

How can creating visual narratives support understanding of poetry in children aged 12-14 years?

Rationale

- My experience as a secondary school professional has shown that students often find studying poetry daunting, which has an impact on their confidence whilst studying poetry units for their GCSE exams.
- Teaching of poetry remains a weaker element of secondary English curriculum (Ofsted 2007), where analytical approaches prevail over creative ones (Ofsted 2012).
- In this study, I aimed to investigate the impact that creating visual narratives (in the form of comics and/or storyboards) can have on students' understanding of poetry.

Context

- Eight participants were recruited within a cohort of Year 8 and Year 9 students (aged between 12 and 14) at a mainstream secondary school.
- The focus group represented a mixture of abilities: students with and without special educational needs and/or English as an additional language, and an equal ratio of male and female students.
- All students in the focus group were recruited on the basis of their shared interest in reading and/or creating comics and manga.
- The poem chosen for this investigation was "The Song of Wandering Aengus" by William Butler Yeats.

Project description

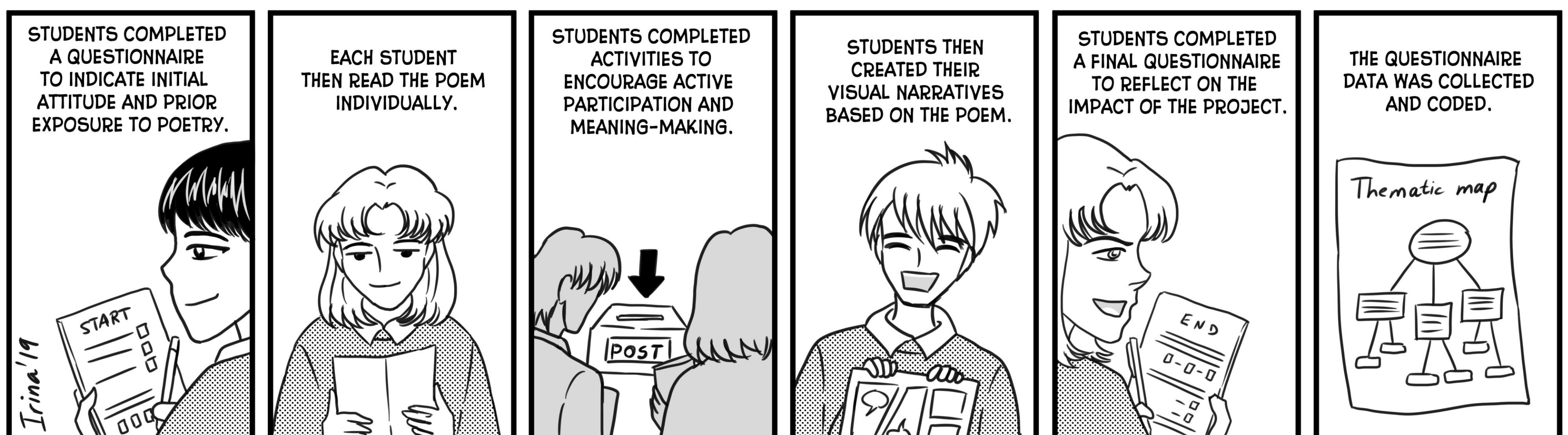


Figure 1: Description of research project

Findings

Three main themes have arisen from the project data:

- **Students' attitude to poetry** was indicated as neutral to positive in 87.5 per cent of responses.
- **Students' understanding of poetry:** the final questionnaire data suggested improvement in students' understanding of poetry, with 50 per cent of respondents agreeing on the positive impact that the project would have on their studies in the future.
- **Students' enjoyment of the project:** 100 per cent of respondents expressed enjoyment of the project and willingness to participate in similar activities in the future.

Conclusion and next steps

The project offered a creative alternative to the habitual way of studying poetry in English lessons. The project data indicated a correlation between students' visual narratives, which involved their visual literacy skills, and their understanding of poetry.

The study's outcomes will inform future research into using visual narratives in various educational contexts. For example, my interest in combining visual narratives and poetry has recently led to collaboration with a spoken word artist and developing a programme of workshops for young people.

References

- Ofsted (2007) Poetry in schools: A survey of practice.
Ofsted (2012) Moving English forward. Action to raise standards in English.
Raney, K. (1999) Visual Literacy and the Art Curriculum. Journal of Art and Design Education, 18(1), pp. 41-47.
Stafford, T. (2011) Teaching visual literacy in the primary classroom : comic books, film, television and picture narratives. Abingdon, Oxon, England: Routledge.

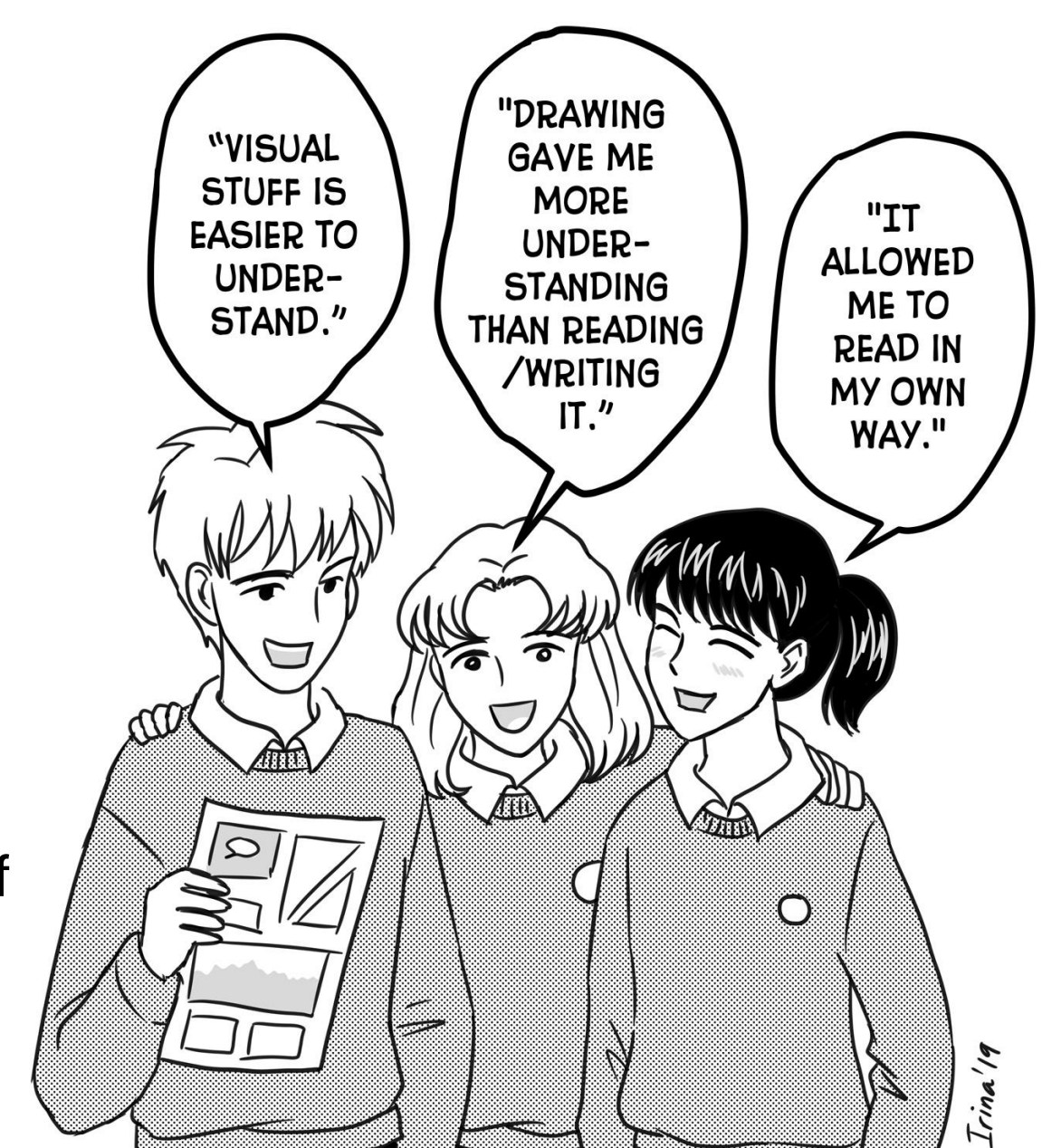


Figure 2: Selected feedback from participants