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A critical investigation, using approaches drawn from action research, into how Year 9 students' learning about the novel *Stone Cold* is developed through Speaking and Listening activities and Drama work.

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Abstract

This paper examines how students can be helped with the production of an empathetic response to a class novel through speaking and listening activities and drama work in English lessons. Other studies have suggested that higher cognitive levels are best reached through speaking and listening, while drama can foster a deeper level of engagement. This piece of research therefore explores students' own feelings and impressions before and after a series of lessons with strong speaking, listening and drama foci in order to establish the extent to which the theories are true. Two questionnaires and one set of empathetic written responses indicate that speaking, listening and drama exercises are initially viewed with a degree of caution, considered more valuable once students have actually experienced them and do appear to impact positively on engagement and academic achievement.

A critical investigation, using approaches drawn from action research, into how Year 9 students' learning about the novel *Stone Cold* is developed through Speaking and Listening activities and Drama work

Introduction

During the course of working on one of my PGCE course assignments, I became increasingly interested in the role of Speaking and Listening in the classroom. Having been schooled in the German system, in which speaking equates to 50% of the overall grade awarded, not only for German, and English as a foreign language, but also for all other subjects (with the exception of Art and Physical Education), I still find the lack of emphasis on oral communication in British classrooms astounding. One could perhaps argue that a paucity of official assessment does not necessarily result in a lack of Speaking and Listening work in the classroom. However, teachers are likely to lend more weight to areas that form the greater parts of assessment at GCSE and A Level, and perhaps rightly so. My experience of British classrooms has been that in many classes, students can be very reluctant to vocalise their ideas in front of the whole group, and often there are only a handful of students who volunteer to answer questions; generally, always the same hands go up. Whilst written work is often private, oral work is inherently public, which raises problems regarding peer pressure and image. Students seem worried about appearing 'keen'. This contrasts strongly with the German model: as students know that their academic success is very dependent on oral work, only the very image-conscious or acutely shy choose not to participate. Clearly, this system also has a major flaw, as it impedes pupils who are naturally quiet from gaining a high grade. However, on a purely functional level, it seems vital that students learn to be self-motivating and practise speaking in front of groups as early as possible in preparation for life after school, as good oral communication skills are highly valued by universities and employers alike.

My research took place in a large, comprehensive secondary school for students aged 11-18 in the East of England. The percentage of students achieving A* to C in five or more GCSE (General Certificate of Education – the school leaving examination taken at age 16) subjects is roughly in line with the national average. In discussions with a colleague, I discovered that a Year 9 group had had relatively little experience of Speaking and Listening and almost no Drama experience. I observed that unless the teacher employed particular methods (such as asking students without their

hands up to answer questions), the same students generally volunteered (if there was volunteering in the first place). Their next assignment needed to be an empathetic response to a novel. So my research required that the assessment of the lessons be in written form. Having discussed the novel *Stone Cold* during a Drama seminar arranged by the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge, I considered the text appropriate for Speaking and Listening activities and Drama work. However, before planning the lesson sequence, I wanted to gather information from students about their thoughts and experiences of Speaking and Listening, and Drama. As an English practitioner and life-long learner, I also felt it was important to the research that I read widely on the subject of Speaking and Listening, and particularly Drama, since this is an area in which I had had relatively little experience.

Literature Review

Learning through Speaking and Listening

Popular pedagogical theory suggests there is a strong relationship between language and thought. Arguably the most influential of these theorists is Vygotsky, who explored how human consciousness and thought is developed through experience with language. In *Thought and Language* he claimed that language is personal and idiosyncratic and that thinking is talking to oneself in note form (Britton, 1987). This style of verbal thinking overrules the formal language structure of grammar and socially acknowledged word meanings, thereby prioritising thought itself. If we support the idea that the role of education is to ensure students can think for themselves and show they are able to express thought, then we must ensure we provide opportunities for students to learn the skills of thinking and expressing thought.

In an educational climate in which pace is frequently seen as desirable, there is potentially a danger that students may be prevented from gaining these vital thinking skills: Marshall and Williams (2006) highlight the importance of thinking time – students must be given the opportunity to consider questions fully and practise thinking, since the expression of thought is overly challenging otherwise. As the processes involved in answering a question are numerous and very different from one another, namely thinking about the answer and expressing the answer in a form that is understandable to the rest of the group, time is essential: the process of moving from the fluid

operation of thought units to the utterance of rule-governed "public" speech using conventional word meanings is one that may demand strenuous mental effort on our part' (Britton, 1987: 24). Vygotsky held the belief that of all the forms of expression, written language was the most valuable in relation to abstract thinking: 'The constancy of the written language, grafted, so to speak, on the immediacy of the spoken language, enables a speaker to reflect upon meanings and by doing so acquire a new level of control, a critical awareness of his/her own thought processes' (p.23). Based on Vygotsky's assessment of the relationship between thought and language, there are a set of processes which are linked and hierarchical, which I have represented diagrammatically in Figure 1:
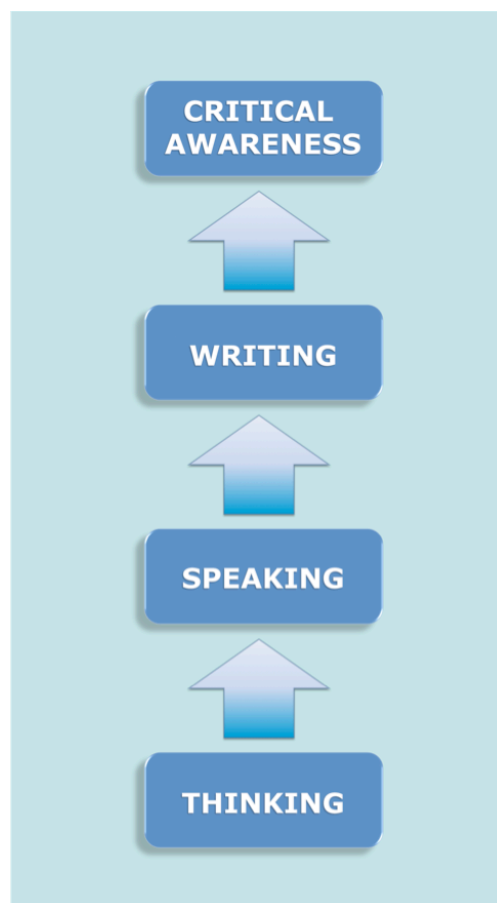
Figure 1: Hierarchy of skills

I believe that a hierarchical view of these skills is both inaccurate and unhelpful. These skills are equally vital, valuable and intrinsically linked to one another. Although not explicitly referred to in Britton's 'Vygotsky's Contribution to Pedagogical Theory', reading is nevertheless an important addition, as is implicit in the reviewing stage previously mentioned. Listening should also be considered an important language skill. This too has therefore been added to an updated representation, Figure 2. Considering these skills as an equal alliance seems more appropriate than placing them in a hierarchy:
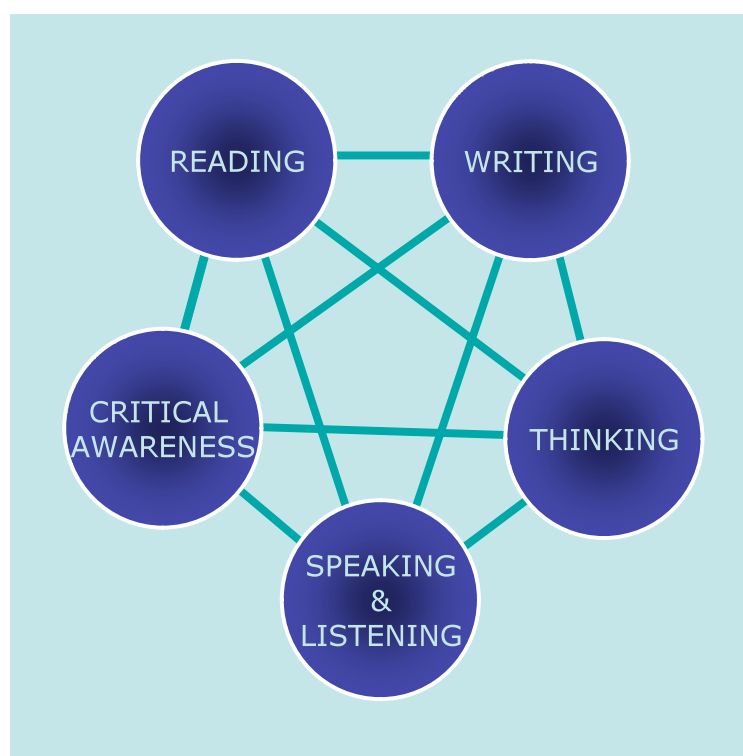
Figure 2: Alliance of language and thought skills

Viewing talk as writing's handmaiden is to grossly underestimate its value. Neil Mercer, who was Professor of Language and Communications at the Open University, explains that talking to one another through discussion greatly advances thought and reason: 'new directions in human thinking often emerge when opposing viewpoints clash, and new courses of human joint action emerge when some ideas win out over others. Persuasion and argumentation are natural, and potentially very valuable, aspects of how we reason together' (Mercer, 2000: 74). There is a strong sense of community action in Mercer's work; he emphasises working and thinking together and explains why collaboration is of such great importance: 'psychologists have redefined cognitive

development as a dialogue, rather than a process of individual discovery and growth' (p.135). This notion of dialogue is the key for the discussion of Speaking and Listening. Pedagogue Robin Alexander (2008) explored the effectiveness of dialogic teaching and emphasised that good practitioners ask open thought-provoking questions which probe into deeper levels of thought, thereby challenging students to extend their knowledge and understanding. Mercer (2004: 134) highlights that dialogue and open questioning can 'guide the development of understanding', 'encourage students to reason and reflect', while also extending problem-solving skills and helping students make sense of experience.

Our own knowledge undoubtedly differs greatly from that of others, as we have different genes and experience: working as a group composed of individuals with different ideas and skills is therefore likely to be beneficial, as it affords us an opportunity to further one another's thinking and reconsider our reasoning. Both Vygotsky and Mercer believe that there are gaps, or 'zones' of potential knowledge that we can access with the help of others: Vygotsky terms this 'the zone of proximal development', 'an area of ability for which one's previous achievements have prepared one, but which awaits assisted performance for its realisation' (Britton, 1987: 25). Mercer (2004: 135) conceptualises this as an 'intermental development zone', explaining that 'young people learn a great deal about how to think collectively from interacting with each other'. If dialogue and interaction are in fact as important to cognitive development as is suggested by leading pedagogical theorists, Speaking and Listening activities with high student involvement presumably ought to be a main mode of teaching in today's classrooms.

Drama for change of insight

Drama theorist John O'Toole (1992: 21) emphasises the power and importance of Drama: he dismisses notions that drama is 'trivial' and explains that Drama is a key process for social and individual development. If true, this is likely to be highly relevant for English – by turning literature into dramatic form, students can become more aware of the interaction that takes place between the original creator and the reader/audience; 'in any literature the relationship between artist and audience is almost infinitely negotiable, and the meanings emergent between them are inevitably dynamic and shifting. In drama, where there is a degree of direct communication with the audience, this negotiability becomes palpable, and sometimes conscious' (p.7). Drama is a very immediate art form that allows students to see connections that may be difficult to arrive at through other means. Educational researcher and former teacher David Booth similarly argues that Drama creates a greater sense of understanding: 'Through drama, they [students] may move from the particular

experience of the story to a more general understanding of the nature of what is being explored, making explicit much of what is implicit' (Booth, p.19).

If Drama is a process, as O'Toole (1992), Booth (1994) and Ackroyd (2004) argue, and not a product, there is no true end-point; this allows students to react, reshape, review, respond and reflect in a way that is more direct and perhaps arguably therefore more straightforward to implement than alternatives, such as re-drafting written work several times. O'Toole (1992: 219) describes this responding, processing and re-incorporation in Drama as a 'self-generative emotional current', which, in turn, furthers the dramatic action itself. While he is unsure whether Drama can in fact create social change, O'Toole does strongly believe that Drama has a transformational capacity that develops skills for different social contexts. This argument seems convincing: even on a basic physical level, Drama requires students to work through fiction in an approximation of lived experience. While O'Toole's idea of how students view the classroom is perhaps somewhat outdated, there are nevertheless likely to be students who 'may see a classroom primarily as a space where they sit in rows all facing one way attending "serious" presentation of "real-life" material in silence' (p.36). In the simple act of moving the furniture of a standard English classroom and repositioning students, teachers reposition the subject and often create a sense of excitement, which arguably is the driving force behind the educational developments observed in Drama activity by researchers and practitioners alike.

Drama undoubtedly exists on a deeper level than the physical. Producing Drama necessitates thought, interaction, communication, cooperation, creativity. While it is largely impossible to demonstrate by a quantifiable, scientific measurement the extent to which Drama is of cognitive, physical, emotional and social value, there is a wealth of information from Drama theorists and practitioners to suggest that Drama should be a feature in the English classroom as well as school Drama studio. Heathcote (1984, p.51) believes Drama can 'surprise' us 'into a new awareness', while O'Toole (1992, p.19) simply calls it 'magic'.

If one assumes that Drama does have the educational merits that O'Toole (1992), Booth (1994) and Ackroyd (2004) put forward, one is compelled to try to understand why Drama is not more widely used in the English classroom. Paradoxically, the power of Drama directly relates to its uptake by practitioners: in order for Drama to be effective, teachers need to create a sense of awareness and reflection in their students. Fostering a 'disposition of mindfulness' to highlight different points of view and encourage criticism and sensitivity requires all members of the group to be open-minded

and more vulnerable (Winston, 2000: 106). Drama asks this not only of students, but also of practitioners. The teacher must be prepared to move away from the potentially more familiar and seemingly safe 'rows all facing one way' (O'Toole, 1992: 36).

Many Drama theorists and practitioners acknowledge that this shift from "traditional" teaching to Drama is potentially a difficult one. Ackroyd (2004: xii) explains that an inherent 'risk' exists in Drama, especially in Teacher in Role. Winston (2000: 103) describes Drama as 'challenging', explaining that it necessitates a 'change in hierarchy' (p.104) and believing that Drama is personal: 'there is always something of me, of my "self", in this "other" I am pretending to be' (p.99). Canadian Theorist Richard Courtney makes the point that teachers need to relinquish a degree of control during Drama lessons (see Booth, 1994: 25). It is possible that some teachers may consider Drama in English simply too risky and challenging, given the particular demands it places on the teacher. However, O'Toole argues that the shift in hierarchy need not be a problem at all so long as teachers have an awareness of this and react accordingly:

> Personality, cultural and relationship factors from the real context may potentially interfere in the fiction [of drama]. This genre therefore imposes demands on the participants for clarity of signalling and a very clear definition of the roles they are playing, for the drama to be sustained at all. For instance, relative *status* is an important situational factor inside and outside drama, and among a class of school students and their teacher, there are normally very strongly upheld status positions. These may be partially suspended within the drama, but particularly if the teacher is participating they need to be taken into account and appropriately managed to prevent them from subsuming the status levels of the characters within the fictional context and either destroying or corrupting the drama in action
>
> O'Toole, 1992: 18, *emphasis* in original.

Drama offers the opportunity for teachers and students to experiment with a more "democratic" classroom: although it may appear paradoxical, the experience of a class sitting on the floor in a circle and being joined there by their teacher can create a greater sense of respect and cooperation between students and teacher than may traditionally be the case.

The role of Speaking and Listening and Drama in English

Pedagogical theory suggests that Speaking and Listening and Drama activities are vital to ensure cognitive, social and emotional development in young adults. Surprisingly, this is not always reflected in government policy. Writing for the QCA, English University Lecturer Ron Carter highlights the low status spoken English has held in relation to the written word and explains why this is the case:

> For many centuries, dictionaries and grammars of the English language have taken the written language as a benchmark for what is proper and standard in the language, incorporating written and often literary examples to illustrate best usage. Accordingly, the spoken language has been downgraded and has become regarded as relatively inferior to written manifestations
>
> Carter, 2006: p.6

While the value and significance of good reading and writing skills ought not to be ignored, it does nevertheless seem equally important that students leave school knowing how to listen, speak and act. Countless situations require well-honed oral and aural skills: offering good customer service, counselling patients, teaching and training, presenting at a sales conference, persuading a boss to increase salary payments, giving a successful interview and negotiating a better price on second-hand goods demand particular skills that all students deserve to learn. Attempting to transcribe any of the afore-mentioned dialogues would quickly illustrate the communicative complexities of oral speech – well-utilised body language, facial expression, intonation, volume and pitch are integral to success, yet, as Carter (2003: 6) points out, 'there are few available models of the good conversationalist or of what is agreed to be successful practice in less formal conversational exchanges'. Arguably, spoken language, due to its inherent flexibility, allows more creativity and innovation, thereby representing language 'at full stretch' (p.7).

As spoken language is both practical and creative, one would expect it to be accorded significant weighting in assessment. Yet interestingly, this importance is not reflected in national examinations. In GCSE English spoken English accounts for a mere fifth of assessment (AQA, 2009). While many teachers undoubtedly foster good Speaking and Listening skills in the classroom and choose to assess these abilities informally, the message communicated by the government is that these skills are not important enough to warrant greater attention in national testing. Since 80% of assessment is written assessment, it is understandable why teachers may gloss over Speaking and Listening in order to provide more time for improving written communication and expression. Coles (2005: 114) explains that the inferior position assigned to Speaking and Listening at Key Stage 4 is in fact a continuation of a problem that exists from the start of secondary school: 'in the banks of the hierarchically organized objectives [of the Key Stage 3 National Strategy Framework for Teaching English] talk clearly takes a subordinate position to reading and writing'. This disadvantages pupils who may not be able to express knowledge confidently in written form.

As a core subject, English plays an important role in the education of every child – students without literacy skills undoubtedly have fewer choices during and after their school career than those with good literacy skills. According to the GCSE specifications, reading and writing are seen to be of most use, based on assessment weighting. However, the conclusion that the government sees Speaking and Listening as less important than reading and writing may perhaps not be accurate – it could be argued that the assessment weighting is related to the amount of time teachers and students need to dedicate to these skills to acquire the expected level. This could be said to imply that it is 'easier' to be good at Speaking and Listening than at reading and writing. To determine the extent to which this may or may not be the case is virtually impossible and requires clearer definitions than exist at present. In either case, the GCSE specifications for English do not, in my opinion, reflect well on the position which Speaking and Listening currently holds.

Perhaps Speaking and Listening plays a minor role in GCSE English assessment because its assessment and moderation is considered more complex than that of written assessments. One feature of the specification indicates that this may be the overriding concern in the assessment of reading: this is assessed through written work, simultaneously indicating that reading is best assessed through the written medium (which is debatable) and penalising those who are strong readers but weak writers. The nature of oral and aural work is undoubtedly very different from that of written work; in regard to assessment this is particularly problematic, since assessment of written work does not take place in real time, while oral assessment generally happens during the spoken activity.

Assessment of Speaking and Listening activities need not be overly challenging provided suitable measures are in place to ensure that assessment is fair and can be moderated: teachers need to be well-informed, in advance of assessment, what the criteria are – there are such a great number of factors in speaking activities (content, volume, length, pitch, body language, facial expression, costume, props, presentation materials, accent, intonation, etc.) that it is difficult to assess them all simultaneously and in real-time throughout a presentation. Criteria therefore either need to be focused, or spoken exams need to be recorded in such a way for them to be reviewed and revisited. Interestingly, the International Baccalaureate Diploma, ever-increasing in popularity, places particular emphasis on oral communication skills and thus contains larger components of oral assessment: almost a third of the final assessment for English comprises of spoken work. The rationale behind this is outlined as follows: 'The discussion of literature is, itself, an art; which requires the clear expression of ideas both orally and in writing' (International Baccalaureate Diploma, 2009, p5).

The position of Drama in the National Curriculum awards relatively little status to the subject, in fact, it is not treated as a subject in its own right; instead, it is consigned to the realm of English in Key Stage 3. However, there is considerable scope for including Drama work to address many of the 'Creativity Key Concepts' (http://curriculum.qca.org.uk/key-stages-3-and-4/subjects/english/keystage3/index.aspx):

a. Making fresh connections between ideas, experiences, texts and words, drawing on rich experience of language and literature.

b. Using inventive approaches to making meaning, taking risks, playing with language and using it to create new effects.

c. Using imagination to convey themes, ideas and arguments, solve problems, and create settings, moods and characters.

d. Using creative approaches to answering questions, solving problems and developing ideas.

The extent to which English teachers choose to include Drama in the English classroom appears varied and whilst Drama activities clearly need to be well-managed, the potential learning is worth the discomfort some non-specialists may experience. With empathetic pieces, Drama has the potential to challenge and motivate students; Heathcote (1984: 50-51) believes 'an important element in personal development is this acquiring of a skill in empathy to apply in our dealings with others. It smoothes the paths of understanding, awareness and communication'.

Research Questions

The idea of learning through experience, either by discussion or through embodied learning in the shape of drama, is intriguing. My initial interest at the start of the project was in Speaking and Listening, having heard from the group's usual teacher that students were relatively inexperienced in this area. I am primarily a teacher of English and had had relatively little involvement in Drama at that point. However, I felt the two areas, Drama and Speaking and Listening, were strongly linked and therefore wanted to:

- gain a better understanding of whether students felt Speaking and Listening activities and Drama could be helpful when preparing for an empathetic response to a novel,

- ascertain how they felt about their skills,

- and know their preferences in terms of enjoyment and usefulness.

Methodology

Research Strategy

Part of this research project involved choosing a research strategy; either that of a case study, or action research. Of these two types, neither strategy is wholly superior to the other; rather their implementation is dependent upon a combination of the results a researcher hopes to gain and the process the researcher wishes to embark on during the course of the research. Case study research takes place through observation and does not require direct involvement (such as through teaching), and therefore arguably allows for a greater level of objectivity. Action research is a "hands on" approach that seeks to instigate change and improve practice during (and after) the research project. Of these two strategies, I have chosen action research, partly because I agree strongly with Denscombe's argument for this method:

> Research should not only be used to gain a better understanding of the problems which arise in everyday practice, but actually set out to alter things – to do so as part and parcel of the research process rather than tag it on as an afterthought which follows the conclusion of the research

> Denscombe, 2007: 122

The advantages of action research in this case are numerous: Firstly, it is appropriate given the experimental and experiential nature of the research objectives; secondly, it is framed in a very positive light; the intention is improvement and the approach is active; thirdly, action research is advantageous to the researcher/practitioner, for seeking to actively improve practice, those involved are furthering their professional development; and fourthly, action research can have a positive impact on other practitioners by generating a positive atmosphere in the staffroom and encouraging others to develop their skills and students' learning.

However, action research is by no means a perfect solution; there are a number of disadvantages to this research strategy: it can be tempting to make generalisations based on what is discovered with only a small sample, findings therefore must be reported using the language of tentativeness until further investigation can lend greater significance to the initial findings (assuming this additional research correlates with the first study). When a number of researchers and practitioners are involved in a research project – as can be the case during action research – this can give rise to a

number of problems pertaining to consistency, roles and ownership. In this particular research project, these problems are largely avoided as I acted as both researcher and teacher. One final concern regarding action research is the question of bias – there is a certain vested interest in the positive outcome of the action research and it is questionable whether full impartiality can be guaranteed. It is therefore of great importance that there is a concerted effort not to introduce bias (such as in the phrasing of questions in questionnaires and interviews) and not to over-estimate the potential findings of any one research project, especially when it is of relatively small scale, as in this case.

Research Method

Mindful of the possible pitfalls of action research, particularly regarding vested interests and impartiality, the choice of research method was carefully considered. The true purpose of a research method is outlined by Denscombe (2007, 133) as to provide 'a clearer picture', 'an accurate measurement' and 'facts and evidence'. These research aims are at times quite challenging; providing irrefutable "proof" is arguably impossible when seeking to investigate whether Drama and Speaking and Listening activities are helpful to students producing an empathetic response to a novel. But educational research is no place for absolutes and a research project of this scale can only ever give an impression of the picture.

There is no 'perfect' method in educational research, 'each of the methods has its particular strengths and weaknesses' (2007: 134). The researcher must therefore choose which method is (or methods are) best suited to the research questions and which is 'the most appropriate method in practice' (p.134). Arguably, the most appropriate research tool for this study is the interview, as it is a verbal form of feedback. However, the group I worked with had relatively little time in which interviews could take place. A quiet place in which interviews could be held was also not available. I therefore made the decision to use questionnaires and supplement the information gleaned from completed questionnaires with the written piece that was required as part of their coursework portfolio, as well as the observations made by my colleague and myself.

Questionnaires have a number of advantages; they can be completed relatively quickly and are simple to arrange in terms of logistics: respondents can complete them simultaneously and in the same location without interference (unlike interviews, for example, which need to take place at separate times). In the classroom setting, questionnaires were therefore more appropriate. An

additional advantage to questionnaires is the standardised questions each respondent is asked exactly the same set of questions as every other participant, thereby creating consistency. Perhaps the greatest advantage of questionnaires is the lack of 'interpersonal factors' witnessed in interviews; in questionnaires there is no 'scope for variation to slip in via face-to-face contact' (Denscombe, 2007: 169).

As pointed out, no one research method is perfect, there are certain disadvantages to questionnaires, e.g.: some respondents can find pre-codes (a set of written answers for selection) unhelpful. It is therefore vital for the researcher to consider pre-codes carefully and ensure there is an 'other (please specify) _____' option when appropriate, so that respondents do not become frustrated. Pre-codes on questionnaires sometimes introduce bias so it is therefore important that researchers guard against such bias at the questionnaire design phase of the research project. One problem that arises from questionnaires is that it can be difficult to gauge the truthfulness of the answers provided by respondents, whilst interviewers can notice changes in body language and intonation that may indicate a degree of untruthfulness. Researchers analysing the responses to a questionnaire need to be mindful of the fact that answers cannot be 100% replied upon. Other simple steps to ensure research through questionnaires is conducted as well as possible include careful consideration of sensitive questions, phrasing, variety (open-ended, pre-coded, ranking, rating, etc.) and sequence of questions. Questionnaires should ideally be piloted to check for bias and the above considerations; in this case the questionnaires were piloted with another teacher.

Teaching Sequence

Students were taught a sequence of English lessons on the novel *Stone Cold* by Robert Swindell, which were planned in response to information gathered about students' experiences and preferences (*Questionnaire I*) in order to provide some insight into whether or not Speaking and Listening activities and Drama are helpful as preparation for an empathetic response to a class novel. An outline of some of the activities students participated in may be of interest: In keeping with the idea of performance, students were asked, in groups, to agree on a set of props and costume that would best portray the character of Link and defend their choices to the other groups. In addition, they had to discuss the casting of a hypothetical actor to play Link and explain how they arrived at their consensus. In another lesson we sat in a circle and arranged the 'stage' with props, discussing in pairs and feeding back to the group how different props and positioning of props affects audiences' perceptions, particularly exploring how we can make the audience feel sympathetic, antagonistic, empathetic. Later, students produced still frames based on a chapter that

had been read out loud in class, focusing on how emotions can be portrayed in a physical way through positioning of the body in the Drama space (and in relation to others), through the posing of the body and facial expression. Students analysed each other's still-frames and explained how ideas are communicated without speech (an idea that can be important to consider during Speaking and Listening assessments). Students participated in other Speaking and Listening activities in pairs and groups and also took part in other Drama activities, such as hot-seating. Hot-seating is a Drama technique similar to teacher in role: typically, one student is selected to sit in front of the class and answer questions from them in character. It offers an excellent opportunity to stretch a gifted and talented student, while also creating variety and interest for the rest of the class, who generally enjoy watching someone they know well, become a different character entirely. By building in time for student to come up with interesting questions that will allow the group to delve deeper into the character's personality, and providing the hot-seated students the opportunity to explain why he or she answered in that particular way in the shape of a debrief discussion, all students can make progress in their understanding of character.
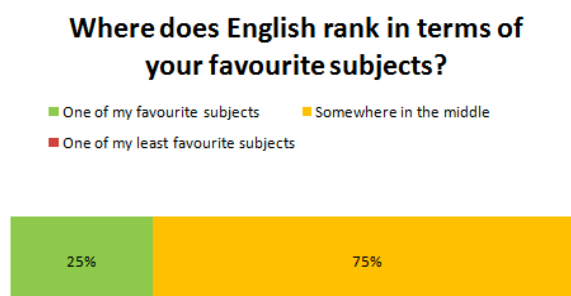
Data and Findings

Overview

The idea behind this research project was to provide an alternative method of studying a class novel in preparation for an empathetic response. Prior to these lessons, students had been working at an individual level producing a number of texts, such as essays and leaflets, by completing written tasks, such as planning and drafting, as preparation. My first research aim was to gain a better understanding about how students felt about English, novels and talk-based learning. The next step was to act on these responses, collect data on the changes and evaluate the success or failure of the new approaches. As discussed in the *Methodology* section, I gathered information (in two stages) through questionnaires, as I felt these were best suited for this research project.

Questionnaire I
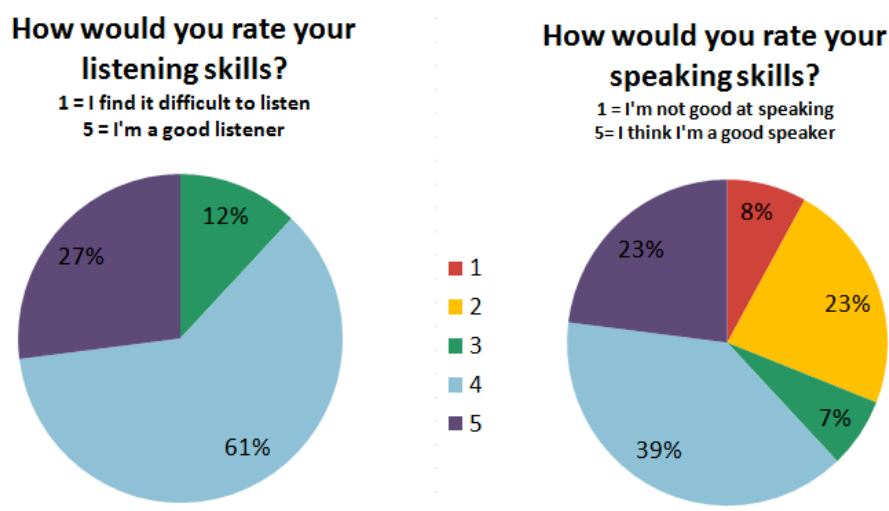
The data of the first questionnaire shows that for the majority of students taking part in this study, English ranks neither as their favourite, nor least favourite subject (see Figure 3). Almost all respondents enjoy English, often describing lessons as 'fun' (5 respondents used this word), 'interesting' (5 respondents) and expressing a particular enthusiasm for the variety English offers

and (to a lesser extent) creative writing. Although few respondents expressed worries about English a few students lacked self-belief: "I enjoy it, but I aint [sic] good at it", "I enjoy english [sic] because I like to learn new things, but I need more confidents [sic]", "I enjoy it but I don't like drama work because I am not very confident."

Where does English rank in terms of your favourite subjects?

■ One of my favourite subjects ■ Somewhere in the middle
■ One of my least favourite subjects

| 25% | 75% |

Figure 3: Ranking of English as a subject

Respondents were asked to rate their skills in Speaking and Listening, on a scale from one to five where one is 'I find it difficult to listen' and 'I'm not good at speaking' respectively and five is 'I'm a good listener' or 'I'm a good speaker'.

How would you rate your listening skills?
1 = I find it difficult to listen
5 = I'm a good listener

How would you rate your speaking skills?
1 = I'm not good at speaking
5= I think I'm a good speaker

■ 1
■ 2
■ 3
■ 4
■ 5

Figure 4: Pupils self-rating of skills

Respondents generally considered themselves relatively skilled in these areas (see Figure 4). Nevertheless, there were marked differences between the two activities: 89% awarded themselves four or more for listening, while only 62% did so for speaking. Although no respondents answered one or two for listening, almost a third of students rated their speaking skills below three out of five. Perhaps this difference can be explained by the fact that speaking skills arguably require students to

be more active, a state not all students of Year 9 like to choose to be. Since several students felt their speaking skills were weak, the sequence of lessons that followed this first stage of research focused on speaking activities. Although not all students rated their skills in these areas as good, the majority did believe that Speaking and Listening work could be helpful when studying a class novel (see figure 5).
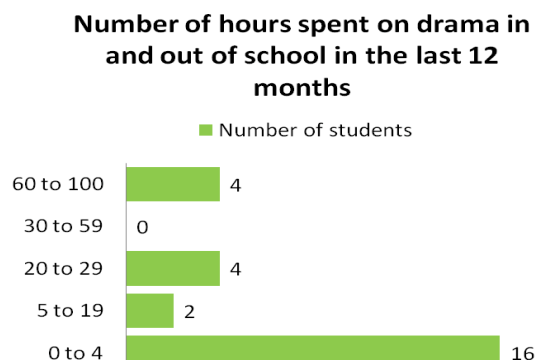
Do you think speaking and listening exercises could help you understand a novel better?

■ Yes ■ Not sure ■ No

| 69% | 23% | 8% |
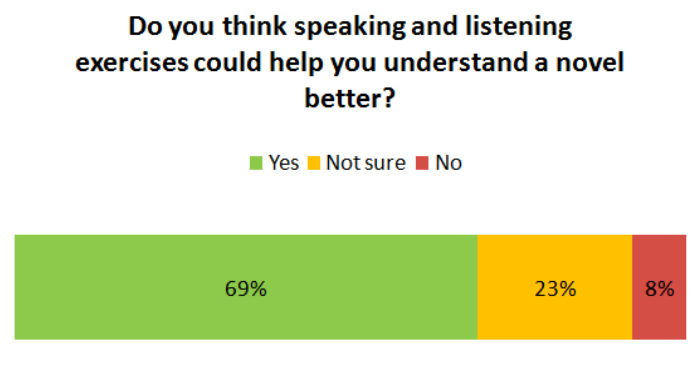
Figure 5: Pupil perceptions of speaking and listening exercises

The attitude and participation levels in Drama show a different picture. On average, respondents had participated in approximately twenty hours of Drama (inside and outside of school) within the previous twelve months (see figure 6).

Number of hours spent on drama in and out of school in the last 12 months

■ Number of students

60 to 100	4
30 to 59	0
20 to 29	4
5 to 19	2
0 to 4	16

Figure 6: Pupil ratings of time spent on drama

However, the average is insufficient in this case; well over half the class had taken part in fewer than 5 hours of Drama in that time, while four students participated in Drama activities for an average of at least an hour a week.

Students felt more certain regarding their opinion on whether or not Drama exercises could be helpful when trying to understand a novel than they did with Speaking and Listening activities (see figure 7). Almost three times as many respondents believed Drama activities would not be helpful than believed Speaking and Listening activities would be unhelpful. It is perhaps questionable whether students answered the question asked; I initially had some concerns that students might be trying to answer the question 'do you want to do Drama?' rather than whether they think it would be helpful.
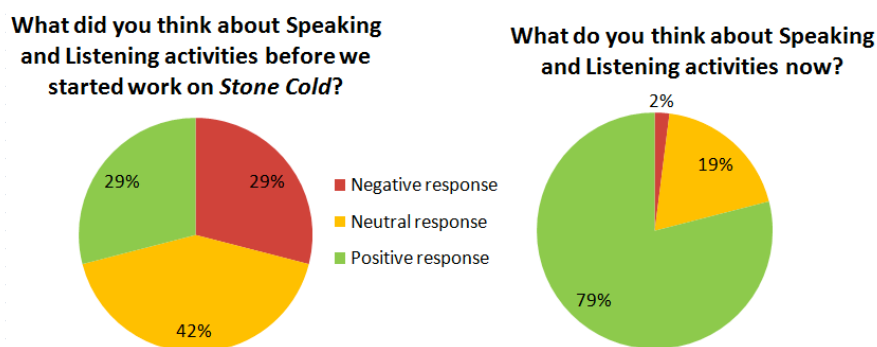

Do you think drama exercises could help you understand a novel better?

■ Yes   ■ Not sure   ■ No

| 62% | 15% | 23% |
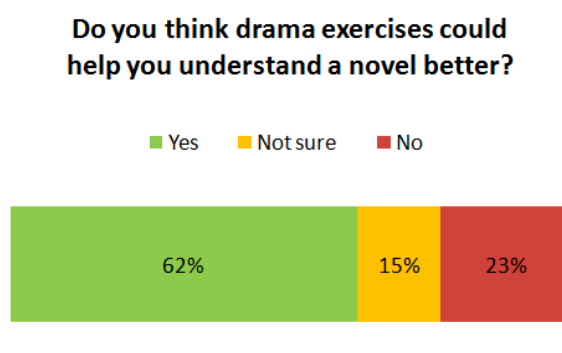
Figure 7: Pupil perceptions of drama exercises

Questionnaire II

During the course of the lessons that followed *Questionnaire I* and preceded *Questionnaire II*, it became apparent that students were enjoying learning through Speaking and Listening and Drama activities: my colleague noted in his lesson observations how different the lessons were to how he usually taught them: they had become more interactive and students were visibly engaged in the work. We were also impressed by the extent to which students were able to recall early work on the novel much later, despite not having written down their ideas. Although we felt confident in our observations that attitudes in the classroom were changing, I wanted to see how much of this was noticed by students themselves.

 As part of the second stage of this research project, respondents were asked to reflect back on their initial thoughts on Speaking and Listening activities and Drama work to establish, as best they could, whether the series of lessons on *Stone Cold* had altered their view in any way (see figure 8).

What did you think about Speaking and Listening activities before we started work on *Stone Cold*?

What do you think about Speaking and Listening activities now?

Figure 8: Shifts in pupil perceptions of speaking and listening activities

While the split between positive, neutral and negative responses to Speaking and Listening activities before the teaching sequence was largely evenly spread, the response to the new speaking activities was significantly more positive following the lesson sequence: almost four out of every five students felt positive. Students said 'I think they are interesting because I like listening to what people have to say about things,' 'I don't mind it and I am happier speaking in front of people,' 'I still don't mind them but I respect them a bit more', 'I have to say I like them a lot more than I did. It was quite fun', 'they are very good to develop empathetic skills and show how you feel.' Interestingly, more respondents felt positive about Drama activities from the outset than they did about Speaking and Listening: just over half the students thought positively about Drama before the study, while nearly three quarters felt positive by the end of the Drama lesson sequence (see figure 9). Only one student still thought negatively about Drama by the end.

What did you think about drama activities before we started work on *Stone Cold*?

**What do you think about drama activities now?**
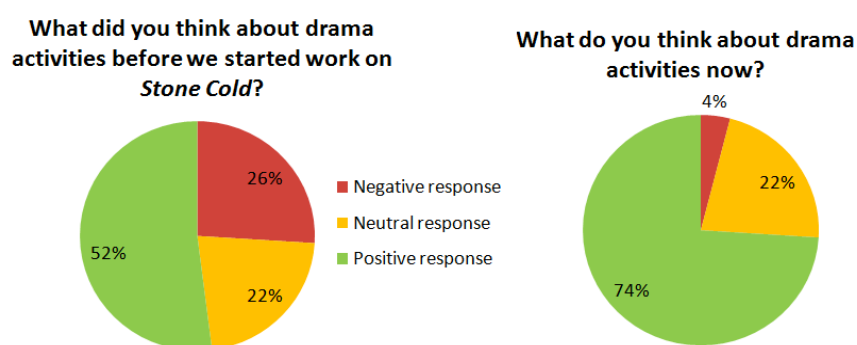
Figure 9: Shifts in pupil perceptions about drama activities

Perhaps students, on the whole, feel more confident portraying a character in front of their peers than speaking to an audience as themselves. While both activities could be said to be a 'risk'

(Ackroyd: xii), there is arguably more risk being one's true self (particularly from the point of view of a teenager who is trying to define who he or she wants to be). Based on some respondents' comments, there seems to be a fear of Drama, but one that can thankfully be overcome: 'I don't mind them now because I realised its [sic] not that bad being watched acting', 'they are fun but I'm still a rubbish actor', 'I realised they are okay and can be fun.'
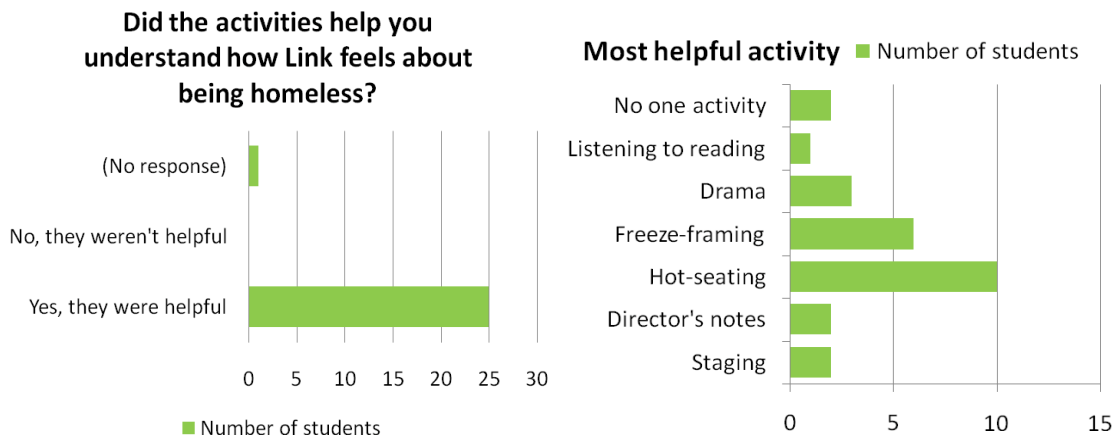
Having a clear reason and objective for the Drama task seems to be very important to how it is received: 'they can help your [sic] understand the feelings of a fictional character.' One student could not see the point of Drama before the teaching sequence began: 'I hate them [Drama activities], never liked drama, It's kind of boring, would never do it again'. By the end of the *Stone Cold* lessons the respondent had a more positive attitude, 'they are a bit better, kinda [sic] funner [sic]. Would do it again', which perhaps reflects the importance of focused, engaging Drama work.

My research aims were in part to discover which activities students enjoyed most, whether they found Speaking and Listening and Drama activities helpful and which activities were most helpful in providing an insight into how Link feels as a homeless teenager. Three activities in particular were popular: five students chose 'listening to the novel being read aloud', six students picked the staging activity (proxemics) and eleven respondents selected freeze-framing as their favourite activity (see figure 10).
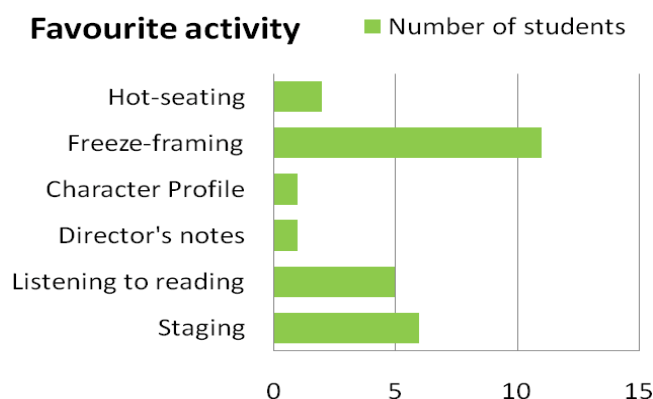

Figure 10: Pupils' favourite activities

While every student responded positively when asked whether the activities were helpful in imagining what Link feels like being homeless, it was interesting to discover that the most helpful activity was not the same as the favourite activity (see figure 11).

Did the activities help you understand how Link feels about being homeless?

(No response)

No, they weren't helpful

Yes, they were helpful

0   5   10   15   20   25   30

■ Number of students

Most helpful activity   ■ Number of students

No one activity

Listening to reading

Drama

Freeze-framing

Hot-seating

Director's notes

Staging

0   5   10   15

Figure 11: Pupil perceptions of different learning activities

In fact, the most helpful activity, hot-seating, was only selected by two respondents as their favourite of the activities. While listening to the novel being read was considered enjoyable, it was in fact the least mentioned helpful activity. It follows that what is most enjoyable is not necessarily the most helpful and vise versa.

Students were also asked to consider which types of activities and classroom setups were most useful to them. An overwhelming majority found group work the most helpful classroom configuration (see figure 12).

Which type of work was most useful?

0%

10%

90%

■ Group work
■ Pair work
■ Individual work
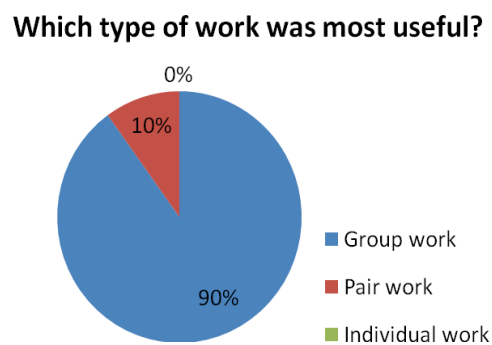
Figure 12: Pupil perceptions of useful learning activities

When asked why, students' comments were very reminiscent of Mercer's writing on how students further learning through discussion: 'Because on your own you miss things, but in groups you get lots of ideas', 'because you can see points of view that you wouldn't have come up with on your own', 'I think working in groups helps me to work more', 'because I could understand it easier',

'because it's not just your ideas so you can put them together', 'because you can find out what other people think aswell [sic]', 'because it helps me think better.'

I found the final comment 'because it helps me think better' most interesting; the student doesn't say how or why this is the case, he or she simply knows it to be true. Not a single respondent said that working on an individual level was most useful; I found this surprising at first, but reading the reasons why working with others was considered more useful, I began to understand why collaborative work is seen as more useful. The individual's thoughts and ideas are always present, therefore, group work can only add to a person's understanding. Even if the group works badly, it is likely to produce more ideas than one individual simply because the members who make up the group all read a text differently as a result of their particular personal experiences.

Wishing to discover how students assess learning most effectively when preparing an empathetic piece, I asked students whether speaking, listening, reading or writing activities were most useful:
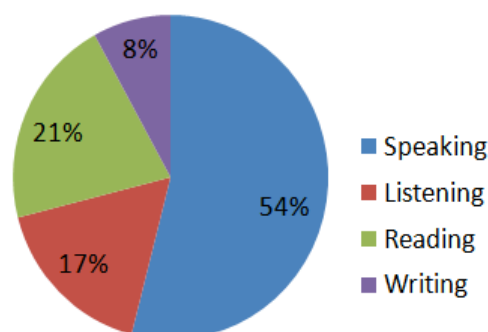
Figure 13: Pupil perceptions of usefulness of language activities

Often tasks comprise several skills, such as reading a chapter and summarising it, listening to group members' contributions and asking for clarification. Regardless of where students consider their strengths or preferences lie, it is obviously essential that students develop skills in all of these areas. It is nonetheless interesting to discover that students personally find speaking most useful when preparing an empathetic response. Their reasons for choosing speaking echo some of the explanations on why group work was considered most useful: 'I learn best when speaking', 'the more you can talk and discuss with your mates the more you understand', 'talking about things aloud makes you think more', 'because it engages you and helps you to understand.' Nevertheless,

a number of students found other methods more useful: those who found listening and reading most helpful drew attention to the fact that it is during these activities that we truly see how Link feels by engaging directly with the author's own words. Those who found writing most helpful said they were better able to concentrate and engaged more with the feelings of Link by actively writing about them.

The observation of my colleague, my evaluations and the questionnaires indicate that students were engaged with Speaking and Listening and Drama activities. A pleasing demonstration of this can be found in the written work students needed to complete for their class teacher; a selection of the empathetic responses of this group to *Stone Cold*, can be found in Appendix I. Students each have a target grade that represents the level they should be able to achieve by the end of Year 9. This grade is based on a combination of CAT (Cognitive Ability Test) scores and the English teacher's assessment of students' potential achievement. The target grade assumes a reasonable amount of effort on the part of the student, which means that students can often exceed or fail to reach their target grade, depending of the level at which they work. In the case of the *Stone Cold* empathetic response 'A Night on the Streets', for which students wrote about the experience of living on the streets as a teenager, the overall performance proved pleasantly positive (see figure 14).

Assessment of *Stone Cold* empathetic response
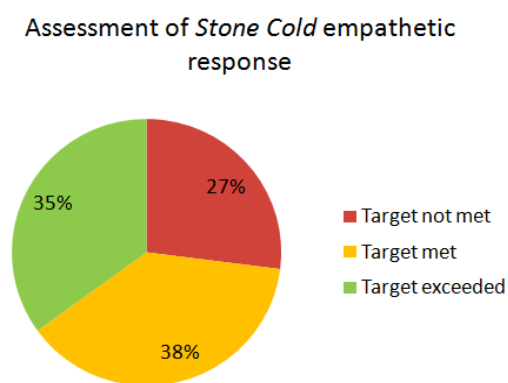
Figure 14: Student assessment

Nearly three quarters of the class successfully achieved or exceeded their target grade. No student was awarded a grade more than one level below or above their target. This perhaps shows that all students (regardless of ability) were sufficiently prepared for the empathetic piece and that the teaching did not favour a particular ability level, but sought to be both accessible and challenging to all students.

Turning to the selection of work in appendix I, we find evidence of strong, empathetic pieces that convey both the tone and the message of the novel with great clarity. Student A creates a biting, bitter tone in her piece, infusing the text with a sarcasm that is reminiscent of Swindell's work: 'Great. I'm one of them now, sitting in doorways of the shops in the street and sleeping rough.' There is an edginess to much of the piece, but there is also an honest desperation and depth of feeling: 'It was about then when the loneliness hit me. I tried to be hopeful – tried to be – by imagining I was with Carole and Mum.'

Student B describes the feeling of being homeless and someone you know from before your time on the streets recognising you:

> I realise that I know him. He's the father of someone who previously was a good friend, back when I was in school. He glances quickly at me, and his eyes widen with the shock of recognition. He quickly looks away, unsure of what to think, and attempts to pretend that he never saw me and that I don't exist. As he walks away, I notice that his speed has increased considerably.

Many of Student B's ideas are entirely his own and do not feature in the novel. Although there is no way to be certain, it is interesting to consider whether Drama work and embodied learning may have helped Student B to develop his ideas: 'I take apart the word inside my mind, say it over and over to myself. Homeless. Home less. I have no home.'

Student C weaves events of the novel and her own ideas together to create an original and convincing piece of writing: 'I don't like being alone, I would rather be with my family, the family I know. Not the family Vince has created.' She explores the feeling of being homeless creating images of her own, thereby lending her work greater impact:

> My fingures [sic] swell up like balloons its [sic] that cold! My nose runs and I swear I get brain freeze! I guess I get so cold and tired I just cant [sic] sleep. I know that sounds weird but if you go to sleep you dont [sic] know if you will wake up again.

Student D, an under-performing boy, has received a below target grade for every piece of assessed work in Year 9, principally, due to a lack of effort, according to his class teacher. However, on this occasion, Student D did meet his target. His work was exceptional in the level of emotion it conveyed: 'I hate being alone, I'm sad, scared I don't know what to do, I mean what if someone tries to mug me or sleep in my sleeping bag with me.', 'I'm so cold and hurt that I can't think straight, I want to cry but I can't.', 'I'm poor and homeless. I'm sad, angry, unhappy, destroyed, dirty and dying. But will last.' Student D meeting his target grade for the first time this year was a hugely positive outcome of these lessons. He overcame initial reluctance and was noticeably more engaged during English lessons. Although his written work is not always strong, it is very

rewarding to see that, in the case of this empathetic response, he has successfully transferred learning in the classroom into written work.

Conclusion

Over the course of this critical investigation I discovered that many of those participating in the study feel their oral communication skills are weak. I also ascertained that these students' experience and opinion of Drama is much divided, a result I had not fully anticipated. My action research project therefore led me down a new path that featured Drama in the English classroom. By reading the work of influential Drama theorists and practitioners such as Dorothy Heathcote, David Booth, Judith Ackroyd, Joe Winston and John O'Toole, I learnt how Drama can have the power to engage learners and further their thinking through embodied learning. I consequently planned a teaching sequence that incorporated Speaking and Listening and Drama activities with the aim of eliciting an empathetic response to *Stone Cold*.

As a practitioner, I could instantly see the impact Drama teaching had on the group. The prior reading was integral to the success of the lessons, as it ensured I established a set of Speaking and Drama rules, which allowed disruption to be kept to a minimum. It was interesting to see how those students who had done less Drama in the previous twelve months were more likely to have a negative view of the activity. I was curious to know whether students who had had this negative view would continue to feel the same way, or would change their opinion. In this case, students clearly did view Drama more differently once they experienced it: at no point did I believe that all students but one would offer a neutral or positive response about Drama, but this was in fact the case. This result has made me seriously re-consider my practice; if students only have a negative view of Drama because they have no experience of it, then it is surely important that we ensure they do have the opportunity to discover the art.

My research was on a small scale: I had only 28 respondents; they were all from the same school and in the same English class. My results therefore cannot be used to suggest that every group's learning would be as positively influenced through the introduction of Speaking and Listening and Drama work as this group. However, my experience with this group has shown me how powerful these activities can be: my observations, data gathered through questionnaires and the work the group produced, show how greatly the activities enhanced students' engagement and leaning. Their

class work and written empathetic responses were very pleasing: students enjoyed the lessons and performed well on an academic level.

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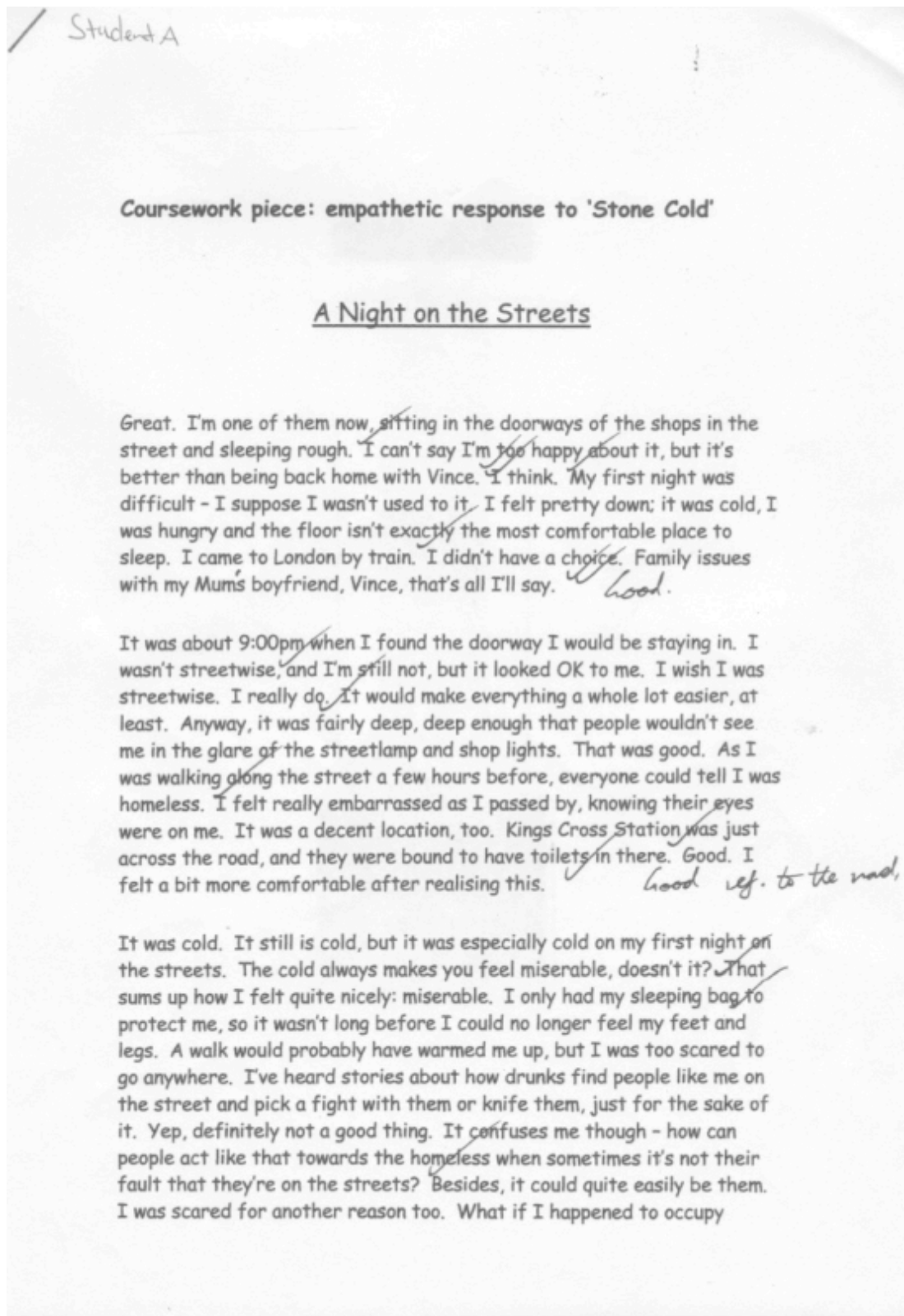
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Appendix I

Student Essays

Coursework piece: empathetic response to 'Stone Cold'

A Night on the Streets

Great. I'm one of them now, sitting in the doorways of the shops in the street and sleeping rough. I can't say I'm too happy about it, but it's better than being back home with Vince. I think. My first night was difficult – I suppose I wasn't used to it. I felt pretty down; it was cold, I was hungry and the floor isn't exactly the most comfortable place to sleep. I came to London by train. I didn't have a choice. Family issues with my Mum's boyfriend, Vince, that's all I'll say. *Good.*

It was about 9:00pm when I found the doorway I would be staying in. I wasn't streetwise, and I'm still not, but it looked OK to me. I wish I was streetwise. I really do. It would make everything a whole lot easier, at least. Anyway, it was fairly deep, deep enough that people wouldn't see me in the glare of the streetlamp and shop lights. That was good. As I was walking along the street a few hours before, everyone could tell I was homeless. I felt really embarrassed as I passed by, knowing their eyes were on me. It was a decent location, too. Kings Cross Station was just across the road, and they were bound to have toilets in there. Good. I felt a bit more comfortable after realising this. *Good ref. to the novel.*

It was cold. It still is cold, but it was especially cold on my first night on the streets. The cold always makes you feel miserable, doesn't it? That sums up how I felt quite nicely: miserable. I only had my sleeping bag to protect me, so it wasn't long before I could no longer feel my feet and legs. A walk would probably have warmed me up, but I was too scared to go anywhere. I've heard stories about how drunks find people like me on the street and pick a fight with them or knife them, just for the sake of it. Yep, definitely not a good thing. It confuses me though – how can people act like that towards the homeless when sometimes it's not their fault that they're on the streets? Besides, it could quite easily be them. I was scared for another reason too. What if I happened to occupy

Student A

someone else's doorway? I wouldn't have been a match for one of the big, streetwise dossers. I was lucky; no-one was living there.

I was woken up after a few hours by a group of people who were incapable of respecting others. I assumed they had just been at the pub down the road and were walking home. I don't think they could have been noisier if they tried! I ended up getting incredibly annoyed and frustrated at them all. Why on earth couldn't they keep their voices down?! Although, right then I would much rather have been in their shoes instead of my own. At least I would have money, even if I did end up spending it on alcohol like they did, and I would have a warm house and bed to go home to. *Good*.

It was about then when the loneliness hit me. I tried to be hopeful – tried to be – by imagining I was with Carole and Mum, no Vince of course, doing things we used to do like fun trips to the seaside for the day. I think it was this that helped me to fall asleep again.

This morning was a rather abrupt start. I was woken by someone prodding me in the back. As you can imagine, I wasn't too pleased about that. There were two of them, one male and one female. Both were police. Once I was conscious, I became quite worried that they were going to arrest me. Thankfully, they didn't. What a relief! Instead, they simply told me to be on my way. So I packed up and left.

It was early morning I think. There were several cars out on the road. I could hear a cooing noise coming from above me. Pigeons. Why are there so many pigeons in the world, and why do they have to make such an annoying noise? Litter was everywhere I looked. If only people could have the decency to put it in the bin instead of leaving it on the street. *Excellent*. This is someone's home you know! Mine now, unfortunately. I'm starting to veer off topic aren't I? Sorry, I'm just so tired, you see. Anyway, there was an all night kebab shop open just down the road; as I passed it the smell was mouth-watering! By now my stomach was controlling me, not my brain.

As I was walking along I realised just how unhappy I was. My money was slowly wasting away; it wouldn't be long before I would have to start begging. I only had about £9 left – enough for about one meal and a couple of drinks. Great. I hadn't received anything from the job company, and my instinct told me I probably never would. I was also quite *Good details from the novel.* surprised to find out that no-one, and I mean *no-one*, even showed some

Student A

form of support for me out here, when they could clearly see the conditions I was living in. I also began to feel a pure hatred towards Vince. After all, it was his fault that I was on the streets. Once I started thinking about *him*, the anger welled up inside me so quick I threw my sleeping bag at a shop window without even giving a second thought. Thankfully the owner hadn't arrived yet. I went over and retrieved the sleeping bag that Carole had given me as a gift for Christmas.

As for the rest of my life? Well, that's still to be decided. Something tells me it's going to be hard to bear, though. I can tell you now I'm definitely not looking forward to tonight, night two sleeping rough. I'd much rather sleep in a soft, cosy bed, thank you! I suppose I'll manage though. I'll have to. I'm not sure what will happen after that. One of two things probably: I'll either get a job and be able to afford to rent a place out or I'll spend the rest of my life homeless. Probably that last one.

Yippee.

, this is an *excellent* piece of empathetic writing. Utterly convincing and enjoyable to read – I didn't want it to end!

Well done!!

Student B

Coursework piece: empathetic response to Stone Cold

A night on the streets

I'm walking along the road, carrying my sleeping bag and possessions with me, my head reeling from what happened just an hour ago. What the hell am I going to do? I'm sixteen years old, with no home, no money, and nobody who cares. Well, I suppose that's not entirely true. Mum cares, I think. But she never stuck up for me when Vince was slapping me around, or when he locked me out of the house. Vince. Just thinking his name makes me feel physically sick. I hate every bone in his body. I hate the way he walks, the way he moves, the way he grins when he knows he's getting to me. I have fewer feelings for him than there are hairs on his worthless head. It disgusts me to think that every night he sleeps in the same bed as my mother. If only Dad hadn't run off with that receptionist when I was fourteen. He's nearly as bad as Vince. I bet he's having the time of his life, while his son's left on the streets to fend for himself.

It's getting darker. At this time of year, the moment the sun gets below the horizon, the temperature quickly drops to below zero. Even now, my fingers and toes are getting colder and colder. The realisation is beginning to sink in now. I'm homeless. I take apart the word inside my mind, say it over and over to myself. Homeless. Home less. I have no home. No bed. Nothing. Panic begins to set in. Oh my God. What am I going to do? A hundred questions chase each other round and round in my head. I want to run, I want to scream, I want to curl up into a ball and cry, all at the same time. I find myself physically unable to breathe. Why won't somebody help me? Then, some miraculous, hidden spark of reason shines through. I force myself to take deep breaths, think about what I'm going to do, banishing the panic from my mind. I've seen homeless people before, hundreds of times. I have to admit, I never paid much attention to them. It was like they didn't exist; their world was separate from mine. Not so separate anymore. I'm one of them now.

It's nearly pitch black. My feet and hands feel like blocks of ice. I need to find somewhere to sleep, and fast. A doorway seems to be the best option. A little clichéd perhaps, but nonetheless effective, providing shelter and protection from three directions. My first possible candidate for a "bed" is filled with broken glass. A second reeks of stale urine. After what seems like hours, I finally find a suitable place to sleep. It's dirty, and several light-years away from anything I'd ever choose to sleep in, but it will have to suffice. I unroll my sleeping bag and climb in. I take

Student B

a look at my surroundings. I'm in a doorway, quite far from t he main road, near a small patch of grass, on which is a small tree and a bench. The house looks like it has been abandoned for weeks, with no car or lights on, and several windows broken. The cold stone of the doorway is digging into the small of my back, and there is no way for me to make myself comfortable. The cold is bitter too. The wind is coming in at a forty-five degree angle, cutting right through my body, and chilling me to the bone. As I lie there, trying to get to sleep, a man walks past, presumably returning from work late. With a shock, I realise that I know him. He's the father of somebody who previously was a good friend, back when I was in school. He glances at me, and his eyes widen with the shock of recognition. He quickly looks away, unsure of what to think, and attempts to pretend that he never saw me and that I don't exist. As he walks away, I notice that his speed has increased considerably. I wonder if this is the way I'll be treated from now on – a quick glance, then total blanking, and awkward detours or escape attempts.

Excellent!!

I carry on unsuccessfully trying to get to sleep. Normally, I sleep heavily and quickly, but tonight I simply can't seem to release my grip on waking life. Finally, after hours of fruitless attempts, I manage to drop off. However, my brief rest is short-lived, and my sleep is perforated with constant awakenings. My dreams are short, partly formed, and leave a lingering sense of worry and foreboding. Partway through the night I hear an owl hoot and fly away. I snap my eyes open and leap up, spooked. My heart races. Slowly, I begin to realise that I was aroused from my difficult sleep by virtually nothing at all. I reluctantly fall back into my troubled slumber.

I wake slowly, blinking and rubbing my eyes. I reach for my pillow, to shift it towards a more comfortable position, then realise that it no longer exists. With that, I shake off the last vestiges of my blissful trance. I roll over, and nearly fall off the doorstep. A bird is singing in a tree nearby. I'm sure that it's a wonderful sound, but at the moment, in my half-asleep state, all I can think of is how the shrill sound feels like it's cutting through my head. As I get up, I realise that my left arm is completely dead, and my back is killing me. I grudgingly stretch myself out, and rub the sleep from my eyes. After slapping myself awake, I roll up my sleeping bag. I get up, and realise that I have just spent my first night on the streets. Then, my heart sinks as I remember that I'll have to spend an indefinite period of time doing this every day. Will I be able to cope? I decide that I'll take each night as it comes. I pick up my bedroll, and walk off, ready to face another day homeless.

⊕ , this is a truly excellent piece of work – utterly convincing and maturely written. Well done!

Student C

Corsework Peice: empathetic response to 'Stone cold'

A night on the Street.

I got to london by borrowing money off of Karole, even though there was a very high chance that I couldn't pay her back any time soon. She even come and said goodbye to me at the train stati when I was in london it was getting late so i thought i better start looking for somewhere to stay the night. I found a doorsway, that would have to make do, I was trying to make the good best out of a bad situation, I dont know how long i would be in this situation. Its so cold, it makes me want to cry but then if i cry then my tears might turn to ice! I can honestly say I never thought i would end up like this. My fingers swell up like balloons its that cold! My nose runs and i swear i get brain freeze. I guess i get so cold and tired i just cant sleep, i know that sounds weird but if you go to sleep, you dont know if you will wake up again yes im homeless and there is a lot to mean about but i still want to live! I finally get to sleep a couple of hours before the sun rises, so i only get to sleep for a couple of hours. If people come coming back from the pubs drunk they sometimes start fights, or if us homeless people are sleeping they will wee on us or spit on us or just keep on kicking us. it really is truely disgusting.

Student C

Good

I dont really like being alone, I would rather be with my family, the family i know. Not the family vince has created. I would like a friend, someone i can talk to, but i cant really see me having one of them any time soon. All i can do is wish.

I feel so unhappy because im all alone, i dont get much food or drink, i dont get much sleep, its cold. i dont get to shower or bath. not even to wash a little.
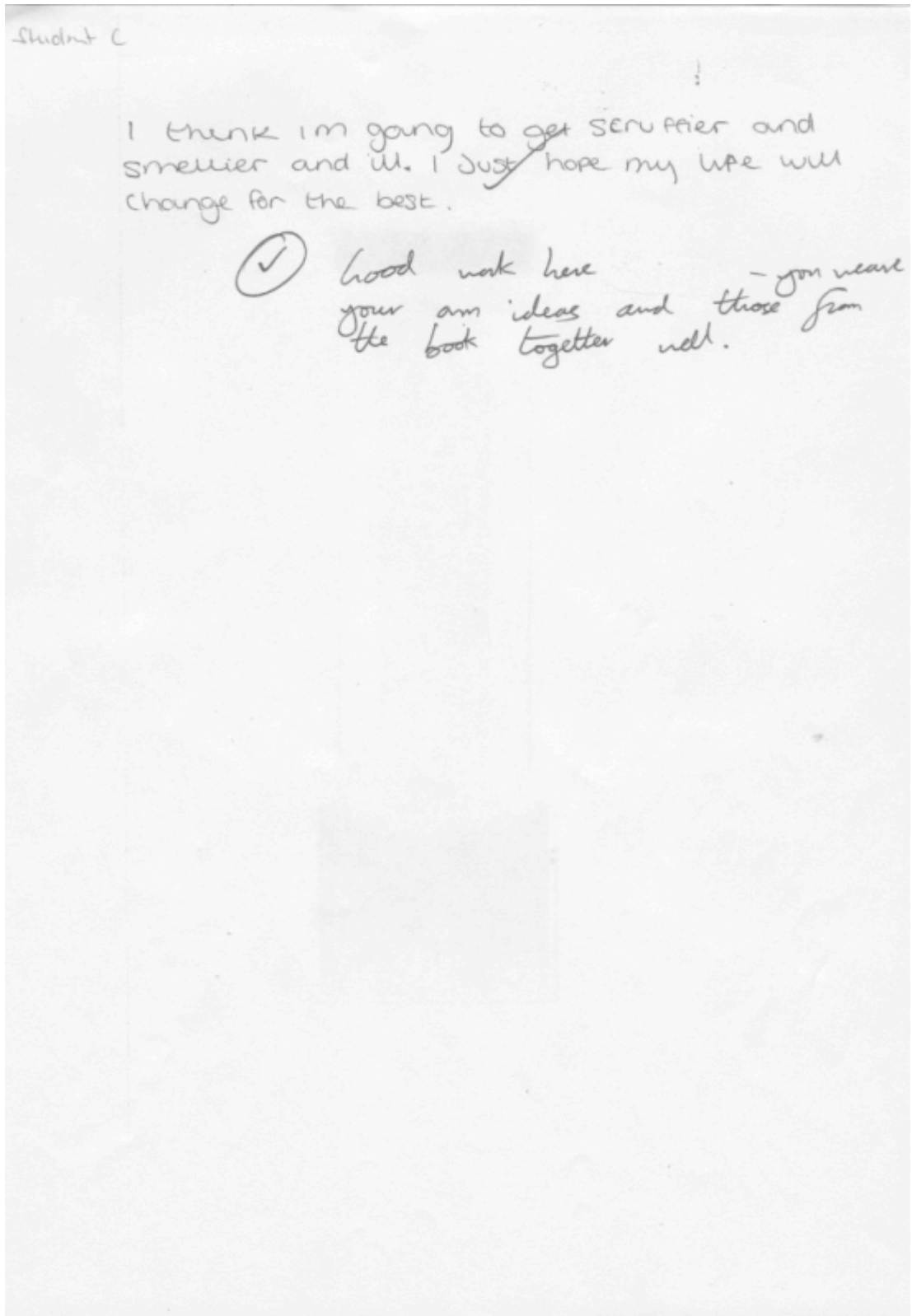
I dont have many belongings and even my own family dont want me around, if you think you could have so little in the world and still be happy, you must be magic!

I miss being mums little boy, when i was 5 or something, then i wouldnt be here, where i am today if i was 5 again, I'd give anything to be just 5 years old.

we get woken up by the police in the morning, before anyones awake so we have time to move out of their way.

I cant hear <u>allot</u>, its just all sounds calm no ones around appart from the police, and other homeless people. I hear my own breathe because its so cold. I can see other people just like me and i can see them breathing too!

I can smell myself, i wish i couldnt, its really embarrasing. The way i look and smell. I feel worst than yesterday. it doesnt feel as if anything is going to get any better. im going to have another night out here, i have no choice.

Student C

I think im going to get scruffier and smellier and ill. I just hope my life will change for the best.

✓ Good work here — you weave your own ideas and those from the book together well.

Student D

The Course Work Piece: empathetic response to 'stone cold'

A night on the streets.

It was cold and so was I. It was dark, dirty and smelt a bit. I was sad, alone and homeless I don't know what to do. I got off the bus and walked down the roads of London, I was colder now and tired, I looked around for a place to hit the hay. Then noticed a spot in a doorway it looked a bit warmer and no ones there. I smiled for a second but then thought, I wouldn't be here if my family loved me. I lay down, the colds getting to me now, I was like a snowman, my nose was runny, I couldn't feel my fingers and could hardly move. It's freezing. I hate being alone, I'm sad, scared I don't know what to do, I mean what if someone tries to mug me or sleep in my sleeping bag with me. What do I do, do they have a weapon, should I fight, I don't like it out here, I want to go home but I cant. I'm so scared and tired right now, well at least I found a spot to sleep, even though I'm not comfortable, I shouldn't be here, I miss them, except from him, you know Vince, I hate him. Every night I cry because I miss them, all because of him, I feel like I'm dying. *Good.*

It's dark and freezing, I hate it. I can't really understand it all yet, why I decided to come to London, I got to sleep in the end, for about ten minutes. I heard a noise, footsteps, scared, can't see anything, scared but then I can, it was a lad, thought he was going to hurt me or something. I spoke to him quietly but I was really scared, turns out he just wanted to sleep in the doorway with me, I smiled again for a second, because I know I'm not on my own anymore and that's a good start, I guess. I'm cold still but not lonely, he knew everything about homeless, I was glad but then I thought to myself, I'm still lonely really, I mean this guy, he ain't my mate, I was sad, really sad then, I hate being alone, I can't be alone anymore. It's scary, I'm unhappy, I need someone to talk to, be there for me. What do I do. I'm unhappy, I'm unhappy because I've run away from my family because that ogre Vince has stolen them from me and is hurting us all. I don't care anymore, they're hurting me, they didn't even try stopping me from running away, they just gave me a sleeping bag for Christmas, that made me so angry, I just wanted to kill them all. I love them all but they obviously don't love me. I miss them and a warm house, bed, food, love, I miss telly, music, friends and a family all together. *Great refs. to the novel.*

I'm still cold, lot of traffic goes by, bit noisy but got to get used to it haven't I. I can hear people and dogs barking, the cold wind in my ear. I'm in a doorway, in a darkish alley behind a main road, walls on both sides, bins tipped over and me and this guy, cold and a bit damp, just laying here. He smells, it smells down here. Bit like sewers, it's horrible, I'm starting too as well, it's not good, I don't know what to feel or say anymore. I'm so cold and hurt that I can't think straight, I want to cry but I can't and I'm angry for being out here, I'm a nobody that's what I am a nobody. After a nights sleep it's a bit better, the family is starting to fade out of my head which is good because it made me sad thinking about us apart. I'm going to be a long time so I will make it tonight with ease I think.
The street isn't that bad you know. It's fresh air, well kind of fresh. Well I'm getting cold, damp, uneasy with people looking at me and I am really unhappy but looks like I'm going to be here for a bit longer, lot longer, but I will be alright, I have a friend, a place to sleep, it will be ok.
I pray!

What do I do when I'm asking for money, how do I get money, because I'm broke and starving. It's not easy, it's cold, hard and annoying. Someone people are right pigs, they just walk past like I'm not even there. Greedy they are. I'm poor and homeless. I'm sad, angry, unhappy, destroyed, dirty, smelly, damp and dying.
But will last.

① Well done — an excellent piece of work here and you've hit your target grade. Keep up the good work!