**Emma Rooney – Developing Children’s Creativity Through Performance Poetry in Brunei**

Following my work with a sub-committee of the Curriculum Development Department (itself part of the Ministry of Education) here in Brunei Darussalam, I became aware of the country's issues with how to promote certain key qualities in Bruneian school children: creativity, teamwork, self expression and self confidence (especially in terms of speaking in public).  
  
Brunei is a very conservative Islamic country; any new initiative has to conform to the Bruneian cultural code that promotes respect for and prioritises 3 things: Islam, the Malay language and culture, and the Bruneian monarchy.  
  
It occurred to me that something like performance poetry could help to instil these things in students, without being at odds with Brunei's culture.  
  
To that end, I proposed initiating a programme in my own school that would have performance poetry at its heart. It included poetry-themed lessons to teach many of the elements of EFL, and used performance poetry as the format for many of the public speaking activities in school - assembly presentations, class presentations, debates, speech competitions, etc. As part of the programme, I was able to persuade Richard 'Dreadlockalien' Grant to come over to Brunei for a week in Sept 2012 and conduct a series of all-day workshops with groups of the students here. The week culminated in a 'showcase' event for the public to introduce the local community to the concept of 'slam'/performance poetry, and it was a huge success. Representatives from the MoE, BELTA, CfBT and KKBS (Ministry of Culture, Youth & Sports) also attended, and were highly impressed.  
  
A few weeks later, the school received a very special invitation from a member of the Bruneian Royal Family... HRH Prince Azim had requested a private performance of our students' slam poems! What a fantastic endorsement this was for this new idea.  
  
Now at the start of 2013, my school has received requests from a number of other Bruneian schools in the area, asking for help and support in initiating their OWN slam poetry programmes. In addition, CfBT are commissioning me to produce a 'Slam Poetry Resource Pack' for distribution to all Bruneian schools, to assist teachers in implementing slam poetry into the schemes of work.  
  
What is clear is that the Bruneian educational community has taken performance poetry to its heart, is making it its own, and is now taking it forward as a medium to help its young people develop the range of skills the country is looking for.

If you want it, I also have video footage of the slam poetry performance we put on for Prince Azim a few weeks ago in November. I've uploaded it (in 2 parts) to Youtube.

[http://www.facebook.com/l/dAQFFt47uAQGiEbbSIAJVKyUeJCuTS1jMSexQ3i7eBMcSow/www.youtube.com/watch?v=K6YY3rfJ2qA&feature=youtu.be](http://www.google.com/url?q=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.facebook.com%2Fl%2FdAQFFt47uAQGiEbbSIAJVKyUeJCuTS1jMSexQ3i7eBMcSow%2Fwww.youtube.com%2Fwatch%3Fv%3DK6YY3rfJ2qA%26feature%3Dyoutu.be&sa=D&sntz=1&usg=AFQjCNHOyps8mwZCU2yW8K8IbHX4LJ6Qxw)  
  
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It shows what these students achieved, and how enthusiastically they embraced the opportunity to articulate their thoughts, views and feelings on a range of topics in front of an audience.   
  
What SO delighted me about the whole experience was watching these young people - almost NONE of whom had ever done any kind of 'performance' in public before - transforming before my eyes... They did what they would formerly have thought was beyond their courage and capabilities. They did things they never thought they could do, and became things they never thought they could be It was just magical.   
  
All these poems were written by the students themselves; all the subject matter was of their own choosing. The piece that I think sums up why this whole initiative was so successful with these young people is approx 13mins in to Part 2 - a Yr10 student of mine called Nicola, and her poem 'I Am Nobody'. These young people were just DESPERATE for an avenue for self-expression here in Brunei, and slam poetry just opened the floodgates I was also blown away with how fully they all explored the possibilities of performance, in terms of how they used their tone of voice, added actions, incorporated choral elements, etc etc... SO creative and original!  
  
I have to give all due credit to Richard, too...his workshops here (as they did when he came to SHS) were a complete inspiration to the participants, and the kids here absolutely ADORED him... He left with a very extensive fan base, I think!!