IMPACT AND IMPORT OF POETRY IN HIGH SCHOOL PEDAGOGY:

A STUDY OF PRACTICE AND STUDENT LEARNING

By

CHRISTOPHER D. ROEBUCK

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Impact and Import of Poetry in High School Pedagogy:

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By CHRISTOPHER D. ROEBUCK

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Alisa Belzer

There are several reasons why it is important to teach students to read and write poetry.

First, the study of poetry satisfies requirements required by the State of New Jersey for the

development of essential language arts skills. Second, the construction of original verse provides

students with an avenue to explore their sense of identity and voice; as Desai and Marsh (2005)

claim, poetry provides a way to "reflect and articulate [students'] lived experiences while

envisioning new possibilities" (p. 72). And finally, poetry appeals to students along a continuum

of skills and abilities. Not only does poetry interest struggling and hesitant readers, "research that

focuses on how particular skills and strategies produce good readers suggests that poetry is

effective with strugglers" (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007, p. 466), but it also appeals to children who

enjoy an intellectual challenge. Poetry can help "[more proficient readers] to build verbal

communication skills, tap into the power of expression, make personal connections to texts,

[and] build analytical thinking skills" (Young, 2007, p. 50). Because of these benefits, it is vitally

important to teach poetry. Nonetheless, poetry is beginning to disappear from the classroom as a result of educator and student reticence, and state and federal level educational goals focusing on test scores and standardized assessments.

Acknowledgments

The number one reason why this dissertation exists today is because of my immeasurably patient, knowledgeable, and helpful advisor, Dr. Alisa Belzer. My journey on the years-long road towards this Ph.D. has been fraught with trial and travail, not unlike many of my colleagues, I'm sure. If it weren't for Dr. Belzer's guidance and understanding, though, this work would not have reached its conclusion. In addition, I would also like to thank my wonderful parents and friends for their ever-continuing support, and the students who agreed to participate in this study and to share their personal opinions and ideas.

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Framing

Throughout the years of my experience as an educator at the middle school, high school, and post-secondary levels, I have witnessed a variety of reactions to poetry: some students readily embrace verse, reveling in the opportunities it provides for creative expression; some students dutifully trudge along, reading and reciting without complaint; and some students despise every stanza, begrudging the moments spent trying to understand the language and struggling through assignments that demand a demonstration of critical thinking. Because of the love that I have for poetry and because of the tremendous educational value that is inherent to this genre of literature and composition, as I will demonstrate through the research described below, I have made it a personal goal of mine to try to reach each of the abovementioned types of students, especially those who struggle to understand verse. I believe that poetry is far too important of an educational resource to be neglected. Yet, because of an ever-increasing emphasis on test scores and quantitative achievement goals, poetry as an instructional text, as a means towards helping students gain effective reading and writing skills, and as a text that can be enjoyed and savored if introduced effectively, is disappearing. The overall goals of this study, therefore, are to understand more about how to engage students with verse and the problems that accompany its teaching.

In "The Importance of Poetry in Children's Learning," Benton (1990) suggests that verse has a powerful effect on student learning and can accomplish certain things more successfully than prose. In order to best harness poetry's unique capacity to focus and channel students' ideas, however, "we must reappraise our methods of working with poems in school and, in particular, align them with what we have come to know about the nature of literary response and the relationship between literature and learning" (p. 27). Benton's call to better utilize poetry as an

instructional device and to readjust our pedagogical techniques so as to facilitate this goal

establish the context within which I frame my research. Putting questions of whether poetry

should have a presence in the classroom and what the best use of poetry in the classroom is

aside, it is important to teach students to read and write poetry for several reasons. First, the

study of poetry satisfies state-established requirements for the development of essential language

arts skills as defined by the NJDOE College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading

("Common Core State Standards initiative," 2010), particularly in those areas that pertain to Key

Ideas and Details, Craft and Structure, Integration of Knowledge and Ideas, and Range of

Reading and Level of Text Complexity. Second, composing original poetry allows students to

develop an authentic voice of their own and to explore their own sense of identity; poetry

provides a way to "reflect and articulate their lived experiences while envisioning new

possibilities" (Desai & Marsh, 2005, p. 72). And finally, researchers find that poetry can appeal

to students along a continuum of skills and abilities. For example, Sekeres and Gregg find that

poetry may appeal to struggling and reluctant readers with limited or discriminatory attention

spans. They assert that "research that focuses on how particular skills and strategies produce

good readers suggests that poetry is effective with strugglers" (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007, p. 466).

For children who enjoy an intellectual challenge, poetry can help "them to build verbal

communication skills, tap into the power of expression, make personal connections to texts,

[and] build analytical thinking skills" (Young, 2007, p. 50). Each of these benefits is critical to

the argument of why it so vitally important to teach poetry. However, the presence of poetry in

the classroom may be diminishing due to educator reticence regarding the virtues and difficulties

of teaching verse, shifting goals at the state and federal levels concerning overall learning

objectives and poetry's place therein, and many students' reluctance to approach what can be seen to be poetry's often challenging and cryptic text.

The Importance of Poetry in the Classroom

According to the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010), co-authored by the Council of Chief State School Officers [CCSSO] and the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices [NGA Center], students should be able to apply reading skills to an array of texts from various time periods and cultures. Included in this range of literary texts are poetry genres such as narrative, lyrical and free verse poems, in addition to sonnets, odes, ballads and epics. The reading and language arts proficiencies required by the Core are substantial, but poetry is uniquely suited for teaching students how to meet these expectations. In general, for any level of student, reading and writing poetry can generate certain attitudes and understandings that are conducive to academic success: a sense of immediate achievement; a willingness to experiment and play with language; comprehension of the inherent connection between reading and writing; and an understanding of the importance of punctuation and word choice (Routman, 2001). In addition, common structural components of poetry, such as rhyme and alliteration, are very useful for improving phonemic and sound awareness. As Rasinski and Padak (2008) contend, "the rhythmical nature of [some] poems and rhymes makes them easy to learn to read and fun to read again and again, which is a main method for developing basic reading fluency in children" (p. 582-3). And furthermore, poems often offer students a less-confusing, straightforward context for the practice of phonics, phonemic awareness, and language development skills by way of subject matter that appeals to their academic and personal interests (Stickling, Parson, & Olsen, 2011). Poetry, by way of its diversity of offerings, furnishes

educators with texts that can help develop state-mandated reading and writing skills requirements.

Another important reason why poetry should be taught concerns the development of student voice and identity. Alexander and Larkin (1994) assert that reading, writing, and sharing poetry in the classroom can help students of all abilities develop and use their voices, inviting them to share their intimate feelings and ideas about various topics. And when students feel free to speak their minds, engagement more readily ensues. Poetry also provides opportunities for self-reflection and the development of a sense of social and personal identity. Students' awareness of their own identities connects them to other groups by emphasizing the shared aspects of the human experience, whether within the classroom, the neighborhood, or society in general, situating them within communities. Along similar lines, Benton (1990) discusses the indispensable role that poetry plays in the language of a culture, arguing that poems create and reinforce social identity in exceptional ways, acting as main fonts for narrative expression. Through narrative expression stories are told about the human experience. "The narrative imagination is our common human property; it is the way we make sense of experience" (p. 30). Benton argues that poetry has the special ability to represent the common truth of our lives in precise ways. Poetry speaks to us about what it means to be human and where our individual identities fit within our shared experiences. In other words, "[p]oetry is unique[ly] able to embody the general within the particular, to diagnose the indwelling value within the external features" (p. 28).

Benton's argument about the importance of poetry in the development of voice and identity is reminiscent of both Rosenblatt's (1998) claims regarding textual analysis and Vygotsky's (1978) ideas about the ways in which we communicate in general. Rosenblatt, in

discussing the reader's engagement with the text and its meaning, describes the idiosyncratic elements such as social, cultural, and educational histories that individuals carry with them when reading a text (1998). In turn, these shared and unique experiences can bring readers to agreement or disagreement concerning "evocation" (p. 887), as each person's point of view affects how he or she makes meaning. Most important to note, though, is that it is through engagement that readers connect to author and text and construct an understanding of the text that is their own (Rosenblatt, 1998), an awareness of their personal perspectives or voices. And yet, as Benton reminds us, there persists a universality of experience and meaning that poetry highlights despite the personal ways in which it can be understood. At its heart, though, poetry is language, and Vygotsky recognized that language is inextricably linked to social and human interaction. For him, it is the tool for moving from interpersonal thinking to intrapersonal cognition that constitutes internalization, the hallmark of the uniquely human course of thought, and the differentiating trait between animal and human psychology; the role of society and literature in this process is crucial.

Despite Rosenblatt's and Vygotsky's points regarding the reader, the text, and language in general, students do not usually approach reading poetry or their interpretation of it as a signal of cultural or individual identity or an expression of the shared human condition. Nonetheless, Benton (1990) argues that poetry is the printed voice of the poet, a narrative account of his/her ideas, feelings, and impressions, and connecting to the voice of the poet is one way that students can develop their own perspectives on identity and the surrounding world. In other words, as the author puts it, "[p]oetry educates the imagination by making us look afresh at the primary world" (p. 28). Thus, poetry instruction is critically important because it serves as a medium for self-examination, providing students with the opportunity and ability to express themselves by

engaging with text and exploring and developing personal identity. That being said, the manner in which poetry is taught plays a vital role in whether students are able to develop these sorts of authentic connections with verse. The absence of effective poetry instruction, as this study demonstrates, often results in the absence of meaningful engagement with poetry.

Finally, perhaps the most important reason to teach poetry is its potential appeal to students along the entire continuum of skill levels. For instance, the artistic language of verse, poets frequent use of linguistic devices such as rhythm, rhyme and alliteration, as well as their use of literary devices such as metaphor and personification, can cultivate in the student an advanced appreciation for the intricacies of language and at the same time offer an ideally effective way for educators to cultivate essential reading and writing skills (Parr & Campbell, 2006; Sekeres & Gregg, 2007). In fact, research demonstrates that poetry is effective in fostering good reading and writing skills because it can help students develop the aptitude to communicate about their own understandings and offers the opportunity to hone tools that can sharpen critical reading and analytical proficiencies (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007). Furthermore, while much of the research discusses the impact of teaching poetry on reading skills, when students are able to talk about poetic literary devices, regardless of age, their writing skills can also be enhanced. They begin to think metacognitively "*about* language, literature, and literacy" (Strickland and Strickland, 1997, p. 201). Regarding the content of poetry, both the struggling and the advanced student can find incentive to connect to and learn from the text in ways that can benefit both their comprehension and composition skills. For example, in order to combat a lack of creativity and engagement in writing among their students, Oczkus, Baura, Murray, and Berry (2006) "incorporated poetry writing in [their] classrooms to help first-grade students gain the confidence and skill to write more interesting pieces" (p. 476). The authors list several reasons why verse, as

opposed to prose, can appeal to students regardless of grade level. First, when reluctant students are asked to engage creatively with poetry, they often find success and approval because "[w]riting brief pieces, repeating words that they like or know, and being unconcerned with standard grammar allowed these students to write freely. The success that our struggling students found with poetry writing [and reading exercises] made other writing tasks seem more approachable" (p. 479). Although it is disingenuous to suggest that poetry alone grants a certain academic advantage, verse does offer a degree of freedom that can hook students of all ages and skill levels in ways that prose does not always accomplish.

Oczkus, et al., also argue that when engaging with poetry, the non-native English-language student can effectively speak and write without constant concern about correctly following complicated grammatical and syntactical rules. Although poetry does not ignore the standards of English grammar, it is a more flexible discourse genre (Oczkus et al., 2006). And since many of the poems that students encounter in school are brief and composed of words that can be quickly taken in (Benton, 1990), its format "invites confident reading: short lines, lots of white space, repetition, and rhyme. … [I]t's easier for students to make sense of text when they don't have to struggle so long to read it" (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007, p. 466). Additionally, "proficient writers" are able to play and "experiment" with poetic language and can be free to express themselves and enrich their creativity (p. 479). For the advanced student, poetry's wide object and demanding linguistic structures, technical elements such as figurative language, and frequent use of rhythm and repetition (Reilly, 2009), provide intellectual challenge. In general, poetry can appeal to students, regardless of skill and grade levels, and has the capacity to spark creativity, respond to powerful adolescent emotions, and ignite passion and enthusiasm (Sekeres & Gregg, 2007). Despite the fact that poetry intended for younger audiences is more accessible

than verse aimed at older children, and although prose writing holds some of the same benefits as well, poetry's versatility plays an important role in its potential appeal to students at all grade levels. Because poems vary greatly in terms of complexity, genre, word choice, and subject matter, it is unproblematic for an educator to construct verse-centric lessons that accommodate a wide range of teaching and learning goals as well as student needs and interests. Ultimately, though, the advantages of using poetry in the classroom only accumulate if the instructional skills of the teacher are effective enough to mitigate the challenges that accompany poetry instruction.

The Need for This Study

This study is unique because of the way in which it draws on students' perspectives regarding their experiences with poetry as a means to describe successful instructional techniques, and in turn, improve pedagogical practice. Using student opinion to inform practice is not a novel idea; in fact, there already is a notable body of literature highlighting the value of using student perspectives to improve practice. In their research, Sands et al. (2007) discuss how knowing more about students' experiences is critically important in efforts to improve pedagogy (p. 341). They assert that "student participation in the reform process is integral to realizing successful outcomes. Efforts to gather information from students themselves should become part of the school improvement process and reform designs" (p. 341). The work of DeFur and Korinek (2010) echo their findings. They contend that students from a broad spectrum of ability levels can readily act as "expert witnesses" concerning what works best in schools, providing both insight and germane recommendations (p. 15). Through focus group discussions aimed at identifying students' ideas about best practices in teaching, DeFur and Korinek found "that all students, regardless of age or ability, wanted opportunities to talk about their schools and their

education, and they were pleased that their voices would be heard" (p. 16). In fact, they were able to identify important themes from student input. Students pointed out that well-informed teachers who guided their navigation through difficult material were critical to a positive learning experience. In addition, students reported that instruction was most effective when it is "active, engaging, and meaningful" (p. 17). Overall, the research of DeFur and Korinek demonstrated a very plain fact: students' perceptions about what works in the classroom are not only similar to what the experts tell us, but also hold the key to fostering higher levels of engagement and comprehension (18-9).

Given the value of gaining the student perspective to help shape practice, the work discussed here makes a contribution to the field because little research on poetry instruction has been informed by student perspectives as a way to improve pedagogy. Moreover, the need for this study is rooted in the nature of current education trends regarding assessment of student achievement and best teaching practices, trends that are relegating poetry to the sidelines despite the evidence that verse can be a highly effective way to address Core Content Standards. This is evidenced by the implementation of primarily data-driven evaluation systems, locally such as TeachNJ and AchieveNJ, predicated in large part upon quantitative student learning outcomes (AchieveNJ, 2013). These instruments "mandate many requirements for the new statewide educator evaluation system and link tenure decisions to evaluation ratings" (AchieveNJ, 2013, p. 1).

Although systems such as TeachNJ are beneficial in some ways, they are causing substantive changes to teaching practices that are not always desirable, useful or supported by the research. Specifically, school districts are focusing on quantitative measures "for assessment-related decision making, particularly evident in the recent emphasis on accountability and

performance indicators" (Biggs, 1996, p. 5). Biggs points out that this is a problematic trend because "quantitative modes of assessment encourage surface approaches to learning, which typically lead to low cognitive-level outcomes that are not compatible with stated course objectives" (p. 5). Furthermore, by emphasizing that student understanding must be primarily measured through the administration of quantitative assessments, pedagogy is changing so as to maximize positive outcomes as measured by these types of assessment approaches. On the other end of the spectrum stands the point of view that learning is a gradual and continual, horizontal and vertical progression, involving mental processes such as analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. According to this approach, the teacher serves as a director, not a distributor, of learning, facilitating a process of education that is longitudinal, expository, and sometimes abstract (p. 8). Poetry education can support this approach; it is important as a qualitative means to encourage our students to dig deeper and delve beneath "surface approaches to learning [and their] typically … low cognitive-level outcomes" (p. 5). To this end, it is my hope that not only will this study clearly demonstrate the importance of poetry's place in high school English curricula, but that it will also offer insight, based upon the direct reports of students, as to how to enrich and further develop their current instructional practices for engaging students in this literary genre. If the methodology for teaching poetry can be improved, verse will better fit into current models of instructional practice, standards, and improving high stakes assessment outcomes.

Beyond these issues of quantitative and qualitative assessment and instruction, the vast majority of the literature that examines poetry and student connection to it in the classroom only focuses on two general topics: first, strategies to foster participation and engagement, and techniques that a teacher may employ to reduce or eliminate verse-related anxiety as well as the all-too-common resistance that students express in regards to poetry. And instructional

approaches that center on the composition of poetry for various educational benefits constitutes the second main type of literature about poetry instruction. For example, regarding engagement and participation, Lesesne (2011) describes the facility of poetry read-alouds to immediately pique student interest, while improving their skills with language. She asserts that "[r]eading [poetry] aloud can motivate students to read and to read more. … In studies ranging from the 1930s to 2011, research confirms gains in reading comprehension and vocabulary, as well as fluency" (p. 336), as a result of students reading verse aloud. Thibeault (2011) echoes this observation in his discussion of poetry recitation as recording projects conducted by students. He reports that "[t]his type of assignment overflows with opportunities to perform and interpret, record and edit, share, critique, and celebrate. Whether learning to record, taking time to critique, or coming to better understand each other's poetic and imaginative preferences, this project has always been a delight for my students and myself" (p. 2). These two studies are examples of how educators are devising strategies that utilize poetry to engage their students, a practice that is well documented in the literature.

There is also abundant research dedicated to fostering a positive and fear-free attitude towards poetry amongst students. It is this specific area of study with which my research is most closely aligned. Watts' (2010) description of her approach to the teaching of poetry analysis serves as an example of what this area of research generally reflects. She observes that "students often fear poetry explication, supposing it is beyond their intellectual reach" (p. 244). However, through a process that involves student self-selection of poetry for study, multi-stage written analyses, and group and teacher-guided discussion, Watts reports that her students typically engage and enjoy success in their interpretations. Although Watts does not describe anything

particularly novel in her approach, her account demonstrates that patience and flexibility can be the keys to ameliorating student poetry anxiety.

And finally, there are numerous studies that discuss the significance of teaching the composition of poetry. In essence, the research shows that students benefit in myriad ways when afforded the opportunity to think about and write poetry without an overabundance of restrictions. Wiseman (2011) underscores this point through a description of poetry workshops. "A poetry workshop can present opportunities to integrate students' knowledge and perspectives in classroom contexts, encouraging the use of language for expression, communication, learning and even empowerment" (p. 70). She reflects that the workshop experience functions on both artistic and academic levels, encouraging "students to contribute to the classroom learning context and engage critically with ideas … relevant to their lives" (p. 70). In other words, allowing students to work directly with poetry as autonomous authors endowed with the power to create at will results in significant and positive learning outcomes.

The examples from the literature that I have discussed each serve to illustrate the overall tenor of the research regarding students and their relationship with the teaching of poetry in the classroom. The study described in this dissertation adds to this body of research because it demonstrates that students can provide useful feedback about effective classroom teaching, and it suggests effective teaching strategies based upon the premise that students are in need of some kind of intervention or mediation in order to achieve academic success or to activate their interest in verse. This study is not predicated on a model of deficiency; rather, it uses the positive and direct reports of students talking about their feelings regarding poetry as a medium of study, both favorable and critical, in order to provide insight into both those pedagogical strategies that may and may not engage students in learning through this literary genre. Overall, my study fills a

research gap in the following ways: it provides an alternative lens through which to view best practices regarding poetry instruction in the language arts classroom; demonstrates the value of student opinion regarding the development of pedagogical practice; and, reiterates the important role that poetry can play in English curricula.

Research Questions

Despite the aforementioned benefits and advantages of poetry education, a significant number of students have negative feelings and reactions to studying, analyzing, and composing poetry. There is a notable body of literature about the trials and tribulations of teaching this genre to high school students (Pike, 2000). Parr and Campbell (2006) sum up the typical student reaction to the study of verse in their article, "Poets in Practice," by asserting that "[r]egardless of the grade level, when poetry is introduced as a topic …, groans of disapproval and cries of anguish can often be heard ringing through our classrooms, telling us that these students are, for the most part, unsure, lack confidence, and don't know where to start" (p. 36). Why, given all of the rewards that verse has to offer students, is poetry met with such hesitancy and dislike? There are a number of possibilities ranging from the obvious, not everyone enjoys poetry, to the more complex. Due to the intricacies of the genre, poetry often requires that students are guided by a highly skilled instructor, something that does not always occur. Because of these considerations and in order to answer the question of why students report such difficulty with the study of poetry, I proposed to learn from students who like poetry what instructional strategies might engage students who do not. In other words, this study is based on the assumption that discussing the English classroom experiences of poetry-positive students can help illuminate effective ways to reach those students who do not like poetry. My hope was that students who were engaged by poetry could provide insight concerning what teaching practices, instructional exercises, and

overall assessment types best engaged students and why. In addition, so as maximize the range of student perspectives as much as possible, I also sought out, whenever possible, the ideas and impressions of students who do not like poetry. My intention was to gather students' points of view to gain insight concerning effective poetry pedagogy, and thereby also emphasize the benefit of examining the student perspective as a valuable means for improving instruction. Therefore, the research question that this study answers is: In what ways can the perspectives of high school students inform instruction so as to more fully engage them in reading and writing poetry?

I constructed two sub-questions in order to more thoroughly address this study's main focus. The first sub-question centered on the reactions and feelings that students have toward poetry as a part of their language arts course experience: What has influenced and contributed to students feelings about verse? The second sub-question directly concerns pedagogy and seeks student input regarding effective and less-effective poetry teaching strategies as a means to inform practice on a broader scale: How do students' perspectives on poetry describe approaches to engaging students when teaching it?

Centering research on the perspectives of students is not altogether novel; nonetheless, this study furnishes a unique lens through which to examine teaching practice and differs from previous research on poetry instruction. Questioning students themselves about what does and does not work can provide valuable information for educators. In the next chapter, I present a review of the literature relevant to this study. In addition, I focus on theories of language and learning, especially Rosenblatt's Literary Transaction Theory, and the manner in which they serve as the conceptual foundation for my research, underlying key themes that have emerged, such as the importance of student autonomy in textual interpretation and analysis, and the

significant role of the teacher as a guide towards student connection with and comprehension of text. In chapter three, I discuss methodology, study design, and the analysis of data. I detail the manner in which the student interviews were conducted, their outcomes, and the coding system that emerged from themes and patterns in student responses. Chapter four presents my findings and defines the three main concepts, aesthetic transaction, flexible guides, and student autonomy, which emerged from analysis of the data. And finally, in my conclusion, I discuss the potential implications of this research and those areas that warrant further study.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Literature Review

Conceptual Framework

When examining the teaching of poetry in the high school classroom, the impact of Rosenblatt's (1982) Literary Transaction Theory cannot be ignored as it significantly transformed the landscape of literary instruction. Benton (1990) describes the substantial contribution of Rosenblatt's model as a force that brought about a pedagogical sea change, shifting instructional focus from an emphasis on building student understanding of the literary canon and its theory-driven, analytical conventions towards the encouragement of more personal, yet still textually-grounded interpretations. He argues that the advancement of a system of teaching that emphasizes the role of the reader in the formation of meaning "rather than upon conventional, narrowly-conceived ideas of comprehension and criticism, is now the priority" (p. 31). Literary Transaction Theory empowers the student perspective to be as important as the lens of the expert. In addition to valuing the autonomy of reader response, Rosenblatt's theory assumes meaning is produced through interaction between text and individual, granting the reader a degree of freedom and independence from restrictive interpretive traditions. In other words, instead of teaching students what the correct or "authorized" meaning of a poem is according to accepted, scholarly interpretation, a teacher grounding her practice in Transaction Theory invites a student to directly engage with a text so as to develop a personal response to it. In this way, when Transaction Theory guides classroom practice, we are beginning "to give poetry back to its readers" (Benton, 1990, p. 31). Thus, Rosenblatt's theory, described in further detail below, served as the primary framework for my research because it provided a means for me to understand those classroom experiences that were reported by students as being most valuable. And as my research demonstrates, the most profound learning events were those that

involved teaching methods that are aligned with Transaction Theory, namely, an emphasis on the reader's personal response in favor of various critics' points of view. However, Transaction Theory is predicated on the idea that meaning is created when a reader engages with a text. If a text is misunderstood, as often occurs when students read and analyze poetry, engagement may fail. This is a problem because "engaged students learn more and retain the information longer" (Sturm, 2012, p. 59). Ways to facilitate engagement, therefore, are critical to consider. And so, in addition to Rosenblatt, two other theorists' ideas help to expand the theoretical foundation for this study, establishing a broader framework upon which to rest the interpretation of the data. Vygotsky (1978) tells us about student learning and the "Zone of Proximal Development," or that area of discovery that can only be realized with expert guidance, and Cazden (1988) describes scaffolding in the classroom as a means to assist student understanding. Both Vygotsky and Cazden furnish insight regarding how to foster engagement by helping students to successfully decipher text with appropriate assistance, therefore offering a sharper focus to the lens of Transaction Theory as applied to the data collected for this study. Overall, accessing Vygotsky's and Cazden's language concerning learning and scaffolding aided in the interpretation of data by enabling me to clearly recognize when students reported constructive classroom experiences that involved teacher- or peer-generated guidance or support.

Transactional Theory

The keystone concept of Transactional Theory has two faces which Rosenblatt (1982) calls the efferent and aesthetic stances. These critically shape the meaning that readers create from their experience of a text. Simply put, the aesthetic stance concerns emotion and the efferent stance involves information. Regarding the specific reader and text interaction, Rosenblatt (1982) argues that the reading event is organic and multi-dimensional, meaning that it

is an interaction between the reader and the text that is not limited to a single definition. The meaning of a story or a poem does not come into being solely by virtue of a given narrative or a combination of written rhythmical, rhyming lines. However, neither does a text rest entirely on the reader's ability to ascribe reference to the words (Rosenblatt, 1982). Rather, "reading is a transaction, a two-way process, involving a reader and a text at a particular time under particular circumstances" (p. 268). The words of the text activate certain elements of memory and consciousness in the reader. In turn, informed by past experiences with language, the reader "sets up tentative notions of a subject, of some framework into which to fit the ideas as the words unfurl … This implies a constant series of selections from the multiple possibilities offered by the text and their synthesis into an organized meaning" (p. 268). Perhaps, though, the most crucial aspect of this transaction occurs prior to textual engagement and the above-described process. The mental attitude or "stance" of the reader may be greatly influenced by the task and purpose for reading and therefore greatly influenced by the context of reading in school. Furthermore, a reader's stance may be aligned with the desire to seek aesthetic pleasure, attainment of knowledge, or some mixture of these two viewpoints (Rosenblatt, 1978, 1994). For instance, with an efferent stance the goal may be to obtain information, get directions for action, or reach a logical conclusion about a topic (Rosenblatt, 1982). Moreover, "[i]n all such reading [events dedicated to the strict acquisition of information, the reader] will narrow his attention to building up the meanings, the ideas, the directions to be retained; attention focuses on accumulating what is to be carried away at the end of the reading" (p. 269). Alternatively, the reader may aim to experience a poem, play or story and to center his attention "on what is being created *during* the actual reading" (p. 269). In such a case, abstract concepts are not the only constituents of the text garnering attention. Personal feelings, attitudes and ideas, as well as the

sound and structure of the words, are also critical. And finally, "[o]ut of these ideas and feelings, a new experience, the story or poem, is shaped and lived through" (p. 269). Rosenblatt calls this the "aesthetic mental set." She argues that these two perspectives, the efferent and aesthetic stances, influence all meanings that readers may construct from their interactions with a text.

It is crucial to note, as Rosenblatt maintains, that transaction with a text does not occur at any one time in just one of these two modes: neither is mutually exclusive of the other. Furthermore, by emphasizing the importance of the reader, the text does not diminish in significance; both reader and written word are essential to meaning making. Therefore, response to any given reading activity may fit along a continuum, falling somewhere between its efferent and aesthetic ends (Rosenblatt, 1982). Reading is, in fact, made up of interactions in which neither the text nor the reader is separate; each element functions in various ways, ultimately allowing for the reader to construct personal meaning (Rosenblatt, 1978). However, this does not mean that text interpretation is a completely open-ended endeavor. Some interpretations are decidedly better than others, depending upon how well they relate to the source. A viable textual interpretation must be consistent in its treatment of the whole text, it must not create superfluous meanings, and it must fit within the original context (Rosenblatt, 1994). In other words, a sound interpretation does not simply fabricate meaning or cherry pick elements from a text to make meaning; interpretation must be anchored in the author's words.

Although so much of what we do in the high school English classroom has traditionally been focused on skills development and assessment, generally necessitating the student to take an efferent stance, the aesthetic point of entry to a text has inherent value. Aesthetic transactions with text come from the desire to engage in a pleasurable and appealing experience in and of itself. The proliferation of standardized tests and benchmarks suggests that this is a goal not

emphasized enough in school. However, when transaction occurs between a text and a reader

solely for the experience, philosophical, social, educational, and moral issues emerge as natural

derivatives (Rosenblatt, p. 275). Because of the innate value of these kinds of complex and

significant learning experiences, Rosenblatt's interpretation of the reading act points to the

importance of promoting learning environments in which both the efferent and aesthetic mental

sets are encouraged.

Poetry lends itself quite well to this because of its focused use of language and

democracy of subject. Verse is focused in that it distills language so as to economically represent

essential ideas, and democratic in that it articulates or kindles universal emotions and

experiences. For instance, in their discussion of poetry's capacity to illustrate the various

perspectives and practices innate to human culture, Fukuyama and Reid (1996) contend that

"[p]oetry is a particularly powerful medium for personal expression. … Part of the power in

poetry comes from its unusual or unexpected juxtaposition of words and from its brevity" (p.

83). Furthermore, they suggest that poetry expresses "feelings, history, and interpersonal

phenomena …, speak[ing] from the heart and soul of people's real-life experiences" (p. 84).

Even the philosopher John Stuart Mill regarded verse for its inherent ability to stimulate the

emotions and free the mind from the heft and burden of analytical thinking; it was his "antidote

to the habit of analysis" (Parkhurst, 2013, p. 19). In fact, Mill "believed that poetry [stood] in

privileged connection with feelings, being endowed with an ability to (in one way or another)

articulate and elicit them" (p. 19). As regards the efferent stance, the various compositional

complexities of poetry exceed those of prose. Rhyme, rhythm, meter, and structure challenge the

reader to identify how linguistic mechanics can affect meaning. It is for these reasons, at least in

part, that poetry functions especially well as a tool for student engagement and textual comprehension.

ZPD and Scaffolding

Given that a main goal of my study was to identify teaching strategies that engage students, Vygotsky's theory about cognitive potential and learning also played an important role. Recognizing the part that Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development plays in how to effectively help students learn is especially valuable to the teacher of poetry given that the abstract concepts and often intricate language inherent to verse frequently challenge students (Vygotsky, 1978). Because of these characteristics of poetry, instructional guidance is key to the classroom teacher, and in part, this study examines those kinds of guidance that students report as helpful and not helpful. The Zone of Proximal Development can effectively aid the classroom teacher in order to provide supportive and useful guidance to students.

In his text, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, Vygotsky (1978) is primarily concerned with the ways in which a person connects with and understands his world as a way to learn. Out of this epistemological study, Vygotsky developed a concept connected to the relationship between cognition and development which he called the "Zone of Proximal Development" (ZPD) (p. 84). In essence, the ZPD is that cognitive area between what can be done independently and what may be accomplished with expert guidance. Vygotsky argues that in school, assessment typically demands children demonstrate those concepts that they have mastered. "[T]his first level [of mastery] can be called the *actual developmental level*, that is, the level of development of a child's mental functions that has been established as a result of certain already *completed* development cycles" (p. 85). Most evaluative methods and tools are designed to gauge subjects or skills that a child has learned. The

unintended negative consequence of this is that those goals which might be met with the assistance of a knowledgeable instructor and/or a peer or peer group are not factored into the evaluation of a child's ability level. This, in Vygotsky's view, is a major deficiency of traditional assessment because ignoring a child's potential to learn or inaccurately identifying a child's level of understanding inhibits that child's overall development by assuming that learning can only occur within the individual.

To illustrate this point, Vygotsky furnishes an example of two children, both ten years old, both functioning at an eight year old level of development. Given that each child is roughly equivalent in terms of mental ability, many would assume that they are equal in terms of school performance. If, however, one child could solve much more complex challenges with the assistance of a teacher and the other could not, Vygotsky questions whether we should say that both children are mentally equivalent or that they should receive the same instruction (p. 86). In other words, if "the capability of the children with equal levels of mental development to learn under a teacher's guidance varied to a high degree," those children are not mentally the same age and should not receive an identical course of instruction (p. 86). It is identifying the zone of proximal development, then, that allows the educator to ascertain "the child's immediate future and his dynamic developmental state, allowing not only for what already has been achieved developmentally but also for what is in the course of maturing" (p. 87). A child's overall development is stunted when instruction is solely aimed towards those developmental levels that have already been achieved. Pedagogy must be oriented so as to be in advance of learning (Vygotsky, 1978). This final point helps to underscore why Vygotsky's concept is especially relevant to this research study. Using the concept of the ZPD for reference, I was better able to

identify those moments in the data that reflect the type of teaching events that help students to grow intellectually by meeting them in their ZPD.

Cazden's (1988) focus on "scaffolding" in the classroom, a specific instructional strategy that can assist learners to develop within their ZPDs, includes modeling, direct guidance, and coaching. It is designed to assist and support (i.e., provide scaffolds for) the learner in ways that are tailored to the individual student using less and less intervention over time. As the student grows and develops, the scaffolding is needed less and less. Research supports the notion that knowledgeable adults can have a substantial impact on a child's acquisition of new information when they scaffold the experience. When they do so, "[a]dults help children make connections between new situations and familiar ones. Children's curiosity and persistence are supported by adults who direct children's attention, structure experiences, support learning attempts, and regulate the complexity and difficulty levels of information for children" (National Research Council, as cited in Cazden, 1988, p. 61). This type of measured, specific instructional assistance describes instructional scaffolding, an approach that can mitigate the difficulty of challenging learning tasks (Cazden, 1988). Scaffolding is especially important when we take into consideration the notion of the ZPD, "a shifting zone of competence within which a learner, with help, can accomplish what later can be accomplished alone. … The metaphorical term *scaffold* has become a common caption for this kind of assistance, and it is a good name … [provided that it changes] continuously as the child's competence grows … [and] we have evidence that the learner's competence does indeed grow over time" (Cazden, 1988, p. 63). Thus, scaffolding can be a critically important way to help students realize their learning potential. Given that transaction with poetry is not always easy to encourage or facilitate, scaffolding has a role to play here. Not only does scaffolding aid students in attaining their learning potential, but the

scaffold can help a reader navigate complex texts which would otherwise be very challenging. Ultimately, in the same manner that Vygotsky's ZPD helped in the analysis of data, using the scaffold concept as a reference point against which to evaluate students' descriptions of classroom experiences greatly helped to clarify my study results. In the next chapter, the way in which the ZPD and scaffolding impacted my coding scheme and analysis of data is discussed in greater detail.

Literature Review

This study identifies those instructional strategies that students perceive as being largely contributive to their ideas and feelings about verse in order to positively impact practice. In addition, this study seeks to understand how students feel about poetry, what these students believe contributed to those feelings, and how instructional techniques contributed to those feelings. In an effort to establish the importance of improving poetry instruction based on this information, this literature review will focus on several areas of research that describe the benefits of poetry education. By highlighting studies such as those conducted by Smith (2010), Flint and Laman (2012), Peskin, Allen, and Wells-Jopling (2010), and Durham (1997), I intend to amplify what current research demonstrates in regards to why poetry instruction is important. Namely, poetry is an effective way to develop language arts skills, encourage the development and expression of student voice, and appeal to reluctant, challenged and proficient readers each in different ways. It should be noted, however, that there is not a robust body of research that focuses on how poetry education can aid teachers in achieving these goals. In fact, the majority of research having to do with poetry centers on several other topics including genre study, specific authors, texts, or stylistic movements; sociological issues, or examinations of how poetry relates to aspects of social justice and diversity; the use of poetry as a language

acquisition tool in ESL classrooms; and especially methodological advice concerning how to teach poetry to students who are often unreceptive or intimidated. Given this, the scope of my literature review is somewhat limited in terms of relevant studies available for comparison. Therefore, in the sections below, I identify and elaborate on those studies that provide instructional guidance and best relate to the goals of my research, specifically those related to the development of language arts skills, the growth of student identity and voice, and the impact of poetry study and composition on struggling and proficient readers.

Language Arts Skills Development

A principal benefit of poetry instruction concerns the capacity that verse has to aid in the development of essential language arts skills. While there are many approaches that can facilitate children's literacy growth, poetry is especially suited to this task given the variety of its forms and subjects, and the varying level of difficulty associated with its analysis and interpretation. Below I highlight two studies that emphasize poetry as a way to develop language and literacy skills: a case study that documents and investigates how various types of poetry and poetry-centered lessons impact classroom learning, and a qualitative study that shows how poetry can be a practical tool for language arts skills improvement and that provides instructional advice concerning how to most effectively teach poetry to students.

Smith (2010) conducted a case study examining how spoken word poetry, slam poetry, and hip hop poetry styles afford students the opportunity to practice reading, speaking, and writing skills in ways that extend beyond the traditional classroom curriculum. "The students' poetic texts and performances remind literacy educators that literacy is more than reading or writing words; literacy learning is tied up with identities, cultural expectations and rhetorical situations" (p. 215). Smith "found ways to engage students in poetry performances in which

student identities and poetic voices could coexist within the culture of the academy" (p. 215). Along these same lines, Arenson and Kretschmer (2010) investigated the impact of a six-week poetry unit on deaf adolescent students. Ultimately, "students became very engaged in reading/watching poems, creating them, understanding their structural aspects, identifying different kinds of poems and poetic themes, and using poetic metaphors, even when provided with poems that were "'above their reading level'" (p. 116). Both of these case studies illustrate the successful use of poetry as texts to teach language arts skills.

The majority of language-arts-oriented, poetry-based research, however, looks at teaching practice in order to offer guidance. For instance, Faver (2008) discusses the benefits of repeated reading as a strategy to develop fluency. Poetry is an ideal genre of text for such a purpose because "[a sample] passage should be one that a student can read several times in 5 to 10 minutes" (p. 351), and brief poems ranging between 100-150 words that fit this criterion are abundant. In addition, Faver contends that "[p]oetry is a good choice for teaching fluency because of its rich and playful language" (p. 351). Likewise, in two separate studies that examine poetry as a context for language arts development, particularly recitation, modeling and composition, and literary analysis, Kane (2004) and Ediger (2003) stress the benefits of using poetry as a teaching tool. Flint and Laman (2012) take a more specific tack, investigating poetry as a means to counter the often formulaic approach to writing instruction, strategies that heavily emphasize scripted exercises, grammar, and mechanics (p. 13). "Through this poetry study, the teachers began to reposition children and curriculum, and in the process, built interest in navigating the terrain of more critical approaches to literacy instruction" (p. 13). They reported that by using poetry as an alternative way to build writing and reading skills, "teachers and students [discovered] opportunities to engage in new practices that could be considered critical"

(p. 17). In a similarly unconventional way, Bintz (2010) describes how he used poetry can be used to teach concepts that span curricula from different disciplines. For instance, he explained that "syllabication—understanding that our language consists of syllables and that words are made up of syllables—is important to language development" (p. 512), and can be studied both mathematically and linguistically. He bridged English and mathematics by showing students that "numbers in the [Fibonacci] sequence could represent the number of syllables in a single word or the number of words on a single line" (p. 510). Also adopting an alternative teaching strategy, Calo (2011) discusses the ways in which literacy skills can be developed and enhanced through the use of graphic poetry, poems that use a combination of text and illustration to depict various elements from verse such as imagery and metaphor. "Graphic poetry exposes students to complex texts and allows for deep discussion and understanding" (p. 352). Using poetry in combination with illustration "not only taps into students' curiosity and imagination, but also can be used to teach powerful literacy concepts" (p. 352) such as imagery, metaphor, and symbolism.

Whereas all of these studies focus on the ways poetry can be exploited for language arts skills development, studies by Peskin, Allen, and Wells-Jopling (2010) and Durham (1997) demonstrate how poetry can be used to help students meet specific standards from the Common Core, and therefore warrant closer examination and greater detail. Peskin et al. (2010) delve into the effects of teaching poetry using direct, teacher-led instruction in order to address numerous speaking, listening and reading standards as defined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative. For example, with regard to the "Integration of Knowledge and Ideas" standard, as well as proficiencies involving the "Key Ideas and Details" standard, Peskin et al. (2010) demonstrated clear evidence of students' abilities to "integrate and evaluate multiple sources of information … determine the meaning of words and phrases as they are used in a text … and

analyze a complex set of ideas" by using several kinds of visual scaffolding tools to aid in the understanding of symbolism while reading poetry (Common Core State Standards Initiative, 2010, p. 40). Peskin et al. (2010) sought to provide students with the instruments needed to deconstruct poetry so they could access meaning by designing a series of lessons using three types of scaffolds: Venn diagrams, the cycle wheel, and scrambled image metaphors. Students used them to interpret symbolism when they read poems, an often confusing element of poetry. The researchers' aim was to make symbolic interpretation less perplexing by exposing the underlying and necessary cognitive processes and showing students that symbols are merely metaphors at work. In order to accomplish this goal, Peskin et al. made use of "visual representations," basically different types of graphic scaffolds that eventually became assimilated into the students' cognitive inventories, challenging students to incorporate several diverse kinds of information, apply critical thinking skills, and analyze the poems for overall meaning (p. 500).

Through the use of poetry that was varied in structure, linguistically complex, and economical in length and form, and by focusing on various deconstructive, meaning-making techniques, Peskin et al. (2010) demonstrated that poetry is a viable way to teach essential language arts skills, even in the face of particularly challenging source material. Their research design involved a sample of two classes of 14 and 15 year old students who were enrolled in their first year of secondary education. Statistical analysis established the equivalency of both student groups regarding verbal reasoning skills and ability to express ideas in writing. The students were divided in half and randomly assigned to either a "symbolism" or control group. The latter group received instruction during small- and large-group discussions and were required to do written reflections to aid in the analytical process. Most notably, however, the

control group did not receive the benefit of learning how to use the three scaffolds. Those students in the "symbolism" group also used both verbal and written analytical procedures similar to the control group, but their poetry study was enhanced by the use of visual scaffolds. After the scaffolding technique was implemented and "abstract thinking was made concrete, students had what Vygotsky (1978) called 'cultural tools' to come up with a range of symbolic meanings for themselves" (Peskin et al., p. 507). The researchers found that the comprehension skills of the students from the "symbolism" group increased as compared to the control group. This study illustrates the efficacy of the teaching methods Peskin et al. (2010) exercised as a way to increase the language skills of students, and it showed that poetry was a viable genre to accomplish this goal.

In addition to addressing reading-based language arts skills, poetry can also successfully be used to help develop speaking- and listening skills. For example, concerning comprehension, collaboration, and the presentation of knowledge and ideas, the Common Core State Standards Initiative (2010) expects that students will be able to "initiate and participate effectively in a range of collaborative discussions … integrate multiple sources of information presented in diverse formats … and present information, findings, and supporting evidence, conveying a clear and distinct perspective" (p. 50). In order to meet these expectations, Durham (1997) used daily poetry exposure with her elementary students. She originally integrated verse into her day-to-day classroom routine for two reasons: to expose her students to poetry as often as possible so as to help alleviate their feelings that it can be unfriendly and difficult, and to help them to appreciate the affective power of poetry. However, the result of this daily inclusion of poetry proved to be even more valuable. Poetry eventually became a major focus of instruction, and student interaction with literature and with each other increased significantly. For example, students

initially chose the poems in which they were interested, and either they or their teacher read them aloud. This was done to encourage confident readers: those students who were self-assured in their abilities to select and read verse. In addition, the read-aloud sessions also emboldened reluctant readers, or those children who wanted to participate in the process, but who felt anxious about reading aloud in front of their peers (Durham, 1997). Although the intention was that students would then share their reactions to the poems, "[m]any times we [would] simply listen and enjoy" (p. 76), an activity which is consistent with an aesthetic stance. General poetry recitation eventually led to the creation of "The Poetry Request Box," a chance for students to "request" to share a poem of their choice. This activity quickly became a favorite student pastime during which readers recited a poem, displayed any accompanying illustrations, and shared biographical information about the poet of the selected text. In addition, student effort was always praised, visualization was encouraged to assist students in understanding imagery, and both small- and large-group discussion frequently followed the recitation.

In an effort to improve the quality of student reading, Durham (1997) eventually began to allow students to select their poems beforehand so that they could practice outside of class time. As the class became more and more invested in the poetry reading activity, individual students found inspiration. "[I]t didn't take long before the wonderfully inevitable occurred: A student, inspired by our daily poetry readings, brought in the poem she had written at home and asked to share it at circle time" (p. 77). Before long, many students were independently composing and sharing their original works of poetry with their classmates. Recognizing the importance and value that poetry had begun to inhabit in her classroom, Durham decided to stage a festival involving groups of students reading, sharing, and discussing poems of their own choice, as well as writing workshops and the creation of student poetry anthologies. She reports that using

poetry in her classroom was effective "on both the affective and cognitive levels" (p. 78).

Specifically, the poetry project motivated students to enjoy language more, thereby increasing

their desire to read. Also, because of poetry's capacity for emotional expression, students were

able to connect with one another.

As a result of her experiences, Durham (1997) reflects that "[p]oetry helps us to be aware

of our feelings and to notice and appreciate our surroundings. Sharing those feelings and

observations through poetry this year has helped humanize the interactions between children" (p.

78). Although the humanizing element of poetry did not necessarily directly lead to the

development of English Language Arts skills, it did help Durham's students connect and relate to

poetry. Furthermore, poetry offered Durham's class the opportunity to express their ideas and

feelings in writing, and to learn to appreciate how language functions metaphorically. Because

Durham's students learned to seek out meaning in poetry, they also learned about the value of

rereading difficult text, visualizing abstract language, and synthesizing important ideas. She

remarked that, "[h]eightening student interest in poetry has allowed me to better meet their

immediate cognitive needs in developing reading, writing, and thinking skills" (p. 78).

According to her own observations and assessment of student work, the strategies that Durham

employed in order to engage her students and to get them to tune in to poetry led to cognitive

growth and improved literacy.

Both of the above studies help establish that poetry has a positive role to play in the

classroom, especially if one is considering student achievement with regard to improved reading,

writing, and comprehension skills. As Durham's study demonstrates and Eva-Wood (2008)

reiterates, poetry has the capacity to refine oral communication, grow vocabulary, support the

close reading of texts, and generally advance composition skills, not to mention the ability to

engage and fascinate a reader (Eva-Wood, 2008, p. 564). Moreover, poetry can engage the reader on both the efferent and aesthetic levels, offering concrete information and skills advancement, while also furnishing an entertaining and appealing experience. Although there are only a limited number of studies on the topic, the research that has been done supports the claim that poetry instruction is important because using it as an instructional text gives students ways to advance their literacy talents, satisfying state-mandated educational requirements.

Growth and Expression of Student Identity and Voice

In addition to the literature that concerns poetry's role in the development of language arts skills, current research also demonstrates that it can provide students with an avenue for individual expression and an opportunity to develop a sense of personal identity (Jocson, 2006). Although these benefits are not exclusive to poetry, verse is particularly well-suited to afford students these advantages as it is "a timeless, valued form of expression … [f]or youth whose voices have been largely ignored in an adult-driven world" (Jocson, 2006, p. 700). Several researchers observed that when students feel more comfortable and less intimidated about connecting with literature in individual ways, their engagement increases. For example, Morris, Urbanski, and Fuller (2005) used poetry as a part of business education to "provide a context and background for emotion exploration" (p. 893). As a result, students enhanced their emotional intelligence while recognizing cross-discipline connections between the liberal arts and business, a not-too-common feat (Morris, Urbanski, & Fuller, 2005). In perhaps a more standard use of poetry, Cappello (2006) commented on the writing workshop as a place for student-poets and student-writers to share personal reflections and feelings. Discussing three students in particular, Cappello underscored the key role that voice and identity played for them in the composition process. "Participants drew upon their notions of the purposes of writing, the appropriation of

various discourses, and the use of writing to privilege oneself, suggesting a reciprocal relationship between their social identities, voices, and the texts they create" (p. 490). Poetry served as a conduit for this type of expression. Overall, these researchers discuss the ways in which poetry affects student identity and voice because it offers a means to explore perspective and an avenue to articulate emotions.

Researchers have shown that poetry is an effective way for students to investigate their own perspectives as a way to explore identity. For example, Kucan (2007) describes how students wrote "I" poems as a way to deepen their understanding of literature and expand their perspective about themselves by "expressing thoughts and feelings from the narrator's point of view" (p. 518). Having students read, write, and recite poetry to express themselves and explore literary elements, encourages them "to begin noticing who characters are, why they feel and act as they do, and how they see things; to begin noticing what places are like and what makes one place different from another; and to begin noticing the impact of the carefully chosen and placed word" (p. 524).

The research described by Reyes (2006) echoes much of what Kucan (2007) discusses regarding student identity, voice, and the role of perspective. In order to strengthen students' ability to express themselves and grow as both learners and individuals, Reyes (2006) established an afterschool program, "Poetic High," as a student forum for poetry recitation where students, not teachers, are the content authorities. As he says, "to authentically help create an identity within our students requires us to relinquish the idea that we are the only experts in the classroom" (p. 14). Certainly Reyes' instructional approach is key to his program's success, but so too is the role that poetry played for the program participants. By giving students a setting to

explore verse they had selected in a nontraditional way, outside of a classroom, an opportunity emerged for students to express themselves and cultivate their unique voices.

Camangian (2008) reports on many of the same benefits that result when students are given a place to engage with poetry. And furthermore, argues that these opportunities are exceptionally critical for disenfranchised urban youth who often do not fare well in school. In his research, he "examines the impact of a performance poetry unit on students' critical thinking, literacy and voice from the perspective of a teacher/researcher in an urban classroom" (p. 35). Not unlike Reyes (2006), Camangian (2008) concludes that poetry can be an alternative educational text for students. Giving students the freedom to choose poetry they want to read and write a forum in which to perform poetry, whether self-composed or sampled from music or rap, allows them to learn in ways that do not always exist in traditional classroom and curricula. These several examples from the literature serve to demonstrate that poetry instruction can be diverse and effective. Further and more closely examining other similar studies helps to emphasize this claim.

Just as poetry instruction can be varied, there is no single form of poetry that best affords students the occasion to express themselves and to cultivate a sense of identity. However, there is research that demonstrates that two kinds of oral poetry in particular, spoken-word and slam, allow students to explore identity and voice. Referring to what McCormick (2000) describes as the "aesthetic safety zone," Jocson (2006) argues that writing and reciting poetry can furnish youth with a safe haven that allows them to accept themselves and share their personal experiences with peers (p. 700). Through mediums like hip-hop and spoken-word, the latter being a type of performance art that blends elements of recitation with more animated and dramatic aspects of theatrical performance, "poetry interventions in and outside of classrooms

have innovated ways of engaging adolescent youths' interest in poetry-related activities" (p. 700). Although reading or reciting poetry is very different from the academic study of poetry, ultimately the end goal is often the same: to cultivate a general interest in and appreciation for poetry in its many forms so as to best engage students.

A study conducted in 2005 by Desai and Marsh reiterates this point concerning student engagement and the effectiveness of spoken-word poetry. They assert that the use of spoken-word can serve as a representation of their and their students' culture, community, and identity. Spoken-word is a performance-based kind of poetry that can closely connect audience with poet through subject-matter that is intensely personal and emotional, and may be political and blunt about the often harsh realities of urban life (Desai & Marsh, 2005). In an effort to explore the benefits of this type of poetry further, Desai and Marsh conducted a small-scale classroom-based study involving approximately twenty students. "Through reading, writing and, sharing poetry as well as other forms of critical expression, the class was developed to assist students in reflecting on what they have learned and how it relates to their own lived experiences both in and outside of school" (p. 78). The space that Desai and Marsh created with these students invited self-expression, identity exploration, and poetic inspiration. The students found verse to be a tool for intimate expression and human connection. They offer evidence of this through students' own words. For example, "One student, Andre said, 'I love poetry ... poetry is just a way of expressing your feelings.' Andre further explained that writing is a way of understanding people and that it is a way to connect with people who share different cultures and views" (p. 82). Desai and Marsh offer a clear conclusion regarding the importance of spoken-word poetry, especially, but of poetry generally when they assert that verse gives students a unique way to safely and personally give voice to their experiences, thoughts, and feelings, emphasizing that poetry can be

more than just a language arts teaching tool. Spoken-word gives students an avenue to comfortably expose private details about their own lives that enable teachers "to connect with [students] in ways that deal with … emotional needs and then assist [them with] academic needs. [Students are] … willing to open up, but only if someone is there to listen" (p. 82). When teachers invite students to participate in spoken-word activities, they afford their charges a chance to become deeply engaged with poetry in an authentic way that reflects their experiences. Opportunities such as this provide teachers the occasion to meaningfully affect their students' lives as both learners and individuals. They also assert that the novel use and teaching of poetry as spoken-word can serve as a beacon and a reminder to educators regarding the value of embracing the lives, experiences, and the multiple discourses of students entering the modern-day classroom (Desai and Marsh, 2005). Spoken-word allows students to speak out, express themselves and their identities in their own unique voices, and connect with those around them, peers and educators alike, in an unconventional educational setting.

Along these same lines, the use of slam poetry in and outside of the classroom is another poetry genre that encourages the articulation of student voice and the development of student identity. As with spoken-word, a slam is predicated on the performance and recitation of poetic language, but the event itself is unique. Slam offers a forum for poetry reading and generally consists of two main parts: "the first part of the program consists of an open mic, with poets performing their various works. The second part is then a competition with experienced poets performing their polished poems" (Rudd, 2012, p. 684). Spoken-word and slam poetry are celebrations of language that allow students to use poetry in constructive and positive ways. Even more notably, these sorts of poems can encourage genuine and faithful representations of the student authors' voices. Slam and spoken-word poetry can directly connect their authors to

each other through shared experiences of time and place and through a mutual feeling of identity (Rudd, 2012).

Although commonly implemented beyond school walls, Low (2006) argues that "spoken-word holds important lessons for curriculum on how contemporary youth communicate, express themselves, and make meaning, through practices constituting what might be thought of as a 'counter-literacy' – outside the formal practices of literacy, pedagogy, and curriculum, and evolving out of exclusion, necessity, and improvised pleasure" (p. 2). In essence, the slam/spoken word venue, while undoubtedly unusual and unconventional in its approach and subject, is an example of how poetry offers students various ways to voice their experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Furthermore, Low contends that the sort of literacy developed through participation in slam/spoken word poetry events demonstrates transactions with text. He states: "I assume that aesthetic form, and specifically poetic form, helps to shape the active, affective, individual, and communal experiences … that there is a dynamic exchange between how and what words say and mean, and that aesthetic forms can reflect ideological, historical contexts" (p. 4). Spoken-word and slam poetry function in the same manner that traditional literature does, yet these examples of verse also demonstrate that poetry encourage students to express themselves, to be heard and to be taken seriously, and to feel empowered in regard to their own educations. Thus, poetry instruction is beneficial for its ability to provide students with both traditional and unconventional opportunities to develop and express their voices and identities by exploring perspective and expressing emotions, thereby becoming more engaged, more successful learners.

Impact on Struggling Readers and Proficient Students

The third and arguably most universally applicable benefit of poetry instruction involves its potential to address the needs of students reading at a whole range of proficiency levels. Whereas poetry is well-suited to aid in the growth of student language arts skills, and it certainly readily adapts to unorthodox or creative endeavors that are responsive to current youth culture by lending its form to the expression of student voice, before all else a child must be engaged in order to learn. For this necessity, poetry functions well as its many genres offer something for students at all skill levels. There is a body of literature dedicated to accommodating and encouraging the struggling reader, just as there are pedagogical and curricular strategies involving poetry for gifted or high-achieving readers. With regard to struggling readers, Smith and Wortley (1984) assert that "[c]ertain poems have characteristics that give them excellent potential for helping students improve their reading behavior" (p. 14). The rhythm often used in poetry can support the development of recitation or read aloud skills; rhyme at the end of lines and stanzas can help to eliminate decoding and pronunciation difficulties; and generally, poetic language such as imagery can encourage students to visualize and reflect on the meanings of words and texts (Smith & Wortley, 1984). So, while reading poetry can be an intellectually rigorous experience, sometimes demanding a high degree of reading comprehension skill, it can also offer a more straightforward encounter that simply asks readers to listen and note sound and cadence. For example, Durham (1997) reflects that "[p]oetry is probably the form of reading one can most appreciate without fully understanding the words. Poetry works on rhythm and sound as much as on word knowledge and meaning. In a way, that makes it safe and more enjoyable for struggling readers, gets them focused on reading, and provides the opportunity for making meaning" (p. 77). But in addition, these same characteristics of rhyme, rhythm, meter, and beat, can be attractive to readers of more advanced skill levels, expressing ideas of much greater

complexity. In this way, poetry can use relatively simple vocabulary and form to appeal to students across the continuum of reading skill levels, creating an inclusive and energetic atmosphere. "Poetry in the classroom has the potential to spark connections and create a dynamic learning environment" (Skelton, 2006, p. 29), though it should be noted that this does not necessarily occur without effort. Rather, making poetry accessible to a wide range of readers in the classroom requires specific efforts on the part of the educator. This claim is further and more fully evidenced by examining in greater depth several studies, each of which details poetry teaching activities and strategies that interest various types of learners.

Instructional strategies. There are many educational strategies available to assist in expanding the accessibility of poetry, especially those that foster personal connection. For instance, a teaching strategy that incorporates actual physical activity can greatly improve student participation and include both struggling and proficient readers (Zimmerman, 2002). "[S]tudents often feel distant from poetry, and activities designed to establish a more direct relationship between the student and the poem facilitate learning" (p. 410). Zimmerman asserts that this can be accomplished through experiential activities which she defines as anything "from wilderness training through Outward Bound to role-playing in psychotherapy, from constructing business models out of toothpicks to studying Shakespeare through puppetry. Of course, everything—from reading a poem to writing an essay to staging a debate—is an experience, but experiential education relies on distinctive experiences" (p. 409). Using this approach as a starting point, Zimmerman suggests that any given reading comprehension activity is appropriate, provided that it begins with a distinctive experience such as "the unexpected, the novel, or the dangerous [so as to] achieve a heightened [student] awareness of the subject matter and its value" (p. 409). For example, she (2002) describes a lesson in which she approaches the

normally soporific task of helping students to understand scansion, the process of determining

the metrical pattern of a line of verse, by having her students physically represent lines of poetry,

"devis[ing] movements to represent stressed and unstressed syllables" (p. 411). Zimmerman's

students, by engaging in a game based upon the rules of a given poem's metrical pattern, became

physically connected to the subject matter. This kind of learning event served as an introduction

to truly interactive educational experiences that had poetry at their center. This is a strategy for

poetry instruction that not only accentuates the social nature of the classroom, but also highlights

how poetry can be made more appealing to students of various skill levels.

Along these same lines, Connolly and Smith (2003) describe a valuable yet noticeably

less experiential strategy for involving both struggling and proficient students. They noted that

"Rather than working with us and with each other to meet the challenge a poem offers, many of

our students have remained silent, offering 'I just don't get poetry' as an explanation" (p. 235).

Moreover, Connolly and Smith report that "poetry discussions in our classrooms – more than

discussions of any other genre – have at times been derailed by our students' reluctance to do …

textual exploration" (p. 235). Thus, in an attempt to facilitate their students' appreciation, and

also their comprehension of poetry, and in pursuit of improving their pedagogical skills,

Connolly and Smith conducted an experiment. Instead of only teaching poetry that they knew,

they also brought poems to their students that they had never read. The results were surprising.

They found that discussion was freer and more meaningful when the instructor was just as

untried with a poem as the students were. "[T]he discussions in which Bill read the poems for the

first time along with his students were markedly different from the ones in which he was

teaching a poem that he had taught many times before" (p. 238). Because some degree of

authority had been removed from the teacher due to his inexperience with a poem that was new

to him, students seemed to feel the playing field had been leveled. The authors reflect that "[p]oetry is a genre feared by many students. One cause of their fear, we think, is that students often feel intimidated by their teachers' interpretive authority" (p. 239). Certainly Connolly and Smith's strategy is unorthodox, but the results are suggestive. Engaging in such an activity encouraged students to participate. Before skills development or personal expression can occur, a reader must be disposed to engage with the text. Otherwise, there may be no appreciation of the reading event or reflection upon the text's meaning and significance (Rosenblatt, 1998). By transacting with unfamiliar text with their students, Connolly and Smith seemed to inspire their students to more actively engage in making meaning.

Pitcher (2009) describes another way that poetry can appeal to students of varying literacy abilities. In a project known as the "Great Poetry Race," students and parents were connected by way of a simple and effective program that reinforces literacy skills through poetry, and also emphasizes the value of student engagement, irrespective of proficiency, by focusing on recitation. The project was simple in design. After a selection was made by the teacher, the participating students "raced" to read their poem to as many individuals as possible. Each recitation earned the student a signature, and the pupil with the most signatures at the conclusion of the designated time period won a prize. Because of the success of "The Race," Pitcher explains how schools and reading clinics in the neighborhood of her university have also adopted this activity, and they too describe its positive reception. "Teachers have shared wonderful stories of the positive literacy encounters this activity has sparked" (p. 613), sharing stories about their students reading outside of the classroom, at home, and even in public places. Activities such as this, which emphasize the value and fun that poetry and literacy can inspire, demonstrate how naturally poetry lends itself to student engagement, regardless of classification

or ability. All students, those who struggled with literacy and those who excelled, were able to participate equally in the "Great Race." Students must be willing to engage before they are able to construct meaning. And while meaning-making was not the express purpose of "The Great Poetry Race," students who "raced" began a process that was both enjoyable and educational for them, and that had engagement with poetry at its center.

Conclusion

The research discussed in this chapter underscores three reasons why poetry instruction is valuable. First, verse facilitates the development of essential language arts skills by challenging students with form and subject, as well as diverse levels of difficulty associated with textual analysis and interpretation. Additionally, poetry readily lends itself to instruction that addresses several speaking, listening, writing, and reading standards as defined by the Common Core State Standards Initiative. Second, poetry offers students unique and interesting ways to express themselves, their voices, and their perspectives, providing the opportunity to develop their sense of self and identity. And finally, poetry provides texts that can be used for students across the range of language arts skills levels, offering a way to express complex ideas through sometimes simple and straightforward language. This aspect of poetry can make it appealing to readers at all levels of proficiency, attracting students in ways that do not depend upon intellectual acumen or proficiency.

Chapter 3: Methodology

According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), "[q]ualitative research … is a broad approach to the study of social phenomena. … [It is] pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (p. 2). In keeping with these ideas of what the qualitative researcher looks to accomplish, I conducted a qualitative study involving 15 high school students in the Westeros Regional School District; specifically, I focused my research at the high school level, grade twelve. As a result of this work, I wanted to understand what ways the perspectives of high school students can inform instruction so as to more fully engage them in reading and writing poetry? Further sub-questions that guided my study were: a) What has influenced and contributed to students feelings about verse? b) How do students' perspectives on poetry describe approaches to engaging students when teaching it? Creswell and Miller (2000) make an important distinction between quantitative and qualitative studies that explains my decision to use qualitative methodology to address my research questions. In essence, the quantitative researcher approaches a study most concerned with "the specific inferences [that can be] made from test scores on psychometric instruments … and the internal and external validity of experimental and quasi-experimental designs" (p. 125). On the other hand, the qualitative investigator does not use a lens that focuses upon "scores, instruments, or research designs," but rather "a lens established using the views of people who conduct, participate in, or read and review a study" (p. 125). Because my research questions are first and foremost about the perspectives of students, a qualitative approach was the appropriate one for me to use.

In the following sections, I describe the context within which I conducted my study, the general demographic character of the community's residents, and the school itself from which my participants were selected. Then, I describe the design of the study and the processes that

characterized its implementation. Data collection involved a series of individual student interviews and focus group discussions. I also describe the data analysis process I implemented. Data analysis included a primarily deductive approach. Transactional theory guided my initial work with the data. I first examined student responses by looking for evidence of the aesthetic stance. In other words, I wanted to know how students were feeling, and how students articulated their emotional reactions to poetry and teaching. It should be noted as well that despite the varying academic levels of the study participants, there was no apparent relationship between achievement and observations about poetry and poetry instruction. From this process, I established the beginnings of my coding scheme. After this step, I searched for themes within the data and looked to further develop my coding structure based upon student responses.

Research Setting

Valleytown, a wonderful place to live. The community in which I conducted my research, known for my purposes as Valleytown, is comprised of three neighboring but distinct boroughs with a total population of approximately 20,000 residents. Valleytown contains numerous up-scale housing developments and single-family homes; the landscape is punctuated with both farmland and forest. It is a mix of rural and suburban. The Valleytown community was well known to me prior to this study. I have been an English teacher at Lannister High School (LHS) since 2002, the sole regional secondary institution in Valleytown and the site of my research. Additionally, I was a resident of the county in which Valleytown is situated for almost ten years, and I have therefore accumulated an intimate understanding of the area and its people. Working as a teacher at LHS, I have become very well acquainted with the student demographics. Naturally, I have personal knowledge of the teaching staff, administration, and numerous district parents as well. Therefore, the claims that I make about Valleytown, its residents, and their ideas

and beliefs in regards to their community are the accumulation of both personal experience and observations and individual reports made by Valleytowners.

As regards LHS and its role in the Valleytown community, the school atmosphere is strongly representative of the character of the town itself. Valleytowners seem to largely share values; they are a somewhat small and closely knit group of individuals, and are ethnically relatively homogeneous. Students at LHS regularly demonstrate a sincere sense of pride in their school, and they participate extensively in myriad community service activities ranging from local fundraising events for charity to global projects aimed at the humanitarian development of impoverished third-world countries. LHS students enjoy steadfast parental support, partake in a wide gamut of sporting and extracurricular events, and generally benefit from a top notch educational experience.

Lannister high school. The setting for this study is a medium-sized, comprehensive high school situated in Valleytown, a community in central New Jersey. Enrollment for the 2011-2 school year was 1,225 students with the following ethnic/racial sub-groups comprising the school population: 85.4% White, 2.4% Black, 3.9% Hispanic, 7.9% Asian, 0.1% American Indian, and 0.3% two or more races. I have been employed by LHS as an English teacher of grades 10-12 for almost ten years, and so I have had ready access to the research site. The district in which LHS is located, Westeros Regional School District (WRSD), consists of four elementary schools (grades K-5), one middle school (grades 6-8) and one high school (grades 9-12). WRSD is classified as being District Factor Group (DFG) I. District Factor Group is a classification system used by the state of New Jersey to categorize public school districts. Districts belonging to DFG I are typified by high levels of parent education, above average income (upper-middle class), and scores on standardized assessments that are higher than the state average.

The Language Arts requirements and offerings at LHS have undergone several changes in recent years that oblige explanation as they are germane to understanding the backgrounds of the study participants. All freshmen, sophomores, and juniors are required to enroll in English I, II, and III respectively. These full-year courses cover a wide range of materials, topics, reading and writing assignments and activities, and are aimed at developing compositional, analytical, critical thinking, and evaluative skills. There is an honors option that any 9th, 10th, or 11th grade student can enroll in provided that students have the requisite GPA and teacher recommendations. Although they must take two semesters of English, seniors at LHS do not take a full-year, required class; instead, they may choose from elective courses that are each a half year in duration. Options include Journalism, Mixed Media I & II, Modern Drama, Creative Writing, Shakespeare, Survey of Poetry, Honors American Literature, and Backgrounds to Literature. Alternatively, students in 11th or 12th grade may elect to enroll in an Advanced Placement English course to fulfill their English requirement.

Because of the relatively small number of participants in this study, neither the planning process nor the procedure that I employed in order to obtain permission to conduct this research was especially arduous. Given the non-intrusive nature of the questions I asked, I was met with zero resistance regarding the implementation of this study. I first approached my building principal so as to describe my intentions, what my overall goal was regarding the solicitation of student participants, and how I would maintain participant confidentiality. He was both supportive and excited about my proposal and readily offered his approval, but advised me that the process would have to receive official authorization from the school board before any further steps could be taken. Within several weeks, the Westeros Regional School District sanctioned my study under the condition that I make the results available upon request; naturally, I agreed to

this condition. Meanwhile, I sought out and received the necessary approval from the Rutgers University Institutional Review Board.

Study Design

In this section, I describe my study design. The study design was essentially composed of two main components: individual interview sessions that were guided by a standardized set of open-ended questions and focus group interviews that revolved around discussions about two texts, "Sonnet XVIII," by William Shakespeare, and "Introduction to Poetry," by Billy Collins. Focus group questions were non-standardized and were adjusted according to student response. I begin by discussing the processes by which I planned and obtained permission to conduct this research. Next, I describe the method of participant selection that was employed, and I discuss the manner in which I decided upon the poetry selections that students were asked to respond to. I continue from there to describe methods of data collection and analysis. And finally, I conclude this chapter by reviewing overall study limitations, addressing issues of trustworthiness, and describing the role of the researcher.

Participant recruitment and selection. A significant benefit that I enjoyed during the selection process of this study was that I am an insider in the LHS community. Thus, I did not have to grapple with the typical obstacles that can arise when one enters a school to do research without any specific or personal knowledge of the school context or its students. Nonetheless, it was not an easy task to identify students who were willing to go on record and share their thoughts and feelings about poetry; I describe this further below.

The selection criteria for student participants in this study were that they must

1. have taken at least one course that includes the study of poetry as a discrete unit;

2. have received at least a C+ in the class;

3. be in the 12th grade;

4. be available to participate either in between class periods or before or after school hours;

5. not be enrolled in a class I was teaching at the time data was collected.

These criteria were necessary for several reasons. First, they guaranteed that participants would be familiar with poetry study in a classroom environment. Second, the criteria ensured that participants had earned passing grades and, presumably, therefore had informed ideas about the subject matter. And third, the criteria ensured that students were not and would never become students of mine, an important consideration in order to decrease the chance of students feeling coerced to participate or saying things just to please me in the hopes that it would positively influence their grade. I aimed to recruit as many students as possible who fit the above criteria, and hoped to obtain the participation of enough students so as to be able to conduct at least three different focus group sessions and have enough data for themes to emerge. My overall goal was to attain a manageable number of participants that was also large enough to be informative regarding my research questions.

I solicited student participants using campus email, the public announcement system, class bulletin boards, and some personal contact with students. All announcements about the study stated the participation criteria; students were excluded from the study if any of the five conditions did not apply to them, and it was made clear to students that due to size and time constraints, not all volunteers would necessarily be selected. This caveat proved to be irrelevant, however; it was a problematic task simply obtaining sufficient volunteers in order to conduct this research. I believe that while there may be several explanations for this, the primary reason is simple: students at LHS lead extremely busy, perhaps even overscheduled, lives. Academic,

sports-related, and extracurricular responsibilities severely reduce the time that any given student has to spend outside of class. And while this research is extremely important to me, participation in a study about poetry most likely did not rate high on their lists of things to do, especially for those who do not like poetry. Although I tried to recruit an equal number of poetry-positive and poetry-negative participants, thirteen of those individuals who volunteered had mostly positive perspectives concerning verse and two were relatively neutral about it. It was difficult to mitigate this trend, as students disinterested in poetry or those who disliked poetry seem to have simply ignored my recruitment attempts altogether. It is probable that being familiar with me as a teacher, students knew about my favorable opinion concerning poetry and decided to stay away if they felt differently. I thought it important to refrain from directly asking students to participate so as to avoid making them feel pressured to join in and so I did not ask students whom I knew to dislike poetry to participate. However, hindsight would suggest that involving more students who disliked poetry might have offered further depth to the data. Perhaps if I had requested the opinions of poetry averse students as a specific part of the recruitment process, more of this type of student would have volunteered. Overall, the lack of poetry averse students is a limitation of the recruitment process.

Ultimately 15 students who met my selection criteria volunteered to participate. They ranged in age from seventeen to nineteen years; they were evenly divided by gender. Fourteen were Caucasian, and one was Asian-American. Given that most of these participants had at one time been students of mine, I am able to provide a general description of their academic abilities based upon class performance, their recent course taking history, and whether they were enrolled in one or more of my previously taught classes, English III or Survey of Poetry (see Table 1), as well as whether they were enrolled in Honors and/or Advanced Placement English classes.

Table 1

Participant Characteristics

Name (pseudonym)	English III	Survey of Poetry	English III Honors	AP	Average for 11th & 12th Grade English Classes
Bob		X	X		A
Cara	X	X			B
Cecelia	X	X			C
Christine		X	X		A
Carol			X		B
Ben	X				C
Evan	X	X			B
Helen				X	A
Kim		X	X		B
Michael				X	A
Robert				X	A
Sam		X	X		A
Scott		X	X		A
Tara	X	X			B
Sarah	X				C

Once fifteen students had expressed interest in participating in the study, and after

ensuring that each one met the participation criteria as outlined below, I discussed all the study

parameters and expectations, as well as their privacy rights and the anticipated time commitment

for participating, with all volunteers. Each volunteer was provided with two forms: "Assent for

Participation in Research Activities" and "Parental Informed Consent." These documents made

plain the nature of the study, its goals and procedures (including the fact that audio recording

would be taking place during data collection), and each individual's rights as a research

participant. I provided contact information to both students and parents via email, phone, or

personal interview in order to field any related questions. Each of the fifteen participants

returned the permission forms without incident.

Finally, I took deliberate steps to maintain the confidentiality of participants throughout

both the data collection and analysis processes and the preparation of the written report. All

participants are referred to by pseudonyms throughout this study. Every effort was made to

guarantee participant confidentiality. Also, all materials generated throughout the proposed

project were stored on a single, password protected computer and will be destroyed in

compliance with institutional review board requirements.

Data collection procedures. In order to collect data for this study, I conducted individual and

focus group interviews using standardized, open-ended protocols (Appendix B) as my primary

strategies; these approaches afforded me insight concerning students' perspectives and feelings

about poetry and the teaching of poetry. I chose to conduct both individual interviews and focus

group discussions to account for how students might respond differently in a one-on-one setting

as compared to an environment involving interactions with peers. I hoped that the private

sessions would allow participants to express their true thoughts and feelings without reservation.

While the group conversation would allow for this as well, it could also furnish students the

opportunity to respond to and build off of each other's responses in real time. In addition,

students were asked to interact with specific poems in the focus group sessions as opposed to simply talking about past experiences with poetry. This aspect of the group sessions allowed me to observe students transacting with poetry directly without the limitations that their memories might create when recalling past classroom events. Finally, because the focus group were intentionally small (only two-three participants) I hoped to create an environment that was distinct from a traditional classroom setting involving 25-30 students. This was a deliberate choice because the individual interviews already inquired about general classroom experiences, and I wanted the focus group sessions to avoid feeling like another classroom event with a teacher in charge of discussion.

The interview sessions and the three focus group meetings occurred over the course of several weeks' time during March and April of 2012. Because interview/discussion sessions never lasted longer than thirty minutes in duration, I was able to be flexible in regards to when I met with students as the time commitment was minimal. Typically, most meetings occurred during lunch periods, senior option "free" periods, or immediately after school. All interview/discussion sessions occurred on school grounds in either a classroom or a guidance counselor's office. At the conclusion of the data collection process, I had audio files and transcripts of fifteen individual interview sessions and three focus group meetings. Two focus groups involved three students in each, and one focus group had two students. These documents totaled 229 minutes in audio length and 149 pages of type-written text.

Individual interviews. Individual interviews were conducted first. The interview proceeded in the following manner: the study participant met me in my classroom at LHS at a predetermined time. Sitting across from one another at opposite-facing desks, I placed a digital audio recording device between the participant and me. Students were made aware that they could terminate

participation at any time. Fortunately, no students chose to exercise this option. The interview recordings were transcribed verbatim as close to the day of the interview as possible.

There were eleven interview questions (see Appendix B) in total that asked students to define poetry, to reflect and report about their feelings and experiences with poetry, to describe and evaluate classroom experiences with poetry, to discuss their opinions about poetry and its value, and to share their ideas about how teaching strategies might be improved or changed in regards to poetry instruction. All interviewees received these questions well, and responded with varying degrees of insight and detail. Overall, the interview process proceeded without any problem.

Focus group interviews. After all of the participants had been interviewed, I conducted three focus group interviews, one composed of two students, and two composed of three students. Not all students interviewed individually took part in the group sessions. The limited number of focus group participants was the result of student scheduling difficulties. Although the focus group meetings followed all the individual interviews, they served a separate data collection purpose; individual interview data did not have an impact upon focus group questions or format. Discussion in these groups revolved around responses to open-ended questions regarding the poetry selections chosen for this activity. I selected "Sonnet XVIII" because it is a good example of the type of canonical selection that students are likely to encounter in an English classroom. Its language register is formal, with definite structural and rhythmic parameters, and is generally unfamiliar and challenging. Although they have some similarity in terms of theme and content, I selected "Introduction to Poetry" because it contrasts with the Shakespeare sonnet in several ways. The register of its language is familiar, the form of the poem is free and not bound by the constraints of the sonnet, and its subject is the struggles and ironies that surround the sort of

poetry analyses that students are expected to produce in a school setting. Students analyzed and shared their ideas about these two poems; this provided students with the opportunity to give immediate and concrete feedback. Also, presenting them with actual poems helped to foster direct and genuine conversation about the students' perceptions regarding the value and purpose of poetry.

For example, instead of inquiring about past classroom experiences, students had specific and current examples that they could speak about, although the focus group was decidedly different from a classroom environment. The poems I selected were employed solely for the purpose of discussion. Students were free to speak their minds without the typical constraints of the classroom; they were not graded or otherwise assessed in any way. Using standardized, open-ended interview protocols allowed "the participants to contribute as much detailed information as they desire[d] and it also [allowed] the researcher to ask probing questions as a means of follow-up" (Turner, 2010, p. 756). Questions derived from the selected poems, Shakespeare's "Sonnet XVIII" and contemporary poet Billy Collins' "Introduction to Poetry," focused on students' opinions regarding the poetry, and their thoughts concerning how to teach these poems to students. Speaking with students both individually and in small groups ultimately yielded robust data that provided insight about personal student reactions.

The students who participated in this research project, by design, were all familiar with the writing, reading, and analysis of poetry. Language Arts curricula at LHS, while not solely devoted to the study or writing of verse, with the single exception of the senior-year elective course Survey of Poetry, are thorough in regards to the variety of literature covered and the types of composition tasks that students are expected to satisfy. Thus, participants brought a basic familiarity and understanding of poetry to the study having encountered it throughout their high

school careers on a limited basis. And because of their past experiences as students, I believe that students automatically thought of poetry as traditional English classroom fare, as opposed to music lyrics or other non-traditional poetry texts, going as far astray even as Twitter posts. My overall intention was to use a pair of traditional poems to inspire authentic and immediate responses and to stimulate participants' thoughts about past experiences with poetry in the classroom setting. In order to facilitate the sorts of insightful responses that I was aiming to gather, I used two poems, one classic, the other contemporary, to encourage discussion and reflection during the focus group interview sessions. Based upon the quality of the focus group responses, this goal was accomplished.

In terms of the interpretative challenge posed by these two selections of poetry, the difficulty level is moderate. Students typically struggle with the language and syntax employed by Shakespeare; however, the overall message of the sonnet, a celebration of the impermeable nature of poetry itself and why this makes it a perfect vehicle to communicate a person's love for his sweetheart, is usually not lost on students, even if the intricacies of the extended metaphor are not always thoroughly understood. Collins' poem, on the other hand, is written in contemporary modern English and uses a series of image-laden descriptions to directly articulate the actual process of literary explication itself; his vivid metaphors are usually well-received by student readers.

Limitations

The first limitation of this study relates to the participants themselves and their professed feelings about verse. My intentions were to gather the opinions of both poetry-positive and poetry-negative students. However, with a few notable exceptions, the majority of the participants claimed that they did generally enjoy reading and learning about poetry. In

retrospect, I believe that this was unavoidable. As I mentioned previously, it was challenging to recruit a sufficient number of students for this study. It seems almost inevitable that those individuals who would volunteer to share their thoughts about verse would be more likely to have affirmative feelings about the topic; most students who dislike poetry simply ignored the request for participation. I did not attempt to ameliorate this deficiency by directly soliciting the participation of students adverse to poetry. Given that this study is based upon a limited number of participants who generally like poetry, future research would benefit from not only enlarging the participant pool, but also purposefully involving students who do not like poetry.

A second limitation associated with this research concerns the research question itself: I do not know how valuable the perspectives and ideas of mostly poetry-positive students will be in helping to engage students who do not like poetry. I assumed, based upon a kind of inverse logic, that by investigating the perspectives of these students, an insight may be gained about how better to serve students who do not share positive feelings about poetry, and subsequently, how to generally engage students in the Language Arts. Naturally, this may not be the case. That being said, student responses underscored what I know to be good teaching practices as an educator with over fifteen years of secondary and post-secondary teaching experience. And moreover, this study is also valuable given the shift in pedagogical ideology that I described previously. As more and more attention is being paid to tests and test scores, student-centered learning practices must not be abandoned.

Two final limitations of this study concern member checking and scope. Member checking, according to Creswell and Miller (2000), "consists of taking data and interpretations back to the participants in the study so that they can confirm the credibility of the information and narrative account" (p. 127). Although I did not subject my interpretations of the interview

data to member checking, students did read through transcripts as near to the actual interview dates as possible to ensure that their responses were accurately represented. I did not ask students to provide any further responses to their transcripts. And ultimately, I did not ask participants to review interpreted data because the logistics of doing so (all participants had graduated prior to the completion of data analysis) were too complex. Also, given that the majority of students had positive, non-controversial opinions regarding their classroom experiences, I believe there was small chance of misinterpretation or misrepresentation on my part. Nonetheless, what I did was a low level of member checking that did not yield any further information. If this study were to be expanded in the future, it would be valuable to have students review and respond to analysis of the data in order perhaps to provide further insight.

Regarding the scope of this study, I gathered my research locally in the school district where I am employed. Given that the number of students interviewed is relatively small, in order to obtain a clearer understanding of the generalizability of my results, further study must be done with a greater number of students, and ideally, from a more diverse demographical background, so as to better represent student points of view. Along these same lines, of the 15 students who participated in the individual interviews, only eight joined the focus group sessions. As mentioned earlier, this was the result of student scheduling conflicts. Nonetheless, this is a limitation. Ideally, it would have been beneficial to have heard from all of the study participants in both individual interview and focus group settings.

Trustworthiness

In general, trustworthiness, according to Barbour (1998), "refers to the extent to which the findings are an authentic reflection of the personal or lived experiences of [participants or stakeholders of] the phenomenon under investigation" (as cited in Curtin & Fossey, 2007, p. 89).

Researcher reflexivity and member checking are the two primary procedures that I employed so as to ensure, as best as possible, the credibility of my findings. As Creswell and Miller (2000) assert, reflexivity entails "[self-disclosure of researcher] assumptions, beliefs and biases" (p. 127). Furthermore, reflexivity describes a researcher's sensitivity to the various, often delicate or indirect ways that elements such as partiality, location, and worldview impact the collection and analysis of data (Hunt, 2010, p. 70). Therefore, as early in the research process as possible, I reflected on how my own perspectives influenced the questions that I asked, and the manner in which I analyzed and presented the data. Specifically, as an English teacher, I believe the most valuable sort of instruction is the type that privileges student perspective and encourages reflection about how literature is personally relative. While learning particular technical skills, such as grammar, writing mechanics, and vocabulary, are important, I personally maintain that they are subordinate to abstract and philosophical interactions with text. Essentially, I prefer my students to engage the aesthetic point of view more often than the efferent perspective. I attempted to limit the effect of this preference by employing as much transparency as possible when analyzing and presenting data. I examined the data as impartially as possible, being meticulous in my representation of all students' points of view. Overall, I believe that my own biases played a somewhat negligible role, as my partiality towards the value of the aesthetic stance over the efferent stance did not shape the responses of the participants.

Data Analysis

In this section, I describe the analytic process that I used to accomplish my research aims, including the construction of codes, the coding method, and the strategies I used to synthesize the data in order to discover important themes. The analysis method that I ultimately employed was a deductive approach. The primary conceptual framework that provided the foundation of

my study was Rosenblatt's (1978) Transactional Theory. Additionally, Vygotsky's (1978) notion

of the Zone of Proximal Development and Cazden's (1988) ideas regarding scaffolding directed

me towards the construction of a coding protocol. In essence, the experiences that I was most

interested in examining were those textual transactions that could chiefly be characterized as

aesthetic in nature. This is not to say I anticipated that efferent transactions would be meritless.

Rather, because the purpose of my study is to understand more about how to engage students

with verse and the problems that accompany its teaching, aesthetic transactions are the most

useful in this regard. Furthermore, because my end goal revolved around the eventual enrichment

or improvement of teaching methods based upon these student reactions, I employed Vygotsky's

(1978) and Cazden's (1988) theories to help identify effective classroom practices. Consideration

of the theories of Rosenblatt, Cazden, and Vygotsky afforded me the articulation of an analytic

lens that yielded clear conclusions.

Hatch (2002) describes qualitative data analysis as "a systematic search for meaning. It is

a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others"

(p. 149). To do this, I approached the analysis of data deductively. Using the framework as a

place to begin, the ideas of Transactional Theory gave me an initial language with which to

create codes. I examined the data in order to identify connections and themes, a process that

assisted me in making broad conclusions about the ways in which students interacted with and

understood poetry in both positive and negative ways. And furthermore, my approach helped to

facilitate an overall understanding of the data because it allowed "research findings to emerge

from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in raw data, without the restraints

imposed by structured methodologies. Key themes are often obscured, reframed or left invisible

because of the preconceptions in the data collection and data analysis procedures imposed by

deductive data analysis" (Thomas, 2003, p. 237). The selected theoretical framework aided in analysis by providing a way to identify themes. My ultimate goal was to identify patterns or themes that helped to provide an answer to my research question; therefore the kinds of codes used connected to Transactional Theory in an effort to elaborate on students' aesthetic and efferent responses. In general, several kinds and levels of codes were necessary so as to place student ideas along the aesthetic/efferent continuum, which then enabled me to respond to what emerged from the data. Overall, I remained open to variability: each student expressed his/her feelings, ideas, and attitudes in different introspective, personal, and/or emotional ways.

Construction of a coding system. I decided that the best and most apt primary analytic concept for this study was student transaction. Specifically, I looked at transaction between students and text, students and students, and students and teacher. Transaction emerged as a key analytic concept for two reasons. First, the interview protocol that I employed during both the individual interview and focus group sessions was rooted in questions about transactions. I asked about the ways in which participants describe their experiences or connections with poetry (text), peers, and classroom teachers/classroom teaching practice in general. And second, during preliminary analysis of the data it became clear that transaction is at the very foundation of what students report regarding their ideas and impressions about poetry and poetry instruction. The positive transactions students described centered on their feelings, ideas, and ability to engage with text. as the positive transactions they spoke about dealt universally with feelings, ideas, and engagement. As this study was designed to uncover ways to improve pedagogy based upon student perspectives, it was crucial to understand more about how students transacted with texts, peers, and instructors inside of the classroom.

Literary Transaction Theory (1982) was essential in understanding these transactions, given that the meaning students made was the direct result of their transactions with the text. And furthermore, the concepts of the Vygotsky and Cazden, ZPD and scaffolding, helped me understand the ways in which students were interacting. Vygotsky (1978) and Cazden (1988) both speak about how to generate engagement by aiding students in successfully deciphering text with suitable assistance. Accessing Vygotsky's and Cazden's language concerning learning and scaffolding helped in the interpretation of data by highlighting those moments when students reported constructive classroom experiences that involved teacher- or peer-generated guidance or support.

Transaction, then, was the key concept that emerged from my initial reviews of the transcripts, and I used references to transaction to begin the process of organizing my data. Sorting through the pages of the transcribed interviews and group meetings, I looked for student descriptions of events wherein students talked about interacting with peers, texts, or instructors and their reactions to these occurrences. Next, I identified with whom or what these transactions occurred. Using this concept, codes and categories began to emerge.

The process of creating a coding system that would adequately highlight key points in the data and ultimately yield germane insight regarding teacher practice thus began as a method for classification, a procedure that Bogdan (2003) recommends; he emphasizes that codes should only be used as guideposts. He also advises using starting codes that focus on context and setting; definition of various situations; participant perspectives and ways of thinking about persons, objects, or ideas; events, processes, methods, or activities; and codes that identify social and relationship organizations (Bogdan, 2003). Bearing Bogdan's suggestions in mind, I sorted types of transactions so that all of the same kinds were together. I searched for student responses

that described classroom or text-based transactions, reflections about pedagogical strategies and emotional or attitudinal descriptions related to general classroom experiences. Through the analytic process, patterns became evident; this paralleled what Darlington and Scott (2002) argue is the proper focus of the coding process: "coding is an integral part of the analysis, involving sifting through the data, making sense of it and categorizing it in various ways. … Qualitative analysis is generally concerned with identifying patterns in the data" (p. 145).

I conducted preliminary analysis by reading and rereading the entirety of the data numerous times. Gradually, codes and patterns emerged as I started to connect interview responses, various students' described experiences, and my knowledge of the reviewed literature. As this process continued, I was able to recognize basic categories. As I grouped these categories, I revised my initial codes. Categories were also adjusted and refocused and eventually reapplied to the data to produce themes.

However, once the coding process began in earnest, and I had moved through the data multiple times using different codes each time, the need to reconsider my data analysis approach became quite apparent because there was too much overlap among the various codes. Once my familiarity with the data grew, I was able to reflect on my findings and significantly reduce the overall number of codes by focusing on those excerpts that directly addressed my research question and its corollary questions. I winnowed down the overall list of codes so as to be more specifically applicable to the research questions, as my original code inventory was too broad. Because of this problem, multiple codes were being assigned to the same chunks of data. Whereas this is not a problem in and of itself, in this case I was finding that many of the overlapping codes were actually very similar in meaning and were not all serving distinct purposes. For example, the code "emotions" was used to identify the same responses as

"feelings." To ameliorate this issue, I re-coded the data, seeking to avoid code overlap whenever this type of repetition occurred. Ultimately, I ended up with three foundational categories that broadly characterized student responses: experiences, reflections, and pedagogical suggestions. These three categories allowed me to code the data in a way that helped me move to the next step of analysis and interpretation. Within this main grouping of codes, I formed subgroups. Experiences were specified as being either classroom- or non-classroom-based. Under the classroom-based code, I denoted further codes that related to peer and teacher transactions. Reflections were identified as either emotional or analytical, and both of these subgroups were tied to text transaction. Finally, pedagogical suggestions were coded according to their connection to my research questions. In this way, my coding structure was derived from the main concept of transaction. Once this coding process was complete, one main theme emerged, autonomy, as the most descriptive and effective answer to my research questions. Students described two ways in which freedom was important and useful to them: freedom regarding aesthetic transaction, and freedom to analyze and interpret poetry based on their own aesthetic responses to the text. In addition, they described the value of teachers acting as facilitators and guides throughout all parts of the transaction process. These types of references indicate how the concept of the ZPD and scaffolding were applied to the data. Students' descriptions of teaching techniques that helped them better understand poetry and make meaning are examples of them valuing the kind of scaffolding that teachers can provide in their ZPD. In chapter four, I discuss these findings in detail.

Chapter 4: Findings

In setting out to use the perspectives of high school seniors regarding poetry instruction as a means to inform practice, my goal was to authentically represent their voices in such a way that made clear their points of view and advice to teachers about how to engage students in reading and writing poetry. This was important to me because it is my belief that responsible and effective educational practice requires that educators listen to and are informed by students' perspectives on teaching and learning. As mentioned previously, the research of Sands et al. (2007) and DeFur and Korinek (2010) support this claim. Their work illustrates that engaging students and using their points of view are essential to effective school reform (Sands et al., 2007, p. 341), and furthermore that students are more fully engaged in learning when they are given the chance to become a part of classroom process and practice (Defur & Korinek, 2010, p. 18-9).

Unfortunately, students are rarely afforded the opportunity to weigh in and offer their opinions concerning effective teaching. This study attempted to do that with a particular focus on poetry instruction by answering the question: in what ways can the perspectives of high school students inform instruction so as to more fully engage them in reading and writing poetry? As a result of data collection and subsequent analysis, the primary theme that emerged concerned the importance of giving students autonomy to make meaning when reading poetry. Specifically, autonomy referred to students feeling free to transact with poetry aesthetically and have the meaning making and emotional expression they bring to it from that transaction be encouraged and valued by their teachers. In other words, students talked about the importance of autonomy with regard to poetry in two ways. First, they talked about the importance of having the opportunity to bring the personal into the classroom. When reading poetry they explained that

drawing on personal experience was key to their meaning making. When writing poetry, they deeply appreciated when they were allowed and encouraged to express emotion. Second, students greatly value a classroom environment in which their own agency is nurtured and prized, especially as concerns the analysis, interpretation, and composition of poetry, and they dislike when teachers value canonical interpretations of poetry over theirs. However, students are not looking for a free for all. While desiring opportunities to bring their own understandings of poetry and approaches to composition to the table, they want their teachers to provide guidance and structure to help enrich their understandings because they feel they respond most fruitfully when a knowledgeable and encouraging teacher-guide scaffolds the course of meaning making. Vygotsky's theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and Cazden's research concerning scaffolding connect to this final point by offering guidance to the teacher about how to facilitate this kind of learning process.

In this chapter, I will explore each of the ways in which the theme of autonomy manifested in the data, providing examples in order to expand on them. First, I briefly characterize three students who best represent this study's overall findings. Next, I describe autonomy as it relates to the opportunity to engage in aesthetic transactions with poetry. Then, I discuss how student autonomy connects to the analysis and interpretation of text and composition of original poetry. And finally, I describe the importance that the teacher-facilitator plays throughout these processes.

Three Representative Student Sketches

Before discussing the theme of student autonomy, it is useful to provide some narrative detail about three of the student participants from this study who offered a notable amount of insight regarding their opinions of poetry and classroom teaching. All three students, Michael,

Sam, and Tara, are Caucasian and hail from upper middle class backgrounds, though their academic paths were somewhat dissimilar. Michael was a generally high achieving student, enrolled in multiple advanced placement courses across content areas. In fact, English was not his preferred subject; he was more naturally disposed towards the sciences and mathematics. Michael is representative of the most academically talented students at LHS. Sam received average to above average grades overall, though unlike Michael, he favored the arts, especially fine art. Sam was perhaps not as dedicated to his academic success as Michael, but he certainly excelled in terms of creative endeavors, being both musically and artistically inclined. Tara was a consistent, though academically average student. Tara could be characterized as somewhere below Michael and Sam concerning her scholastic achievements, content to enroll in and receive passing marks in mostly grade-level courses.

With regard to poetry, Michael described his feelings about it as generally positive. However, he prefers more contemporary works as opposed to "the really structured, rigid stuff." He explained that free verse offers him the opportunity to express his thoughts without worry for form or structure. As he put it, "when it's free verse, you can really say exactly what you want to say, and I feel like it just forms a better picture in my mind." Michael does not typically read or write poetry outside of a school environment, though he described certain bands that he enjoys as having poetic elements to their compositions, especially regarding how "the music and the lyrics interact with each other." For Michael, the appeal of poetry as music goes "beyond the words." In the classroom, though, Michael was hesitant and somewhat unsure about how to approach making meaning from poems. As a sophomore, he said that he would usually "just wait for the teacher to tell [him] what [the poems] meant." In his senior year when he took an AP Literature course, however, taught by an instructor who steered students towards constructing meaning

independently of heavy-handed teacher guidance, Michael developed a different opinion. "This year I had to figure it out for myself, and I really got an appreciation for what poetry is."

Like Michael, Sam's connection to poetry was also positive. Although he enjoys poetry and defines it as a "kind of self-expression," he does not regularly read or write poetry outside of school. In Sam's words, "as far as I can recall, the only times I've ever actually encountered poetry outside of school was just on the internet when I come across it, or if it's linked to me [by a friend] or someone references it, and I just research it because it sounds really interesting." Sam does, though, have a varied understanding of the many different subjects that can be addressed through verse. Poetry can describe

> humanity or any sociological matter or any psychological matter, anything like that. Or it could even be poking fun at anything: any prominent issue or anything that deserves to be made fun of. But on the other hand, it could just be extremely goofy, like really silly, as long as it maintains a good sense of humor, a good rhyme scheme and it just sounds good.

Although he doesn't generally read it if not required to, Sam does enjoy composing poetry, and spoke enthusiastically about the times when he was asked to do so in class. "I had a lot of fun with those classes. Writing poetry's a lot of fun and teachers that I had those years were awesome." Outside of school, though, Sam does not write poetry of his own accord. As a member of my Survey of Poetry class, Sam was outspoken and participated a great deal. He was always enthusiastic about offering his interpretations of the poems we were reading. He enrolled in the course as an alternative to the other literature-based class offerings that were available which seems to indicate some interest in poetry.

Similar to her peers, Tara enjoys contemporary poetry and defined verse as "a type of literature where people express their feelings and their thoughts, where no one can tell them what is right or what is wrong. It's in their own words." Unlike Michael and Sam, however, Tara greatly values composing poetry on her own and has been doing so since her early teenage years: "I actually began writing my own poetry when I was younger, maybe around 13 or 14 … and I really enjoyed it. I like writing poetry on my own; it's a hobby of mine." In much the same way that Michael connects poetry with music, Tara also viewed the two as interconnected. She described her poetry- and music-making efforts saying, "[s]ometimes the poems that I come up with on my own, I turn into songs. I also love music, and I kind of coordinate those two together, so it's pretty cool." For Tara, the imagery that is so often employed by poets to express complex ideas is what she found most compelling. "[Imagery] really helps me relate to [the poem] and be able to see how my own life compares to that poem and how I feel about it. Without imagery, I feel like it's harder to see and compare." Like Sam, Tara was also a member of my Survey of Poetry class, though she was not as vocal as he was. She said that she enrolled in the course in order to enlarge her experiences with different types of verse and to have the chance to write more original poetry of her own.

These three students represent the diverse sample of students who participated in the study because they are unique in terms of their course taking histories and academic accomplishments. They did not share a common vision regarding what interested them most in school. Michael was a high achiever, Sam was an artist and musician, and Tara was somewhat of a social butterfly. However, all three of these students, despite their differences, felt similarly concerning the teaching of poetry. Michael, Sam, and Tara each agreed that student autonomy was essential. Furthermore, they reported that they benefited most when given the chance to

connect emotionally with poetry, and to interpret and analyze poetry in ways that made sense to them. Finally, they also felt that teachers who acted in supportive ways, facilitating and guiding the meaning making process, were most effective. As I will demonstrate in this chapter, the opinions of Michael, Sam, and Tara accurately exemplify the opinions of their peers and the overall findings of this study.

Autonomy and Students' Aesthetic Transactions with Text

The hallmark of aesthetic transaction with text is personal response. When the "reservoir of past experience with people and the world, [the] past inner linkage of words and things, [or the] past encounters with spoken or written texts" (Rosenblatt, 1982, p. 270) is stimulated, students are participating in a meaningful learning event, an occurrence that engages and connects readers with text. These kinds of learning experiences make indelible marks on students, and they form the foundation for the central findings and conclusions of this study. The study participants described in detail the power that poetry has for them as a means for expressing their feelings and thoughts, and as an avenue for introspection. When students were given autonomy, or the freedom to develop their own personal ideas about and reactions to text, they were able to aesthetically transact with poetry. For example, Carol described an experience she had with a poem that opened up to her imagination a common human connection between the author and her. Reading the poet's words, she realized how powerful it can be to see through the eyes of someone else. She explained that "[w]ith poetry you can look into a poem and just see a wholly different person and wholly different world and it's exciting to see someone else's brain for a couple seconds," without having always to identify its "official" meaning. There are numerous examples from the data that illustrate student-text transactions in which students discuss how and why they personally connect with poetry. In fact, nearly all of the participants

described the ways in which poetry has affected them. It should be noted, though, that in many cases, study participants did not differentiate between reading poetry assigned in class, and their experiences composing their own poetry. This is largely due to the fact that the classroom experiences described by students regarding poetry units involved activities and assignments that included both types of work. Nonetheless, the strong sentiment expressed by the students concerning poetry's impact upon them was consistent, as was their appreciation for opportunities that afforded the freedom to personally transact.

Students' assertion that poetry expressed authentic emotion to which they could strongly relate or acted as a conduit for emotion was universal across participants. And it is through this emotional connection that the students find an affirmation of their own identities and experiences. For instance, Tara reported that writing poetry is an effective way to facilitate self-expression and self-discovery. She said "[poetry] helps you express yourself and see parts, sides of yourself I believe that you didn't even know that you had." Tara raised an essential point about how students connect poetry and emotion, and Ben echoed this idea when he said "I think poetry is amazing. I mean it expresses emotions that people might otherwise not understand." For Ben specifically, the emotion that poetry can express through language, style, and subject matter is a pathway towards a special sort of understanding. Transactional theory would suggest that Ben is explaining an aesthetic transaction with poetry. The poet expresses emotion that the reader engages with and relates to. Thus, Ben sees poetry in a positive light because he has had experiences reading poetry that reflect his own thoughts and feelings. Ben said, "you see someone that has put down on paper something that you have thought and it's relieving, but an emotional experience at the same time." The relief that Ben mentions comes from a sense of

shared perspective. He recognizes in the poet's words something that he has felt or thought himself.

Ben was not the only student who recognized something personal through his transaction with poetry. Cecelia, in discussing why she enjoys and connects with the poetry of Jim Morrison and why she writes poetry of her own, echoes many of the same ideas:

> To me [poetry] sort of captures … the energy of a moment. [The poet] writes sometimes just about a specific feeling, but he'll describe it as a bunch of different things that you know exactly what he was feeling when he wrote that, do you know what I mean? Whereas a story is just like a broad thing, … [poetry] has way more emotion and interpretation. … Poetry's a really personal thing because it is so emotional, and I don't really like writing poetry in school because they always make you share it, and I don't really like to share it because I feel kind of weird about [doing it].

For Cecelia, reading poetry can be a very private experience that can also be uniquely poignant. Cecelia, Ben and Tara's perspectives, like other study participants', suggest that students may connect to poetry best when they can relate to the poet's expressions of emotion because this gives them a sense of shared experiences. But naturally, this only occurs when students are given the autonomy to do so. Cecelia described this well when she talked about how her feelings concerning Shakespeare's work had changed. Although here she specifically speaks of his plays, the language throughout Shakespeare's sonnets and dramatic works are equally poetic. "[Establishing] an emotional background is … I mean, I personally found that to be the most important thing. I really hated Shakespeare until I took the Shakespeare course and was able to put myself in the [characters'] shoes and be like, oh my god, this is actually a real situation. And then you feel an attachment to it and can relate it to yourself." Cecelia did not like Shakespeare

until she was helped to see how much she had in common with the perspectives he expressed in his sonnets and plays.

While the students themselves did not always separate the experience of writing poetry from reading poetry, and although these activities are clearly related, they are different. Reading in a classroom context is a shared experience that helps students relate to and perhaps develop an affinity for a poem, and reading sometimes helps students understand things in a new way. Writing is discovering and expressing ideas that they might not otherwise be able to articulate. Both Michael and Kim affirmed the spirit of Cecelia's, Ben's, and Tara's assertions and said how, for them, composing poetry is a catalyst for expressing feelings. In particular, Michael describes writing poetry and how it enables an individual to express or reveal complex and deep thoughts and feelings:

> [Poetry] has a central theme, and a flow … my idea of poetry is … kind of getting beyond just a physical description, if that makes any sense. Like, my idea of poetry kind of gets into the emotion behind things. … And it's what's beyond face value.

Like Michael, Kim described the capacity that poetry has to communicate feelings and to do so in a manner that is not always direct and obvious, but sometimes more subtle:

> I really like poetry, but I haven't been that exposed to it. … [However,] I think it's a really good way to express yourself indirectly. … And to [say] things without, like, saying how you feel or how the author feels [by] directly putting it out there.

For Kim and Michael, poetry is a vehicle that can be used to communicate significant personal ideas or impressions in indirect ways. In other words, verse can be a veil that is at once both revealing and protective. This is a valued quality for these adolescent students perhaps because they often shy away from directly expressing their opinions or thoughts in front of their peers for

fear of rejection or being made fun of, and yet they do want the autonomy to share their feelings. Along similar lines, Helen mentioned that for her poetry is emotionally expressive, but also a way to communicate thoughts or feelings that are not easily voiced or impossible to express in any other fashion. In Helen's case, poetry may be a safe way to speak about feelings, but it is also a unique way to do so. Given the trials and tribulations that accompany the development which occurs during the teenage years, Helen finds poetry to be a welcome outlet for difficult-to-express emotions that she might otherwise be reluctant to share:

> Usually, I think poetry is just trying to get across some sort of feeling or an experience that's somehow universal, and it's not … always … a really discreet, concrete message as much as [it's] something people say, like, "oh, that poem really touched me. … [P]oetry is a way of saying something that can't be said any other way; it wouldn't make sense if it were expressed in a form, like prose or even music. … [T]hat's kind of vague, but I think there's something special about poetry.

For these students, poetry is multi-faceted and multi-purpose, but at its core it engenders a response in the reader that touches deep and personal experiences they feel they have in common with the poet. As Bob stated, poetry tries "to express a feeling or maybe many feelings in maybe not the shortest way possible, but the most clear way possible. … [P]oetry is amazing. I mean, it expresses emotions that people might otherwise not understand." Carol emphasized this same idea regarding the writing of poetry:

> After taking this class, [Survey of Poetry, poetry] means a lot more to me. Basically, it means taking out my feelings and putting [in] feelings and words that are different than writing a regular essay. … I used to think I was not a very good writer, but then I explored poetry and I was able to express my words differently than writing just plain

sentences down, and I mean, after taking [Survey of Poetry], … I read more and actually

read poetry and if I have problems and I write poetry it calms me; it makes me focus on

what's going on. So it's a different way of looking at writing, and I think it's interesting

to see a different perspective.

Ultimately, these students had positive experiences with writing and reading poetry because they

were treated as autonomous learners and given the freedom to aesthetically transact with text.

Thus, the students felt free to experience poetry through their emotions rather than as texts used

to teach specific literacy and language skills. Because students felt free and even encouraged to

express their emotions and ideas, they became engaged with the text. For example, as Robert

said, "I personally like [poetry] because there aren't many boundaries and it's not as rigid as

essay writing or novels in terms of length, … it's just pure expression of anything you want."

Hence, in the above excerpts from the data, evidence of aesthetic engagement and what students

like best about the reading and writing of poetry is clear. The study participants described at

length the capacity that verse holds for them as a medium of emotional expression and a means

of introspection. When students were given autonomy, they were able to connect aesthetically

and experience aesthetic transactions with poetry. It is for this reason that it is essential for

teachers to establish the appropriate conditions and expectations that allow students autonomy in

their experiences with poetry. In the next section, I discuss how students described the

importance of autonomy as concerns the analysis, interpretation, and composition of poetry.

Autonomy in Analysis, Interpretation, and Composition of Poetry

Throughout the course of the interviews, students often expressed that they felt most

engaged and empowered when they could freely interact with and make their own meaning from

the poems they read in English classes. This points to the important relationship between reader

autonomy and valuing poetry. Student autonomy with regard to assignments refers to the participants' desire to be permitted and encouraged to engage with, analyze, and interpret text freely. Additionally, autonomy includes the opportunity to think creatively, whether that refers to analysis and interpretation or original composition of poetry. In this section, I seek to illustrate how student autonomy was enacted regarding analysis, interpretation, and composition of poetry and demonstrate how critical it is that students' opinions about the meaning of poetry be treated as valuable in the classroom.

For students, autonomy is key in the process of developing an opinion about a text's meaning. For instance, Michael described a classroom experience in which he and his classmates were given autonomy and expected to assume responsibility for the development of their own ideas about poetry.

> Michael: I'd say I feel positive about poetry. … I definitely used to feel negatively about it. Like even at the beginning of this year, I'd say, [Mr.] Soda gave us the syllabus and there were, like, two different poetry units on it, and I, along with the rest of the class, groaned and was not looking forward to it.

> Chris: So what changed your mind?

> Michael: I don't know. Honestly, it's probably this new [student-centered] teaching style that I've never had before. And because, I guess with the teacher, that kind of thing, it also lets the students not really think about what they're doing, they can just say, "oh okay, I'm supposed to look at it this way, I'll just look at it this way." I know in the past, I didn't really seriously read the poems. I'd read them, know what the words said, but not what they meant. And I'd just wait for the teacher to tell me what they meant. But this year I had to figure it out for myself

and I really got an appreciation for what poetry is. And what it's all about. And, yeah, it's something that I've never really seen before, so that's probably it.

Michael indicates that when students are given the latitude to explore verse without feeling like they have to find a pre-established, official interpretation, good things happen regarding the overall educational experience. Christine echoes Michael's point when she draws a distinction between two classes, one of which, Survey of Poetry, had fewer restrictions concerning interpretation of text.

During the [Survey of] Poetry class, I felt like it was open and I felt like I could express [myself,] and I could analyze [poetry] more, but analyze it in a different way than how we do it in English class. In an English class, it's "this is right or this is wrong." But in the poetry class, [the teacher would say] … "this might be what [the poet] was going for but I could totally understand why you were thinking this right here," or, "I understand where you're coming from and I think that could work as well."

Christine and Michael, though describing two different courses, AP Literature and the elective class Survey of Poetry, share the same perspective. Their experience with poetry is enhanced when they are not made to feel burdened by pre-determined interpretations about what a poet is saying or what a poem means.

When students are given the latitude to be creative in their interpretation and analysis of text, the result of this autonomy is positive and productive. For example, Sam discussed how the opportunity to analyze and interpret poetry creatively led to the realization that the meaning-making process in any subject can involve more than one way of doing things. He explained that "[poetry] leaves an influence on the student, [and] that the same concept is applicable to other subjects. … [A]s far as artistic talent, even some sciences, you need to think outside the box and

if you're told that you shouldn't do that, then you probably won't." When he was given the opportunity to think freely about how to analyze and interpret poetry, he was able to recognize the value of thinking "outside the box," whether regarding poetry or a different subject altogether. Similarly, in response to a question about whether he believes that poetry should have a stronger and more frequent presence in the typical English classroom, Sam said: "as long as [instruction is] really open-minded, then it could be [included more]; as long as we're learning something at the same time about poetry and we have the freedom to express [ourselves]. … As long as it's very, I want to say, free. … As long as we have choice in the matter." Along these same lines, Kim emphasized that in her experience, instructors who use a prescriptive approach not only limited their students' autonomy, but also discourage the development of essential skills necessary in college including the ability to articulate original (creative) responses to text. She said:

> teachers say to do it one way and then because the students want to get a good grade, they do it that way. But then when [students] get into college or something, where the professors are like, "think about it differently," like, "how else could this be interpreted?" [students] don't really understand or know how to do that because they're so comfortable with a set way and they're just kind of lost on the creativity [aspect], the creative perspective [required to interpret] a poem.

Though Kim discusses the importance of autonomy as it applies to academic success in college, the deeper point she makes concerns the negative effect that a lack of autonomy can have on a student's approach to analysis and interpretation. Worries about grades and transcripts aside, Kim's comment implies that creative capacity is harmed or stunted when a teacher offers only a single path towards analysis and interpretation.

Scott echoed Kim's point about the importance of autonomy as it relates to creativity when he explained that he has experienced both ends of the spectrum regarding analytical and interpretive freedom that teachers allow: "I've had teachers who are a little more free about their take on poetry, about how to look at it, but I've also had teachers who want to just dissect every word and see how it relates to the entire poem and try to figure out that one concrete meaning of the poem." Scott reported that he preferred the former approach because he enjoyed having the opportunity to simply express his thoughts and feelings without being required to adhere to an "authorized" analysis and interpretation. He said, "I'm someone who certainly likes discussion in an English classroom about books [and] about poems, and I like that idea of going out and just talking about what you think the poem is about, as opposed to a teacher just telling you."

The autonomy that participants value highly also applies to the kinds of assignments that they prefer. Students' comments indicate that they wish for writing tasks that at least sometimes allow them the autonomy to choose how to respond and to be creative in their responses. For example, Carol asserted that interaction with text should not inevitably necessitate a strict, formal response. She described an assignment like this that required the students to identify imagery in several teacher-selected poems, visualize the concepts as they are described using the imagery, and finally illustrate the language as best as possible. "I liked how we drew the pictures [about the poems]. … It sets a scene for the poem and it makes you look into each word and see, okay, this is what he meant by that, and it creates a picture in your head, and it makes you slow down and realize what's going on more than just reading it." Students often stated that they embrace teaching methods such as this because it encourages creativity and allows it to flourish.

In fact, Carol continued in this vein and described an experience of hers in the classroom in which she was given the liberty to express herself creatively through the original composition

of poetry. "I had a new English teacher and she wanted us to write a poem about us. … I was really excited …and we were just able to do whatever, and that's my favorite part of poetry, just being able to, like the sky's the limit …. I took full advantage of it and I got a good grade." Carol's enthusiasm and interest in this assignment is obvious. Evan had similarly positive things to say about the opportunity to be creative when he was asked to compose poetry. For an assignment that required the creative use of rhyme and rhythm, Evan reported that he was motivated to put forth adequate effort which produced a final result that he felt proud of: "I felt like I accomplished something. … Like some of them I didn't put all of my effort in and they were, like, all right, but like, in a few cases, I put a lot of effort in, and I thought I did a good job, so I liked finishing them." Although Evan did not stipulate why some poems received his full energy and others did not, the creative aspect of the task appealed to him nonetheless.

The theme of student autonomy is clearly and succinctly summarized by Evan with the following statement: "let us choose and [don't] force the poem on the person, you know?" Furthermore, areas in which students expressed appreciation of autonomy were analysis and interpretation of text and composition of original poetry as it relates to the study of verse. In essence, students want enough freedom to be active participants in their interactions with poetry, making meaning in ways that reflect and reinforce their own ideas and feelings.

Teacher as Facilitator and Guide

The final way in which student autonomy emerged in the data concerns the importance of teachers acting as facilitators and guides: content experts who steer students towards making meaning from poetry texts without being overbearing or rigid. When teachers acted in this manner, they were scaffolding their students' learning within their ZPDs. The study participants had a clear message that echoed this sentiment about effective and productive teacher practices.

According to the participants, pedantic, didactic teaching only stifles their understanding and discourages them from engaging with poetry. The following section illustrates this.

If an instructor perpetuates the notion that there is only one single way to understand an author's message, students' freedom to think independently and their ability to transact with text aesthetically is devalued and restrained. Bob illustrated this when he discussed the teacher's role in fostering student engagement with text by using the term "guide." He said instructors should "do a little less straight forward teaching and just be more of a guide. … Make the students figure it out." As this quotation makes plain, the connection between student autonomy and instructor strategy are closely linked. The role that the teacher assumes, whether directive or assistive, affects how students approach and understand text. Bob's description of the type of classroom atmosphere in which students feel welcome to experiment and connect freely with text reiterates this point:

> I think [students] should have to read through it [poetry] a couple of times and just really sit there and think about the, whatever they're reading, and then try and come up with some sort of, maybe an analysis for it.

If students are working in an atmosphere that permits intellectual struggle in order to develop personal interpretations, the instructor is being flexible and acting as a knowledgeable guide to help students grow through within their zone of proximal development. By the same token, Bob responded to a question about the way poetry is taught in school by again emphasizing the value of an instructor acting as a knowledgeable guide.

> Well, it depends on who's teaching it. In certain cases, poetry can be well-thought-out, like, well-taught, in the sense that they make the students figure it out. … And perhaps with a guide, which is how I think it should be done. But in some cases, [teachers] just sit

there in the front of the board and just kind of tell [the students] what it means. … I

understand why they are doing it, because they have to get something across, but at the

same time, it should be the [students] themselves [make meaning from the text].

Bob's remark is not novel; he touches upon a common theme that emerged throughout the data.

Students want to feel empowered to engage and interact with poetry in ways that foster an

understanding that is not overly teacher-directed. In fact, students expressed their dislike for

teaching practices that they perceived as constricting or limiting. Scott sums up these feelings in

the following example:

The only time I was ever asked to write poetry for a class that I can remember was in

sophomore year with Miss David, and I definitely did not like that because there were

very strict rules, and she basically told you exactly what to write. I remember we were

supposed to write about, I think it was a body organ, and there were a lot of rules. And I

just felt like, I realize you're trying to teach us something about poetry, but it was more

like you're not trying to make us enjoy poetry. So while maybe that was good for

teaching us poetry, it didn't really do a lot to get students to want to embrace poetry.

Sarah agreed with Bob's and Scott's sentiment: "if a teacher goes into a classroom and is like,

this is how you have to do it, that's not a great idea; but if a teacher goes in saying to the

students, have an open mind, feel free to interpret this differently, then that's probably the best

way to teach poetry." As these quotes reveal, these students report that they engage with poetry

more when they have the freedom to interpret or write poems in ways that makes sense to them.

Despite students' claims that the freedom to discover meaning within poetry is essential

to them, it is crucial to note that this does not mean that students are asking for complete and

total autonomy. The teacher has a role to play in scaffolding and guiding the analytical and

interpretative processes that students undergo. For instance, as Evan pointed out, "when teachers have assigned me poems [that] I do like and … they talked about [those poems] in class, like, whenever you guys go over poems and help us understand them …, then it makes more sense; it's not as gratifying, but it helps us understand the poem." Christine, too, offers an apt example of guided teaching practices that students especially respond to and find beneficial because it aids students in developing and realizing their own ideas and interpretations of a text:

> Personally, I feel like [teachers] should walk people through each part of it and just sort of put emotion behind it because with things like Shakespeare, it's … really easy to distance yourself from the author, especially because it's written so differently, and with language that people could sort of just shut down when they read it. But I think when you read it line by line, and picture "the rough winds shaking everything in May" and all of that beauty … and then saying that a person is better than that makes [one] feel … [the] emotion behind it, it becomes a relate-able thing that people embrace. But it's sort of easy to just read this and push it aside because you just don't understand it.

Cara agreed with her peers that teacher guidance helps ameliorate interpretative difficulty, though her point of view slightly differs from Evan's and Christine's regarding the discovery of meaning. In her opinion, poems do have one authoritative meaning and it is the teacher who can help her to understand that meaning. "I think it's interesting when the teachers help you decipher … what [the poem] really means. I think it's not easy when you read [poetry], it's really hard to understand." Sam offers a clear example about the role of the teacher as a guide for literary interpretation as well, though he is less concerned with "what the poem really means." In describing his opinion concerning what the teacher's role in facilitating the analysis and interpretation of poetry, he states:

There's not really much you can do as long as you, you know, like I said, give them basic guidelines, tell them how poetry is usually structured and what it's usually about and where it usually leads and what it's usually meant to do, but don't tell them specifically to do any of those things, just give them the opportunity, then you've just taught them all you needed to teach them about poetry. The rest they have to fill out for themselves…It's like Mad Libs: they just fill in the blanks.

Sam's final comment is especially intriguing, as it succinctly summarizes his ideas about how best to guide a student through the interpretative process. Like "Mad Libs," the teacher's role is to offer a framework that guides and limits response by not providing all the information, but giving some structure. In this way, the teacher aids with aesthetic and efferent transactions with the text.

Tara, Sam, and Michael have each had experiences with teachers who take up this role and provided descriptions of what it was like to read and learn about poetry in their classrooms. Tara offered advice to other teachers based on her experience. "Definitely let the flow of things go on its own and just kind of watch and see what happens and observe. Occasionally guiding them here and there … and adding to it, not really taking anything away from what's gonna happen." Sam described a time he helped a teacher understand what would engage him and his classmates. In doing so, he explained what it means to guide interpretation rather than dictate it.

I have to say at one point of my school career I had a teacher who didn't really give the students the opportunity to interpret for themselves what poetry meant, so I confronted the teacher about it and the way that teacher responded, they were just like, "Oh, I didn't realize that," so for the rest of the year, that teacher made sure that every student would actually interpret it for themselves. For that, I actually felt pretty proud, I was like, "oh,

look at that; I actually inspired somebody to do something." That kind of introduced me to the idea that some teachers in the past probably, or, teachers that I don't even have, might even be doing this. They just don't give people the opportunity to think for themselves, which is really an important part in poetry.

Tara and Sam describe some of the best and the worst of what can occur in the classroom. For Tara, good practice involves patience, creativity, and encouragement; for Sam, bad practice is synonymous with rigid approaches to poetry that disallow individual interpretations and experiences. Michael's description of a classroom environment helmed by a teacher is similar. His instructor facilitated his students' learning by allowing the class to read and analyze text in small groups before offering guidance. Prior to teacher involvement, the students were given the opportunity to approach and wrestle with text in small groups. Those ideas were then presented for further analysis in the whole group. Michael said that he especially liked this teacher's approach because he gave them a comfortable context for making meaning collaboratively with other classmates.

> [In] the small group setting, to discuss the one specific poem was nice 'cause there's that mentality that you don't want to say something wrong in front of the whole class. … But if you do it in front of two or three other students, it seems a lot more … accepting. So that was nice. Um, what else? Yeah, just the ability to kind of, really get down into one poem without the teacher's guidance. 'Cause previously, and it might just be because we're seniors and have had … enough experience in the past to allow us to do this, but in the past it's always been the teacher kind of guiding you through the interpretation and the class kind of just picks up on that interpretation and doesn't really question it because

it's the teacher. But, I really liked the kind of self-interpretation we that were allowed to

do.

Indeed, there is a balance that needs to be struck regarding scaffolded instruction: too little

guidance, where the instructor does not offer any interpretative assistance, seems to be just as

unproductive as too much guidance, where the instructor allows for only a single interpretative

perspective. In Michael's description, he mentioned other teachers "guiding [the class] through

the interpretation" versus the time and structure this teacher makes for the "self-interpretation"

that working in student-led, small groups produced. Working with peers, Michael felt supported

and unafraid to take intellectual risks; this opportunity gave him the confidence necessary to

formulate a textual analysis. In contrast, when a teacher first leads students along a singular path

to reveal "the interpretation," and generally there is just one interpretation, analytical opportunity

becomes limited. Michael reports when teachers are directive about what to see in the text "[the]

class kind of just picks up on that interpretation and doesn't really question it because it's the

teacher." It is this sort of practice that indicates to students that they might "say something wrong

in front of the whole class" and thus discourages engagement with the text and the act of

meaning making. As much as Michael values the time and space to find meaning in poetry

collaboratively with his classmates, however, he acknowledged that teachers are sometimes

needed to help.

> I think … it's not bad for the teacher to provide a little guidance if the students have no
>
> idea where to start, but I feel like the teacher shouldn't be just the only one interpreting
>
> because then, like I said, the class kind of picks up on that and only goes in that one
>
> direction.

As Michael's description makes plain, when and to what degree an instructor offers guidance greatly impacts how students view the process of textual analysis and interpretation. Robert similarly described the benefits of collaborative peer analysis of text.

> Robert: I think having [students] discuss with other students. I think it gives people a chance to support their own interpretation because with the lecture-based teaching of poetry, the teacher decides what the right interpretation was. I guess I didn't respond to that at least because I didn't really think of poetry, I didn't think of literature before the discussion-based groups as something that I should interpret by myself.

And finally, Helen offers a succinct and insightful summary of how guided instruction works best. In response to a question regarding the manner in which a teacher should require students to engage with and analyze text, she said:

> I guess just encouraging students to look at poetry in a personal way and also kind of going with their guts on what they feel about a poem 'cause usually … that's what the poet was trying to do. Like, what you feel when you first read the poem … that's the effect that it's supposed to have on you.

At its very heart, analyzing and interpreting poetry should allow for a freedom of response and expression.

These excerpts from the data show that aesthetic transactions require an open and unfettered approach without a teacher insisting students take up predetermined interpretations. Meaning making will be diminished in quality if a balance between direction and autonomy is not realized. A final remark by Sam sums this point up well:

> Researcher: what should teachers do better to instruct students about poetry?

Sam: Hmm, there's not really much you can do as long as you, you know, like I said,

give them basic guidelines, tell them how poetry is usually structured and what

it's usually about and where it usually leads and what it's usually meant to do, but

don't tell them specifically to do any of those things, just give them the

opportunity, then you've just taught them all you needed to teach them about

poetry.

The role of the teacher must be that of a facilitator and guide who allows for the autonomous

student to analyze and interpret text before offering direction. In this chapter, I presented my

findings regarding the way in which the theme of autonomy and the three types of freedom that

students talked about most, aesthetic transaction, analysis and interpretation, and teachers as

facilitators and guides, were derived from the data. In addition, I reviewed excerpts from the data

that demonstrate how I identified and qualified the central theme of this research. In the final

chapter, I discuss the essential findings of this study and review their implications for future

research.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

This research addressed the question, "what ways can the perspectives of high school students inform instruction so as to more fully engage them in reading and writing poetry?" Further sub-questions that guided my study were: a) What has influenced and contributed to students feelings about verse? b) How do students' perspectives on poetry describe approaches to engaging students when teaching it? In this chapter, I summarize and discuss the findings. I conclude by identifying implications of this study as they may pertain to future research and practice in education.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

In the interview and focus groups, students talked frequently about the value of autonomy concerning poetry instruction in three ways. First, they discussed the importance of having the chance to respond personally to poetry. When reading verse, relying on personal experience was an essential part of the meaning making process for them. Similarly, when writing poetry, they greatly valued the opportunity to express their own ideas and feelings without strictures. Second, students value the type of classroom environment in which their own agency is nurtured and prized, especially regarding the analysis, interpretation, and composition of poetry. They dislike when teachers elevate canonical interpretations of poetry over theirs. Similarly, students withdraw from teaching practice that is rigid and restricts or devalues their insights. They generally do not respond positively or productively when required to discover "what a poem really means" from the perspective of a teacher or some distant "other" as opposed to being given the opportunity to personally transact with text. However, while desiring opportunities to bring their own understandings of poetry and approaches to composition to the table, students want their teachers to provide some guidance and structure to help enrich their understandings.

Students do not wish to be left to flounder in uncertainty when it comes to analyzing a text. They feel they respond most fruitfully when a knowledgeable and encouraging teacher-facilitator aids them in making meaning. In other words, they do see the value of scaffolded assistance and see that as playing a counter balance to the lack of structure associated with autonomy.

These findings are notable for several critical reasons and are underscored by Rosenblatt's (1978) notion of Transactional Theory, Vygotsky's (1978) Zone of Proximal development, and Cazden's (1990) concept of the scaffold. The connection between Transactional Theory and this study's findings is especially significant. Certainly poetry functions on multiple levels, some of which are technical in nature and accommodate an efferent reading. Nonetheless, poetry also provides rich opportunities for students to connect and transact aesthetically because emotion and personal experience are fundamental parts of what many poems express. If the goal of this study was to discover the ways in which the perspectives of high school students can inform instruction so as to more fully engage them in reading and writing poetry, the results support the claim that opportunities for aesthetic textual transaction are the key. Literary Transaction Theory places the student perspective as of equal importance to that of the expert. Besides valuing the autonomy of reader response, Rosenblatt's theory claims that meaning is made through the interaction of reader and text. If an instructor grounded her practice in Transactional Theory, she would invite her students to transact with a text in order to have a personal response or aesthetic transaction with it, as opposed to stressing their learning a single interpretation based upon a generally accepted, scholarly point of view, or overemphasizing the technical aspects of a poem in favor of an efferent transaction. This type of transaction is precisely the opposite kind of experience that the study participants reported as being most valuable and useful to them. Rather, they want the opportunity to develop their own

interpretations. As Cecelia said, "[establishing] an emotional background is … the most important thing" in order to understand a poem. And to understand poetry, in Helen's words, is to understand "some sort of feeling or … experience that's somehow universal." In order for poetry instruction to succeed, students must have the opportunity to aesthetically transact with text.

However, the meaning making process, especially concerning poetry, is not always straightforward. Students often report having difficulty understanding the often abstract and complex language of poetry. In order to help ameliorate this problem, the participants indicated that teacher guidance and scaffolding are essential. Here, using Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development and Cazden's research on scaffolding helped me understand what the students were expressing as helpful. They do not want to be told "the answer," they want help and guidance in finding an answer themselves through a process that encourages personal responses and allows for both efferent and aesthetic transaction. The classroom teacher can play a key role in bridging the gap between reading a poem and making meaning out of that poem. The students seem to be asking for teachers who can function as more knowledgeable others to help them with poetry in their ZPD, that cognitive area between what may be understood with the aid of an expert and what can be accomplished independently by the student. The poetry teacher, using instructional strategies that can aid learners to develop within their ZPDs, is providing the type of support that Cazden (1988) describes as scaffolding. By modeling, coaching, and offering direct guidance, teachers can then assist students in developing an understanding of any given text. As students gain comprehension tools and better understand strategies for constructing meaning, the scaffolding techniques can be slowly removed. This is precisely the sort of instruction that students reported is important to their meaning making, as is

an instructor who acts as guide and facilitator in an environment that privileges their point of view. As he so frequently did, Bob succinctly summarized this sentiment in his advice to the classroom teacher: "do a little less straight forward teaching and just be more of a guide. … Make the students figure it out." Overall, it is the opportunity to aesthetically transact with text with the help of a teacher-facilitator that is at the foundation of their engagement with poetry.

Although they suggest classroom practice in which the students' interest in poetry has the potential to flourish, these findings at least somewhat contradict practice that often emerges from the current ideological momentum of many state-wide and federal educational and assessment programs. Selections from the College Board's SAT, the NY Regents High School Evaluation Exam, and the New Jersey Department of Education's College and Career Readiness Anchor Standards for Reading indicate that high stakes tests and state-issued standards are predicated upon the notion that there are single, correct responses to a large variety of interpretative questions about literature. Furthermore, all students must be able to articulate these objective answers in order to graduate from high school and/or demonstrate adequate preparation for and potential to succeed in college. For instance the first three anchor standards for reading concerning key ideas and details are:

> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.1: Read closely to determine what the text says explicitly and to make logical inferences from it; cite specific textual evidence when writing or speaking to support conclusions drawn from the text.

> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.2: Determine central ideas or themes of a text and analyze their development; summarize the key supporting details and ideas.

> CCSS.ELA-Literacy.CCRA.R.3: Analyze how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text. (2011)

Examined in isolation, the above expectations are not at all unreasonable. In fact, they would readily fit into the course objectives of nearly any high school Language Arts classroom. However, one must then ask how mastery of these standards will be measured? And therein lies the difficulty: mastery of standards such as these is currently measured by way of standardized assessments. There is no proffered alternative. For example, the College Board routinely assesses students on their ability to read and comprehend a literary selection of approximately 700-900 words and then answer objective, multiple-choice questions such as the following:

In context, the description in lines 58-59 of Mr. Pontellier's way of speaking suggests the narrator's belief that his complaints are

(A) stumbling and confused

(B) familiar and not as urgent as he claims

(C) angry and sarcastic

(D) too complex to make sense to anyone but himself

(E) both rational and thought-provoking ("SAT," 2013)

In a similar fashion, the New York State Regents exam utilizes an identical format in its evaluation strategy:

3) By calling Harpo "one of the best 'ambassadors for the harp' the world has known," the speaker means that Marx

(A) funded harp lessons for public school children

(B) introduced the harp to the general public

(C) arranged popular music for harpists

(D) founded international competitions for harpists ("Comprehensive," 2013)

Couple these sorts of inflexible assessments with high stakes, standardized assessments that schools must administer for accountability purposes and that are directly tied to high school graduation requirements, and the likely opportunity for aesthetic transaction with text becomes infinitesimally slim given teachers' imperative to prepare students to do as well as possible on the tests. These sorts of measurement standards do not positively correspond with what the students who participated in this study tell us is important for engaging them with poetry. That being said, I am not implying that objective, multiple choice questions cannot and must not be asked about prose and poetry. Rather, the findings indicate that students' interactions with poetry texts are most meaningful and genuine when they are allowed to transact with them aesthetically in ways that are not easily captured in a standardized test. If the goal of education, then, is to best prepare students for productive adult life as sensible thinkers and active global citizens, facility with multiple choice tests is not necessarily the most appropriate way to achieve that end. Instead, perhaps the first logical step in this preparation process is to teach students how to aesthetically transact with text so as to learn how to analyze and interpret the big, complicated, and abstract ideas that poetry conveys.

Moreover, teaching poetry is important for reasons that expand beyond Scantron sheets and computer screens. As described in the literature review, poetry aids in the growth of student voice and identity. Reading, writing, and reciting poetry helps students articulate and develop their voices, furnishing the chance for them to share their ideas and feelings (Alexander & Larkin, 1994). Poetry provides opportunities for students to reflect on their thoughts and to develop senses of personal and social identity by helping them, in part, to recognize a shared human narrative. As Benton (1990) argues, poetry represents the universal human condition in unique ways. And in addition, poetry appeals to students of all skill levels. Because poems vary

significantly regarding style, language, intricacy, and subject matter, it is not difficult for a teacher to create poetry lessons that provide challenge and engagement to all manner of learner.

In short, the findings from this study connect and add to the current literature because the participants expressed an overall appreciation and desire for teaching that encourages aesthetic transaction. Students want to be able to express their ideas, feelings, and voices in their engagement with poetry. And they want to recognize the relevancy that poetry has to their own lives and identities as adolescents and students. Through these types of interactions, students are able to not only able to develop essential Language Arts skills, but also grow as individuals.

Conclusion

The study was successful in providing clear answers to my research questions concerning the ways in which the points of view of high school students can be useful in the further development and refinement of pedagogical techniques. It is my hope that these results can aid teachers so as to better and more fully engage not just other, possibly less interested, students of poetry, but perhaps all kinds of students studying literature more generally. In this regard, this study contributes to our current understanding of the ways in which student engagement is deeply affected by the expectations and instructional techniques of the educator. In addition, the findings may have implications concerning assessment standards and the continued relevancy of the tenets of Transactional Theory (Rosenblatt, 1978), the Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978), and scaffolding techniques (Cazden, 1990). These implications impact teaching practice in as much as they suggest ways in which to engage the student of poetry, and they impact research by suggesting future topics that may be beneficial to explore further.

Implications for Practice

There are two primary implications for practice that this study provides: first and foremost, using the findings from this study as a basis for pedagogical design, teachers should structure lesson and unit plans around the concept of transaction, especially aesthetic transaction. Students should be given as many opportunities as possible to engage with text in ways that allow them to discover the relevant and the personal in the work of the author, stimulating their ideas and emotions. Naturally, though, room should remain for efferent transactions as well. For instance, the teacher of Shakespeare might begin a unit of study by introducing the political and social contexts that framed the writing of the sonnets. Students could conduct inquiry-based research in order to construct an understanding of what factors contributed to making Shakespeare the poet that he was. After such a foundation is established, the chance for students to engage on a more personal and aesthetic level arises. Allowing students to deconstruct the language of the poems and translate it into more prosaic, contemporary speech would begin to demystify the often intimidating poems. Identifying enduring themes and ideas that persist throughout the works such as love, heartbreak, the beauty of nature, and the passage of time, and encouraging students to compose their own sonnets in the same vein could help to establish engagement. Furthermore, given that the range of possible poetry genres and formats in the contemporary world is expanding so dramatically, constructing lessons that allow students to explore various digital, musical, and other non-traditional enactments of poetry could provide diverse and creative opportunities for students to transact with poetry. For instance, social media outlets such as Vine and Twitter offer numerous ways to express ideas and emotions. Harnessing these digital tools as potential avenues for poetic expression would not only engage students by utilizing a medium they are already most likely familiar with and use on a daily basis, but doing so also demonstrates the ubiquity and relevance of poetry in contemporary life. Undoubtedly, the

possibilities are numerous and these are just a few suggestions. Overall, the teacher of poetry, using the results of this study as a basis for instruction, should focus on creating opportunities for personal engagement and avenues for emotional connection between her students and verse. And regardless of the method or content of instruction, the poetry teacher should also make certain that meaning making efforts are supported through scaffolded instructional practices that acknowledge and seek to advance students' learning within their ZPDs.

The second implication for practice concerns the impact that teaching for aesthetic engagement might have on assessment outcomes. Undoubtedly, standardized exams are not going to disappear anytime soon, and neglecting to prepare students for success on these kinds of tests is therefore a mistaken if not neglectful pedagogy. While autonomy and valuing aesthetic transactions with poetry may be deeply empowering and engaging for students, instructional practices that encourage this type of response to text are not well aligned with standardized assessment questions that value the "one right answer." However, fostering aesthetic transaction and getting students ready to succeed on objective exams are not necessarily opposing aims. The key element in preparing students for success is engagement. Teachers need to permit students to express their own interpretations, but they must also teach the traditionally accepted ones. In other words, aesthetic transaction is a necessary but insufficient instructional goal. Students should be shown that their interpretations are valuable but also be given the tools to find and understand more canonical interpretations of literature as well. In essence, students need to learn how to interpret texts in both of these worlds and teachers need to encourage them to develop a kind of flexible way of responding to and interpreting text that places a value on personal response and also empowers students to approach texts in traditional ways.

Implications for Research

The scope of this study is quite small. Its findings are limited by the number of participants and the narrow demographic variety of the school district in which this research was conducted. It is additionally limited by the sample that was made up predominantly of students who like reading and/or writing poetry. Therefore, one clear implication for future research would be to enlarge the scope of the study by incorporating a broader range of participants in settings that are more diverse. As opposed to only fifteen students, the opinions and ideas of 50 or 150 students would be even more valuable. Moreover, it would be beneficial to include the more poetry averse students, students from a broader range of socio-economic and race/ethnicity backgrounds, and students from other school districts throughout and outside the state of New Jersey. All of these criteria would add significant value and make the findings of this study more robust.

Another potential area for future research would be to examine how the findings may relate to student engagement with other texts in addition to poetry. Examining how students aesthetically transact with works of fiction and nonfiction and comparing and contrasting those results with students' reports about poetry might yield valuable findings because of the inherent differences between poetry and prose. Generally, students' engagement with poetry centered on their discovery of and appreciation for emotions and ideas they shared with the poets. In other words, students were most engaged when they discovered something personally relevant in the work of the poet. Certainly, feeling and emotion are elements that the prose author also instills into her work. And given that fiction and particularly nonfiction are usually more concrete representations of concepts and experiences than poetry, it stands to reason that students would aesthetically engage with these sorts of texts as they do with poetry. Research about the ways in

which student reactions are similar and different from those to poetry would offer valuable insight about how to engage students with a broad selection of texts.

It would also be worthwhile to expand on this study by posing the question, how does aesthetic transaction and the impact of engagement affect standardized outcomes? In other words, what happens when students participate in classrooms where instruction in literature encourages them to engage in aesthetic transactions with text with regard to standardized test results? As the research affirms, the composition and reading of verse can aid students in the development of attitudes and understandings that are advantageous to scholastic success. According to Routman (2001), poetry study "builds immediate success, … encourages experimentation with language and form, … teaches a powerful way to express personal voice, … taps into interest and knowledge, [and] connects writing with reading" (p. 29). These skills are not only useful to the student when reading poetry, but also in relation to all kinds of text in all kinds of media.

But most importantly, there is no reason why prose cannot be used in the same manner provided that aesthetic transaction is emphasized by the instructor. This is particularly important given the proliferation of prose, nonfiction texts on various standardized exams. For example, educators across New Jersey are currently preparing their students for the PARCC assessment. Although much controversy surrounds the implementation of this standardized, computer-based exam, for the time being, students across the state are being asked to complete it. In terms of text selections that students encounter, the PARCC centers on "informational texts," the result of a change in focus of the Common Core State Standards [CCSS]: "One of the major shifts of the CCSS is an emphasis on developing skills for comprehending and analyzing informational texts. Increased exposure to informational texts better prepares students for the various types of texts

they will encounter in college and the workplace" ("Passage Selection Guidelines for the PARCC," 2015). As a result, students must be able to make meaning from these kinds of readings in order to do well on the PARCC. Thus, it is important to ask how significant engagement with poetry or fiction through aesthetic transaction benefits students when they read nonfiction texts, if it benefits them at all? Furthermore, it is important to ask if an instructional focus on aesthetic engagement is counterproductive in an educational environment that stresses accountability, objective evaluation, and standardized assessment? At the very least, it is not advisable to forgo efferent engagement with text altogether. Therefore, how might both aesthetic and efferent transactions be incorporated into instructional practice appropriately so as to effectively engage students and help them demonstrate positive outcomes? And what is the best balance to strike between teaching that emphasizes the aesthetic and the efferent? Addressing each of these questions could help extend this work to a broader context and ensure that the findings remain both timely and appropriate.

These findings affirm the opinion that I have cultivated over the course of nearly fifteen years of classroom teaching experience at the middle, secondary, and post-secondary-levels. It is my contention that students flourish when they are provided with active and responsive teacher support, they are given an environment that promotes creativity, and they are allowed to act as their own personal agents in charge of how they interact with text. Taken as a whole, this study offers support for my personal beliefs about how best to engage students and how to most effectively teach the analysis of literature. I hope it also encourages other teachers to continue or begin to respond to the perspectives of students regarding the teaching of poetry specifically and to value their perspectives generally regarding a wide range of classroom practices that have the potential to both engage them and improve educational outcomes.

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Appendix A

ASSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH ACTIVITIES

Investigator: Mr. Chris Roebuck, Ph.D. Candidate
Rutgers University
Impact and Import of Poetry in High School Pedagogy:
A Study of Practice and Student Learning

This assent form may contain words that you do not understand. Please ask the researcher or your parent or teacher to explain any words or information that you do not clearly understand before signing this document.

1. **Mr. Roebuck is inviting you to take part in his research study. Why is this study being done?**
   I want to gather information about the perspectives of students who both like and dislike poetry. My goal is to use this information in order to constructively impact the way in which language arts teachers approach the instruction of poetry to students.

2. **What will happen**:
   First, you will be personally interviewed by me and asked a series of questions about your ideas and impressions, whether positive or negative, of poetry. Then, in a second interview, we will discuss your thoughts about a pre-selected poem/poetry. Finally, you will participate in a focus group discussion about poetry with several of your peers.

3. **What does it cost and how much does it pay?**
   You do not pay to take part in this study, and you will not be paid to participate.

4. **There are very few risks in taking part in this research, but the following things could happen**:

   Probably: Nothing bad would happen.

   Maybe: Your answers would be seen by somebody not involved in this study. We will do our absolute best to keep all your answers private. Your answers will be kept locked up. Your name will not appear on the answer sheets; we will use a code number instead. The people involved with this study are very well trained and understand the importance of confidentiality. But, if the researchers learn that you or someone else are in serious danger they would have to tell an appropriate family member, such as your mother, father, or caretaker or the appropriate officials to protect you and other people.

   Very unusual: You could be upset or embarrassed by a few of the questions. If this should occur, remember that you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to and either you or a member of the research team may choose to stop the project.

5. **Are there any Benefits that you or others will get out of being in this study?**
All research must have some potential Bobefit either directly to those that take part in it or potentially to others through the knowledge gained. The only direct Bobefit to you may be the satisfaction gained by providing your point of view and having your opinions used as an important part of a study that is meant to impact students and teachers. The knowledge gained through this study may allow us to develop more effective ways to teach students about poetry.

It's completely up to you! Both you and your parents have to agree to allow you to take part in this study. If you choose to not take part in this study, we will honor that choice.
No one will get angry or upset with you if you don't want to do this. If you agree to take part in it and then you change your mind later, that's OK too. It's always your choice!

6. **CONFIDENTIALITY: We will do everything we can to protect the confidentiality of your records.** If I write professional articles about this research, they will never say your name or anything that could give away who you are. I will do a good job at keeping all our records secret by following the rules made for researchers.

7. **Do you have any questions?** If you have any questions or worries regarding this study, or if any problems come up, you may call the principal investigator, Mr. Chris Roebuck at:
   259 Pennington-Titusville Rd.
   Pennington, NJ 08534
   Tel: 609-474-0703
   Email: croebuck@hvrsd.org

You may also ask questions or talk about any worries to the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Your parent or guardian will also be asked if they wish for you to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this form for your records.

Please sign below if you assent (that means you agree) to participate in this study.

_____
Signature   Date

Name (Please print): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____Date: _____

AUDIO ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to participate in a research study entitled: Impact and Import of Poetry in High School Pedagogy: A Study of Practice and Student Learning conducted by Mr. Chris Roebuck. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound) your participation as part of this research study. You do not have to agree to be recorded in order to participate in the main part of this study.

The recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team and possible use as a teaching tool to those who are not members of the research staff (i.e. for educational purposes).

The recording(s) may include your name. The recording(s) will be stored digitally on a single, password secure computer and destroyed in compliance with institutional review board requirements. Additionally, all participants and described locations will be referred to by pseudonyms throughout this study. Recording(s) will be retained at least until the publication of study results.

By participating in this study/these procedures, you agree to be a study subject and you grant the investigator named above permission to record you as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

_____

Signature   Date

Name (Please print): _____

Investigator's Signature: _____Date: _____

SAMPLE PARENTAL INFORMED CONSENT:

Investigator: Mr. Chris Roebuck, Ph.D. Candidate
Rutgers University
Impact and Import of Poetry in High School Pedagogy:
A Study of Practice and Student Learning

Your child is invited to participate in a research study that is being conducted by Mr. Chris Roebuck, Ph.D. Candidate at the Rutgers Graduate School of Education, who is a teacher at Hopewell Valley Central High School. The purpose of this research is to gather information about the perspectives of students who both like and dislike poetry. The overall goal is to use this information in order to constructively impact the way in which language arts teachers approach the instruction of poetry to students.

Approximately eight to ten children between the ages of sixteen and eighteen years old will participate in the study, and each child's participation will last through two individual interviews and one focus group interview (approximately several hours in total length).

The study procedures include: First, students will be personally interviewed by me and asked a series of questions about their ideas and impressions, whether positive or negative, of poetry. Then, in a second personal interview, they will discuss their thoughts about a pre-selected poem/poetry. Finally, they will participate in a focus group discussion about poetry with several of their peers.

This research is confidential. The research records will include some information about your child and this information will be stored in such a manner that some linkage between your child's identity and the response in the research exists. Some of the information collected about your child includes his/her thoughts and impressions about poetry, and his/her responses to questions asked about poetry. Please note that we will keep this information confidential by limiting individual's access to the research data and keeping it in a secure location. All participants and described locations will be referred to by pseudonyms throughout this study. Recording(s) will be retained at least until the publication of study results.

The research team and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect research participants) at Rutgers University are the only parties that will be allowed to see the data, except as may be required by law. If a report of this study is published, or the results are presented at a professional conference, only group results will be stated. All study data will be kept at least until the publication of study results.

There are no foreseeable risks to participation in this study.

Your child has been told that the Benefits of taking part in this study may be: The satisfaction gained by providing his/her point of view and having his/her opinions used as an important part of a study that is meant to impact students and teachers; the knowledge gained through this study may allow the research team to develop more effective ways to teach students about poetry.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may choose for your child not to participate, and you may withdraw your child from participating at any time during the study activities without any penalty to your child. In addition, your child may choose not to answer any questions with which your child is not comfortable.

If you/your child have any questions about the study or study procedures, you/your child may contact me at:

> 259 Pennington-Titusville Rd.
> Pennington, NJ 08534
> Tel: 609-474-0703
> Email: croebuck@hvrsd.org

If you/your child have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews research studies in order to protect those who participate). Please contact the IRB Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University, the State University of New Jersey
Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 848-932-0150
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Your child will also be asked if he/she wishes to participate in this study. You will be given a copy of this consent form for your records.

Sign below if you agree to allow your child to participate in this research study:

Name of Child (Print) _____

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

AUDIOTAPE ADDENDUM TO CONSENT FORM

You have already agreed to allow your child to participate in a research study entitled: Impact and Import of Poetry in High School Pedagogy: A Study of Practice and Student Learning conducted by Mr. Chris Roebuck. I am asking for your permission to allow me to audiotape (sound) your child as part of that research study. You do not have to agree allow your child to be audio-recorded in order to participate in the main part of the study.

The audio- recording(s) will be used for analysis by the research team and possible use as a teaching tool to those who are not members of the research staff (i.e. for educational purposes).

The recording(s) may students' names. The recording(s) will be stored digitally on a single, password secure computer and destroyed in compliance with institutional review board requirements. Additionally, all participants and described locations will be referred to by pseudonyms throughout this study. Recording(s) will be retained at least until the publication of study results.

Your signature on this form grants the investigator named above permission to record your child as described above during participation in the above-referenced study. The investigator will not use the recording(s) for any other reason than that/those stated in the consent form without your written permission.

Name of Child (Print) _____

Name of Parent/Legal Guardian (Print) _____

Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature _____ Date _____

Principal Investigator Signature _____ Date _____

Appendix B

Individual Interview Questions

1. What is poetry to you? Explain.

2. How do you feel about poetry? Tell me about where/when/how you read poetry?

3. What types of experiences outside of an educational setting have you had with poetry? What were these experiences like? How do they compare with reading poetry in school? Why?

4. What are some poems that you remember learning about both outside of and in school? What stands out in your memory?

5. Have you ever been asked to write your own poetry for a class? What was that experience like?

6. What's your favorite poem or poet? What makes it/him/her a favorite? Why?

7. Do you think that there should be more or less poetry in the curriculum? Explain your point of view.

8. What do you think about the way poetry is taught in school?

9. What teaching strategies do you think work best for teaching students poetry?

10. What experiences do you believe caused you to feel positively about poetry?

11. What should teachers do better to instruct students about poetry?

Appendix C

1. What do you think about this poem?

2. What do you dislike about this poem?

3. What do you like about this poem?

4. How would you go about teaching this poem to students?

5. What do you think is the best way to go about teaching this kind of poetry?

6. What do you think are ineffective ways to teach this kind of poetry?

Appendix D

Focus Group Text Selections

Sonnet XVIII

Shall I compare thee to a summer's day?

Thou art more lovely and more temperate:

Rough winds do shake the darling buds of May,

And summer's lease hath all too short a date:

Sometime too hot the eye of heaven shines,

And often is his gold complexion dimm'd;

And every fair from fair sometime declines,

By chance, or nature's changing course untrimm'd;

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,

Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,

Nor shall death brag thou wander'st in his shade,

When in eternal lines to time thou grow'st;

    So long as men can breathe, or eyes can see,

    So long lives this, and this gives life to thee.

Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem

and hold it up to the light

like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem

and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room

and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski

across the surface of a poem

waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do

is tie the poem to a chair with rope

and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose

to find out what it really means.