Process Writing Project Scheme Summary Sheet

Name of teacher	School or college
Simon Heald	Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Blackburn
Class/Year	Topic or title
Year 9 Set 4	Analytical Writing About Poetry

Prewriting activities

Students listened to the poems being read aloud, and watched the poetry slideshows from the BBC Bitesize website. As a class we discussed their impressions of the poems – Tennyson's 'The Charge of the Light Brigade' and Owen's 'Dulce et Decorum Est' (a poem they were familiar with, having read it in class previously and answered some comprehension questions about it), and in general how they felt war was presented in them. I told the class some basic contextual information about the poems. In future, I would give pupils more time to look at the poems unseen and give them a little less guidance and background information.

The word 'analyse' was defined on the board after the class came up with their own definitions. We discussed what features might be analysed in the poems, such as poetic techniques, the presentation of war and the actual events of each poem. These were written on the board as guidance for the students when they carried out their own analysis. In pairs the pupils re-read the poems carefully and annotated any key features and ideas that they found. These were shared as a class.

Individually, students were asked to come up with a question with which to analyse the poems and use as a basis for a piece of writing. Each pupil came up with a question, written on a post-it note, from which they drew spider diagrams with ideas from the poems they could use to answer their question. Questions included, 'How do these poems contrast about their view of war?' and 'What can we learn from war from these poems?'

After sharing ideas from their plans and checking their partner's questions, students were asked to write a first draft of a piece of writing answering their question, analysing the poems.

Comments on students' first drafts and revisions

After first drafts peer assessment took place for 'what worked well' and ideas for improvement.

Initial writing tended to be short but in general kept some relation to the question. Some used supporting quotations. Some did not analyse successfully and were more descriptive.

Revisions tended to improve on first drafts by tightening up on spelling and grammar errors, focusing more on the question and organising responses more clearly. All students began to show some level of analysis with the use of supporting evidence from the poems.

Criteria for success and any other assessment issues

Criteria for success were discussed and included:
Answering the question
Using quotations
Introduction and conclusion

Celebration of students' writing

Celebration involved everyone reading out their final essay and as a class making comments on the successful elements of each piece of work. They will be put on display next term. Students engaged with the process of producing this piece of work perhaps because of the sense of ownership provided by them setting their own question. Although final pieces were not all in-depth analyses or consistently clear and thoughtful, they did all show an improvement in style, accuracy and detail over the course of the writing process. More time would have been useful to spend revising and polishing up work. That said, students showed improvements in their understanding of how to write analytically about literature.

Overall comment
The actual structure of process writing seemed to fit when writing about the poetry, in terms of polishing up and taking responsibility for work, but more needed to be done in terms of applying analytical skills. Further time on 'prewriting and exploration' would have helped this as well as more experience of writing about literature. You could apply process approaches when teaching analytical skills which students could then apply more successfully when writing, though this may inevitably include elements of teacher-led prescriptivism. Process approaches could help when practising for 'unseen' exam questions. It is certainly more problematic when applying the principles to analytical writing.