



Where the Poems went in 2008

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“You kindly sent me a set of the bilingual poems last year, which I used with my Level 1 ESOL students (aged between 16 and 18). The poems proved very useful classroom materials and we went on to study other poems. The result is a book of poems, written by the students themselves, in 2 languages – their mother tongue and English. They wrote some truly amazing poems and really enjoyed the process as well as the finished product...”

I would love to have another set, as some of my colleagues have been inspired to do some creative writing with their classes next year. Could you please mail them to: A----D---, Programme Area Leader, Lewisham College, London.”

Background

In the Spring of 2007, this project offering small poem-posters for public display changed its name from “Poems for the Waiting Room” to “Poems for...” The change was in response to our realisation that many of the poems, especially the later bilingual collections, do not just belong in healthcare settings. Yes, those 50 “Poems for...waiting” still seem mostly applicable to healthcare waiting rooms (though does waiting take place *only* in health centres ?) ; but the 45 bilingual “Poems for...one world” most certainly belong in *any* open space otherwise bare - in classroom, in library, on digital display screens now located in buses, in Reception areas....

Later in 2007, we began working on a separate website for the “Poems for...” project, finally launched by Andrew Motion on April 22nd 2008 at the Nehru Centre near Hyde Park Corner. The website address is www-poemsfor.org and includes pdf versions of all the project’s poem-posters online, so that people can now simply download them via their own printers.

These two developments have transformed how the poem-posters are delivered and where they go. The figures below reflect that change.

The Hard Copy Posters

Despite the new site, requests for the hard copy posters still continued throughout 2008, and this steady though low-key demand seems likely to continue. Let’s look at the breakdown of the hard-copy posters first.

A total of 49 full packs and an additional 12 diversity packs were sent out - making a total of 61 hard copy packs sent to 46 destinations.

(The “full packs” consist of all three collections produced so far, a total of 145 poems-posters ; the “diversity packs” consist of the third and latest collection of 45 bilingual poem-posters – some people ask for these specifically).

Several requests for the full collections included multiple orders - the largest being for eight packs, which went to a hospital in New York.

I shall categorise the destinations as follows : FO embassies ; healthcare (hospital or health centre) ; libraries ; prisons ; schools ; social care settings.

There are one or two blurred lines between categories, and one or two sub-headings have been required.

For instance, some requests identified themselves as libraries but were libraries based in schools, or prisons. I marked these under the “school” and “prison” categories respectively.

A significant number of requests came from people based in a Local Authority. Most of these have responsibility for liaising with schools, usually on the issue of diversity-training of one kind or another ; some of course manage the local libraries, either directly or indirectly. Accordingly, where it’s been clear, I have categorised each of these under “schools” or “libraries” ; where not, I have put them in their own Local Authority category : LA.

	Sites	packs requested
Schools :	27	31
Social Care settings :	7	7
Libraries :	6	7
Healthcare settings :	3	10
LA settings :	2	4
FO embassies :	1	1
Prisons :	1	1
Totals	47	61

Thus, in 2008, by far the largest proportion of the hard copy packs requested and delivered went to schools, much more than twice all the other categories combined.

In more detail :

The healthcare settings included a perinatal service in South West London and an oncology unit in New York (this was the site which ordered 8 packs of poems).

(As we are covering the healthcare category here, it is worth reminding ourselves that the project also featured largely at the Royal Brompton Hospital in 2008 – not measurable in figures for a report like this, but in the form of a successful reading event and a mural that will act as a permanent feature in the Hospital’s Oncoscopy Unit).

The “social care” heading included a wide variety of settings :

- a social work team in Westminster, supporting homeless people ;
- a police diversity unit in Cumbria ;
- a home for old people in Surrey ;
- a MIND mental health centre in north west London ;
- a refugee support centre in south east London ;
- a “reading bus” project in Aberdeen.

The prison that requested a pack is HM Prison Send, Woking, Surrey.

The FO embassy is that based in Harare, Zimbabwe.

Visits to www.poemsfor.org in 2008.

The above section on the hard copy packs records activity over a full year. The new site, on the other hand, has of course not been operating that long. This record of its activity covers the 9 month period between the evening of April 22nd when it was launched and the end of December 2008.

Visits to the website (not to be confused with registering/downloads) have shown a fairly steady increase since the launch date, (though there was a slight falling away in December, probably for the obvious reasons).

Thus in May, the month after the launch, the site received 228 visits, and 128 distinct visitors.

In November, the site achieved its highest total of visits so far, following a fairly constant monthly increase – 1092 visits and 872 distinct visitors.

The lower December figures of 777 visits and 698 visitors were still the third highest of the nine month period.

Over the nine month period as a whole, the number of visits to the site totalled 5,971 and the number of visitors 4,634.

Where the Visits are coming from

Clearly, in order to decide to register and then download the poems, people must first visit and look over the site. However, visiting alone gives us little individual information besides the number tally given above, and we must wait for people to decide to register before we can find out who they are, where they work and for what purpose they have downloaded the poems.

But the visiting process does reveal to us something of how people have found the site, and that in turn can teach us how best to promote it.

In the early years, this project was featured several times in the national press (principally *The Guardian*) and quite often in local papers or healthcare journals. Whenever a story appeared, there was a dramatic response and expressions of interest came flooding in. But for quite a while now there has been no exposure in the national press, partly because it's an old story. A new website? That a story?

Nowadays one relies on specialist website features and links and internet chat-rooms. In 2007 I had contacted some educational websites which had been recommended to me. These had then featured the project – with immediate and dramatic results. This led in turn to a library website mentioning us, with a response almost as dramatic. Thus, during October/November 2007, around 270 packs had already been sent out to destinations other than healthcare – approx 210 to schools, 50 to libraries, 10 to prisons.

The same websites/chat-rooms helped publicise the new Poemsfor...website and still feature as a major source of visits. Soon after the launch, the Poetry Society's educational section also began

featuring the project on the Society's website and that is now one of the main sources of "referrals." However, since the Autumn of 2008, the chief source of visits received has usually been the website of the Children's Poet Laureate, Michael Rosen, who now links over to us. This is through no action of mine and I take it as a compliment.

Thus, it seems that most of our visitors are people in search of diversity poems. They are teachers or librarians and they know what they are looking for. Their classes contain many children for whom English is not their mother-tongue. Nowadays, the National Curriculum requires them to teach on Diversity and Citizenship. They go to Google and log some search words or they go to sites such as the Children's Laureate or the Poetry Society where they notice the link. Conversely, they are told specifically by colleagues on the internet where to come.

Poems downloaded from www.poemsfor.org in 2008.

It can be assumed that anyone registering on the site intends to download the poems (which can only be downloaded as entire packs). There can be no other purpose in registering *except* to download. On the other hand, although we ask people to tell us what they plan to do with the poems, under certain headings, we don't know any further details. For instance, are the poems to be displayed in one particular school, or shown around *various* schools by someone whose job it is to keep visiting several in a locality? Either is possible and - following various conversations and exchanges I've had - I think both are common.

Over the period in question, **279** people registered on the "Poems for..." site.

This total breaks down as follows, in descending order of numbers :

for use in schools	197
for personal use	46
for use in a library	11
other	8
for use in a health or social care setting	7
for use in an FCO embassy	5
for use in a prison	3
for use on a public transport system	2

Even more than the findings from the hard copy deliveries, we can see from the above that schools' appetite for this idea far outstrips all other possible venues and applications, at least for the present.

One more general point : the headings "for personal use" and "other" leave it possible that several of the collections go no further than to a single person - rather like a poetry book. (However, some of the email addresses we are given under these categories suggest otherwise, as can be seen below).

The other categories all clearly imply a totally public use. In some cases, this might be limited to just one occasion for a single class of fifteen children ; but in others, it might mean a display over months seen by hundreds daily and maybe more than that.

I shall continue this report with some more detail under each of the category headings ; and end it by drawing together the findings a/ from the site and b/ from the hard copy deliveries.

Schools (197 people registered)

The vast majority of schools which have downloaded these poem-posters are situated in the UK. The schools come from all over the country - from end to end and side to side. They include a wide spectrum of school types and pupil age-groups - comprehensive schools, small primary schools, faith schools, teacher training colleges, plus the odd big name from the private sector - Stowe, Cheltenham, etc.

When poemsfor.org was advertised on a School Librarian site/chat room in the Autumn, (through no action of mine) there was a fresh and widespread burst of enthusiasm and interest and several registrations followed, which I have included under the "school" heading.

But also there are eighteen registrations from schools abroad. Six of these are US schools - Michigan, Washington DC and Phoenix Arizona being three locations named (the other three were not).

The other non- UK schools can be located as follows :

A school in Bangkok, Thailand

Three schools in the Netherlands, including an International School in Hilversum

Two schools in India - one in Delhi, the other in Chennai, Madras.

A school for British Army children living in Germany

Two other schools in Germany - one in Dortmund, the other in Erlangen.

A school in the Netherlands Antilles (West Indies)

A school in Malaysia

A school in Doha, Qatar.

For Personal Use (46 people registered)

This heading includes people based in a few more locations which to the insular UK eye look exotic and are certainly far away : Buenos Aires, Dubai, USA (Texas), USA (Guam), USA (Cicero New York State), USA (Vermont), USA (Florida).

And several people using this "For Personal Use" category, gave a thoroughly occupational email address - for instance, in one case, that of a major city centre library ; in another, that of the Arts Council. So for some - though the "Personal" heading may signify something different from any of the other categories provided - it may not necessarily mean just "private" use at all.

For use in a Library (11 people registered)

I believe all the libraries identified under this heading are public libraries (as opposed to libraries within institutions such as school or prison). But cannot absolutely guarantee it in each case.

Two of them are situated abroad. One is identified as DCSL Libraries, based in Shanghai, China. The other is a library in Las Vegas, Nevada, USA.

Other (8 people registered)

Here again, some of the email addresses provided under this category suggest other public purposes for the poem-posters not covered by the categories we've provided.

They include the National Trust and the Book Trust.

They also include another faraway place – Bogota, Bolivia, South America.

Health or Social Care Setting (7 people registered)

One of the entries under this category records the name of someone who works for a local Mind – who wants to use the poem-posters in a hospital, perhaps a psychiatric one.

All the others appear to be associated with primary health care centres, ie GP surgeries and the like.

FCO Embassies (5 people registered)

The FCO connection goes back to the ten poems part-funded by the FCO, to celebrate the EU Enlargement of 2004.

Since then I have been allowed to promote this project on an internal FCO bulletin which is transmitted regularly to all “posts” (ie UK embassies) around the world. The response has been keen every time. This year the bulletin promoted the new site and again the response was enthusiastic, though we encountered some technical problems – the FCO SPAM defence wall would not let through the registration emails.

This problem is not yet fully resolved, but some registrations were successfully completed. They include the following embassies : Bogota, capital of Bolivia ; and Lima capital of Peru.

Prisons (3 people registered)

The three registrations which placed themselves in this category include the prison at Doncaster ; and the better known Wormwood Scrubs prison in West London, where the poems were to be used in a school based there.

Transport System (2 people registered)

The reason we included this category is that there remains a small chance that some of the bilingual poems will interest bus companies, especially in London, for occasional display on the digital screens increasingly available on their vehicles. But that's for the future.

We didn't expect anyone else to use this heading. Why would they ? In 2008, the two people who did are :

- a vicar based just west of the Welsh border, near the small town of Flint.(I do not know what transport systems operate in that area, so am bound to dream. I dream of the vicar doing his rounds on a bike, nowadays with a poem hanging from his cross-bar, a new poem each week...)
- Someone who lives in Rio Negro, Argentina.

Conclusions

This project now clearly has an international relevance and appeal, even though it is still primarily designed for an English-speaking audience.

The poems would appear also still to *stand out* in a way which people find appealing – either the poster design/format, the feature of two languages facing one another, the wide choice and particular selection of languages available (soon to be increased), the fact that they are free..

I have reason to believe that the take-up of this idea still relies on the enthusiast on site. Yes, we now have this deep interest from schools and, yes, the schools are required as a top-down policy to teach under certain headings, for which these poems may seem relevant. Yet I am still exchanging messages with excited individuals responding to the news that these poems are available – rather than supplying them to some functionary who's merely obeying instructions. It seems clear that the successful deployment of these poems on site, whatever that site might be, will always rely on the creativity and personal enthusiasm of individuals who've discovered them. And that suggests the necessity for and relevance of further public promotion of the project – rather than just talking to senior managers..

The project worker remains excited, too. During one week-end recently, I saw that there were two new registrations on the Poemsfor... site – one from Las Vegas, USA, the other from Doha, Qatar. There is no escape from the excitement of that. I am glad to stay caught up in it.

Finally, here are the numbers again, this time combining the figures for the hard copy collections, with those for the website registrations. Admittedly, the two approaches are very different, above all because registering online allows you to download any number of poem collections any number of times. So our records – and this last table below – can no longer usefully record the number of packs that have gone out, only the number of places to where they have gone. But the table shows that those numbers – and the audience for the poems – continue significant and look set to become yet more so.

There are many schools in the world who still have not heard of this project ; and many libraries...

For use in schools	224
For use in public libraries	17
For use in health care settings	10
For use in social care settings	7
For use in prisons	4
For use in FCO embassies	6

Thank you so much – we love them! I am planning to laminate all the poems, and have a Poem of the Week in a prominent place in both the boy's and girl's schools.

School Librarian, King Fahad Academy.