



Letter to the Editor - July 2008

Article Author:

[Mary Sutcliffe](#) [1]

[171](#) [2]

Article Category:

Letters to the Editor

Byline:

Mary Sutcliffe on teacher training.

Dear Editor

Ref. Michael Rosen's recent piece in **BfK** ('Laureate Log' in **BfK** No. 170) and the notion that there is no longer time to develop trainee teachers' understanding of how to help children enjoy books, I'm writing because I do 'know otherwise'!

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On all our primary ITT courses, learning about books for children and how to help children enjoy them, and engage with them, is central. Without this, anything else we might do on the teaching of reading would be pointless. It is our firm belief that teachers who are readers themselves are the best teachers of readers and this principle informs everything we do.

We have a long history of courses in children's literature, begun by Aidan Chambers in the early 1980s at the then Westminster College and developed over the years since, during which the merger with Oxford Brookes took place. Our students are recognised in schools for their knowledge of children's books and the enthusiasm with which they approach the teaching of reading and in a recent Ofsted Inspection we were told that 'An outstanding feature of the courses is the work on children's literature, and the attention to development of students' own reading.' So, Ofsted inspectors sometimes do recognise what is important.

Here are a few of the things we do to create reading communities within the various groups of students:

- all students keep a reading diary in which they record books read and their responses to them;
- they make regular book recommendations, so that they share their knowledge and enthusiasms;
- elements of assessment for undergraduate students include presentations of picture books, making poetry anthologies (later displayed for other students and staff to view) and undertaking author studies (materials from which are copied for peers);
- taking part in local prize projects, including one with secondary schools;<

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- inviting authors and illustrators to talk to students;
- lots of discussion of all kinds of fiction and poetry;

- numerous sessions on how to teach literature in ways which engage children, using drama, music, art etc;
- joint meetings with the local FCBG;
- a specially created blogsite and the Institute's internal web-based forum provide opportunities for discussion of books across courses and year groups;
- 2nd year undergraduate students nominate books for the 'Westminster Institute Book Award' and all students are encouraged to read the books, post their comments on the blogsite and vote.

I'm not sending this to be boastful or to 'blow our trumpet' but I do think it's important that the positive should be publicised as well as the negative. There *are* teachers who have continued to do great work with children and books in spite of the constant stream of initiatives and developments they have to deal with. And there are teacher-training institutions in which time is given to developing the kind of knowledge and understanding they need to enable them to do that with confidence. The new 'Framework for Literacy' gives us hope that more good practice will begin to develop.

Perhaps **BfK** could provide a forum for ITT institutions to share practice?

Mary Sutcliffe

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Great idea to have a forum for ITT institutions to share practice! It will kick off in our January '09 issue. Ed.

Page Number:

16

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Links:

[1] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/member/mary-sutcliffe>

[2] <http://savfkn.booksforkeeps.co.uk/issue/171>