an informed citizen would ideally have empathy, a sense of the past, and a general knowledge about society. These are characteristics of someone who has read widely and have a sense of identity and morality from that reading.</li> </ul>

## 4. Conclusion

What is living? Finding a great hall  
 Inside a cell.  
 What is knowing? One root  
 To all the branches.

Waldo Williams

Whether the subject is called reading, as it tends to be until Year 10, or Literature when it branches off into separate status at Key Stage 4, learning to become a high level reader is an essential part of an individual's education, and needs careful scrutiny and preparation. Contributing to all of the purposes of Donaldson's curriculum review, and important to three areas of study, Literature has a crucial role in raising standards and closing the achievement gap.

Through the use of texts in the Welsh language or those written in English by Welsh writers, Literature contributes to the identity of Welsh nationhood and community, and as such should be an essential part of any pupil's education in Wales. Furthermore, our long traditions of poetry, and the well-documented action research projects on its use in motivating students, should alert us to its special place in our culture and in our classrooms.

We outline knowledge/concepts and associated skills and competencies for children aged 3-16 in Appendix 2. This follows the progression of pupils' increasing complex relationship with texts, and in particular the development of their emotional, critical and philosophical response. We argue that the deploiment of the many forms of spoken word already being used by our children and young people will normalise public performance and forge a generation of articulate communicators. The development of these skills, using forms which already appeal, should take place in all Areas of Learning and Experience, thereby equipping pupils with the means to become outspoken and engaged citizens of the world.

### Concluding Points

- Reading brings joy and happiness. Those are important benefits.
- Because reading Literature is transformational, it is a powerful tool in motivating pupils, opening their minds, and closing gaps brought about by deprivation.

- Children have rights and entitlements about what they read, how they read, and the quality of resources offered to them.
- Children in Wales are entitled to have contact with writing and writers, reflecting their heritage, community and nation.
- Through works translated into English and Welsh, children should have access to all that is best and/appropriate from other cultures. Many children in Wales have more than one national identity and this needs to be reflected in reading materials.
- Agencies such as Literature Wales, the Welsh Books Council and publishing houses should be supported to provide access to materials and reading experiences for children.
- Libraries and librarians still have a strong part to play in education, alongside, and not in competition with digital platforms.
- The word ‘text’ has a wider connotation than the word ‘book’, but both have family resemblances which it is more helpful to put in the same house than to keep separate.
- The role of reading in giving access to the world, improving understanding of others and creating more altruistic and empathetic citizens cannot be over-emphasised.

Last of all, to not weave Literature into all aspects of language teaching, is to miss learning opportunities of the sweetest and sharpest kind. To ask someone to write, without studying writers is equivalent to hobbling an athlete or blind-folding an artist. Only at our peril, do we relegate Literature to the periphery in an English or Welsh lesson, for from Obama to Aneirin Karadog, it is clear that Literature can save your life.

“...Things that are dead  
we keep with words, but when the words die  
themselves; oh then they’re dead, and dead indeed.”

Sheenagh Pugh