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Examining Students' Reflections on Literacy Activities Focused on Poetry Reading and Writing

Celeste Long
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Walden University
2011

Abstract

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Writing

by

Celeste Long

M.Ed., Cambridge College, 2000

B.Ed., University of Alaska, Anchorage, 1993

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

Walden University

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Abstract

Motivation, which is based on experience, is crucial in promoting literacy acquisition; however, little research has explored what children experience during literacy activities such as poetry reading and writing. This phenomenological study explored what elementary students experienced during literacy activities focused on poetry. Educational reform inspired by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 is based on a narrow range of quantitative research and does not consider the multifaceted nature of literacy and the experiences of the learner. Bruner's psychocultural theory and the belief that an individual's experiences are the core of existence were the philosophical and theoretical frameworks used to craft this research. This study was conducted to illuminate children's experience during literacy activities, including Poetry Break, which has been observed to be an eagerly anticipated part of daily classroom rituals at a culturally diverse Title I school. Interviews were held with 22 fifth through twelfth grade students from culturally diverse backgrounds. Fourteen were English-language learners. Students were asked to reflect upon and describe their experiences of poetry reading and writing when in the third or fourth grade. Data were analyzed by isolating thematic statements to glean the essence of the poetry experience. The experiences of fun, being center stage, working with friends, emotional outlet, expressing oneself, choice, creating community, improved reading, and writing were some of the themes that emerged. Implications for positive social change include the use of these findings by educational planners to create motivational and engaging literacy learning activities that can result in improved literacy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this research endeavor to my past, present, and future students. I believe they have the right to an education filled with joy and the power of poetry.

Acknowledgments

Through the twists, turns, peaks, and valleys of my arduous adventure in doctoral pursuit land, my best friend was with me. He was not always by my side, for at times he needed to be behind me pushing, poking, and prodding in order for me to take the next step. When I was ready to pack my bags and head for less taxing terrain, he encouraged me to stay the course. Andrew, I am grateful for the gift of your time.

Fortune favored me when I was assigned Dr. Sigrin Newell as my mentor. She was with me for the duration of my doctoral studies. In the beginning of my journey she informed me that I had a mammoth amount of knowledge to consume and consistently reminded me you can only eat an elephant one bite at a time. Dr. Newell, your sage advice and humor seasoned the feast and helped me appreciate the chewing required.

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I would like to extend my heartfelt thanks to all of the participants in this study. Your insights and voices made this research process enjoyable and the end product possible.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Experience is at the heart of existence, yet children's experiences are not being considered in the current educational reform. Currently in education, children are being treated as a commodity (Barrier-Ferreira, 2008; Greene & Hill, 2005). The idea is that children need to learn in order to contribute to society and the global economy (Noddings, 2003; Tett, 2003). Evidence of this learning is measured through testing (Parkison, 2009; Toffler & Toffler, 1994). However, education does not have to be seen in such a narrow light. As Woolley (2008) pointed out, many assessments are not sufficiently multifaceted to address complex areas such as reading. As Dennis (2009) suggested, all children have strengths that should be built upon and students should be involved in their educational goal setting and self-evaluation through meaningful activities. Children are not commodities—they are unique, dynamic, experiencing beings.

Schools may be more effective if they provide experiences that are motivating to children. As noted by Marinak (2006), "Educators agree that motivation plays a central role in literacy development. ... Without the intrinsic motivation to read, students may never reach their full potential as literacy learners" (p. 55). Individuals are more likely to participate in literacy activities when they feel their views are heard and valued (Hall, Allan, Dean, & Warren, 2003; Smith, & Connolly, 2005).

Attitude, which is based on experience, may be a key in promoting literacy acquisition. Merisuo-Storm (2006) proposed, "An important goal of literacy teaching is to awaken children's interest in language and literature. The aim is to give them, during their first school years, a lasting positive attitude towards reading and writing" (p. 111).

People who have a positive attitude toward reading and writing are more likely to continue reading and writing. Noddings (2003) and Levine (2002) both pointed out that humans are inclined to pursue areas that give them pleasure and avoid activities that are painful and difficult. Expressing this sentiment, Feldman, Csikszentmihalyi, and Gardner (1994) suggested, “No organism wanders like humanity wanders, toward the conditions that are satisfying and away from those that are not” (p. 31). Children need to be provided with activities that they will “wander toward.” In order to know how children feel about any given literacy activity, research needs to be conducted to explore their feelings and attitudes. Currently there is a gap in the literature related to children’s experiences with literacy activities from the child’s perspective, especially in the area of poetry.

Poetry is an art that provides a portal for exploring, expressing, and sharing experience and the essence of existence. Emotions, values, culture, and language can be explored through poetry,. The social nature of humanity invites the sharing of individuals’ perceptions of their inner and outer worlds. Poetry offers a potent medium for expressing what it means to be human. According to Jobling and Moni (2000) in their research with young adults with Down syndrome, “Poetry is a literacy activity that should be accessible to all individuals in a society” (p. 37). In settings with diverse populations, poetry provides opportunities for language development because it is accessible regardless of academic ability and language proficiency. Elster (2010) suggested, “Age-appropriate poetry experiences promote young children’s language awareness. Through repeated attention to language that is rich and personally meaningful, teachers and children study language while learning about the self and the world” (p. 55). Although

there are forms of poetry that are accessible to diverse populations of children, little research has been conducted on the social nature of children's experiences with poetry. In this research, I explored what children experienced during poetry-centered activities when they were in third and fourth grade.

Poetry Break: An Introduction

It was 12:50 and students were excitedly entering the class door from recess. While most went to the closet, some made a beeline for the poetry bookshelf, shedding snow gear as they went. Rapidly, children selected poetry books and began reading by themselves, while others formed groups and began to practice poems for performance. Some groups were already formed and poems picked, because part of recess was spent in this critical negotiation. They all knew that they only had a little less than 10 minutes to be ready. While the class was practicing, some students approached the teacher and asked for the honor of being the emcee for the day. As the children worked, groups and individuals who wish to perform signed up on the Poetry Break list.

At the appointed time, without teacher direction, children made their way to the audience, eager for Poetry Break to commence. When all of the students had assembled, and the stragglers had seated themselves, the emcees introduced the day's show to the audience and called up the first performers to the classroom stage. Though this stage was just a small space at the front of the room, the performers acted as if they were in the grand spotlight. As each child or group finished performing, their efforts were rewarded with beatnik finger snaps.

It was midwinter, and by now Poetry Break was a familiar and welcomed daily ritual, which the children effortlessly ran. Students, regardless of their academic abilities, primary language, or social skills, seemed engaged in the enjoyment of the poetry experience. It did not start out this way, yet laying the foundations for Poetry Break was not a difficult task.

The first day of school started with poetry. Posted next to the classroom door was Silverstein's poem "Invitation." At Poetry Break time, I read "Invitation" to the class, and many students claimed that they read the poem coming in and pointed out its location. With this, I invited them to read poems from the poetry bookshelf. I let them know that they were welcome to share any poems that they found interesting or enjoyable. I provided a Poetry Break sign-up book and explained that all they needed to do was add their name to the list if they wanted to read to the class.

When the students had explored and read the poetry books for about 10 minutes, I called them to the audience on the floor in the room. I modeled performing a poem for the audience. Taking the poetry sign-up book, I modeled the role of the Poetry Break emcee, whose job was to introduce the performers. To make the job more interesting, and the ritual of Poetry Break more entertaining, the emcees introduced the performers in a dramatic and complimentary way, often alliterating the performers' names.

At the conclusion of that first day's Poetry Break, I closed the show and directed them to the next activity of the day. Frequently, as the year progressed, the conclusion of the show became more elaborate. The emcees, in television style, turned the show, or rest of the school day, back over to me.

Next door, in Mr. Mah's room, Poetry Break was introduced in a similar manner. Mr. Mah would often start the year with one of the poems he had written, modeling Poetry Break as a forum to share personal works. In both classrooms, Poetry Break quickly developed a life of its own, moving from being teacher-directed to a student-centered activity.

Writing poetry grew out of both Poetry Break and other literature activities. Its birth lay in noticing and enjoying, with students, the richness of language in the books that we read and the way that we spoke. In the first week of school, I modeled noticing language elements for my students. In the books that we read, I pointed out figurative language and wondrous word choice as we encountered it. Sharing my love of language, I played with words, spoke in simile and metaphor, and sprinkled conversations with alliteration. Much to my students delight and embarrassment, I also occasionally gave directions in the form of a rhyme.

At the end of the first week of school, and each week for the duration of the school year, Mr. Mah and I brought our classes together and composed a poem that was published in the Poetry Corner section of our classroom newsletter.

After the introduction of poetry writing at the newsletter, Mr. Mah and I began to add poetry lessons to our writing schedule. We picked a poetic element as a focus of each lesson. We shared poems written by published authors, students, and ourselves that highlighted the poetic element on which we were focusing. Before asking students to write their own poems, we did an extensive amount of reading, modeling, and coconstructing of poetry.

Once students had written their own poems, they were invited to share them at Poetry Break. Although sharing their work was not required, many students took the opportunity to entertain their peers with their wonderful word weaving. Smith (2010) asserted, “The act of performing one’s own writing is transformative for both performer and audience” (p. 214). Through sharing their poetry, students were sharing a piece of themselves.

Background

Individuals exist in a dynamic and everchanging social tapestry woven on the mutable loom of culture. Humans are social by nature: “As human beings we are social creatures: we need society and society needs each of us to function” (Garbarino, 1992, p. 1). *Culture* might be defined as, “The totality of socially transmitted behavior patterns ... human work and thought” (*American Heritage Dictionary*, 2000). Culture is continuously woven, raveled, and rewoven as it is shaped by and in turn shapes individuals and society. Culture permeates all that is human (Bruner, 1996). Some of the most vibrant threads in the tapestry of civilization have been transmitted through poetry (Douma, 2008).

It is through symbol systems, such as language, that individuals think about and make meaning of both their internal and external existence (Bruner, 1996; Levine, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Language, both verbal and nonverbal, allows an individual to communicate with others.

The uniqueness of being human lies in our ability to continually weave the linguistic network in which we are embedded. To be human is to exist in

language. In language we coordinate our behavior, and together in language we bring forth our world. (Capra, 1996, p. 290)

Whether language is an instinct, as Pinker (1994) asserted, or a cultural creation, it is a medium that allows individuals to put their thoughts out into the world. It is a product and process used in interpreting ideas offered by others. Language exists for social purposes (Dewey, 1976).

Literacy is a multifaceted social phenomenon that cannot be separated from a cultural context (Bloome, Katz, Solken, Willet, & Wilson-Keenan, 2000; Bruner, 1996; Cairney & Ruge, 1997; Gee, 2001; Jung & Ouane, 2001; Nelson & Damico, 2006; Nieto, 1996; Rockwell, 2001; Vygotsky, 1978). Commeyras (2000) proposed that all peoples have literacy practices and that what constitutes literacy is determined by the society's needs. Historically and from multiple disciplines, the definition of literacy has been debated (Stubbs, 1980). In its simplest and most common definition, *literacy* has become synonymous with *reading and writing*. However, definitions of literacy are continuously evolving (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007; United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization [UNESCO], 2008).

Currently in educational reform in the United States, a clear definition of literacy has not been put forward. Nonetheless, literacy is a focal point of current educational reform. The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 has been the leading force in the current reform movement. NCLB, for the most part, was based on information gleaned from the Report of the National Reading Panel (NRP) of 2000 (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000). Although the NRP claimed, in its 1999 progress

report, that a definition for literacy was needed, the NRP never produced a definition of literacy for the final report. The NRP and, in turn, NCLB did not produce a working definition of literacy; therefore, educational reform seems to have fallen back on the most common and simple meaning of literacy as functional reading and writing.

In 1997, the congressional charge to the NRP was to review the research on how children learn to read and effective ways of teaching reading. Their findings were to be summarized and effective reading practices were to be quickly implemented throughout classrooms in the United States (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development, 2000, p. 1). According to notes from the NRP Meeting Archives, on October 14, 1999, Panel member Dr. Yatvin, “noted that the Panel ignored many areas of study and still has not concluded how to teach, or even define, reading” (¶27). In a minority report found at the end of the *Report of the National Reading Panel*, Dr. Yatvin claimed that subgroups of the NRP were working without a common definition of reading. Furthermore, Dr. Yatvin asserted that theoretical models of reading had not been considered or examined. Instead, a narrow range of research was examined based on the philosophical views of the majority of the committee members. Initially, comprehension, alphabets, and fluency were chosen by the NRP as the areas of reading research that would be reviewed. Eventually, technology and teacher education were added to the mix. Along with the limitation of areas of reading that would be studied by the NRP came the mandate that only research that fit the criterion of “scientifically based” was to be reviewed. This focus led to a narrow view of what constitutes reading and reading education for the current educational-reform movement in the United States. Quantitative

research, fitting more closely with scientifically based criteria, has taken precedence over qualitative research. The social nature of literacy and the individual's place in the process has not been considered in current educational reform (Hinchman, 2005).

Throughout the extensive research on literacy, very little research has been conducted to explore children's perceptions of literacy experiences. These issues are examined in more detail in chapter 2.

Statement of Problem

In the current educational-reform movement in the United States, one problem is that the experience of the child in the social context of learning and literacy is not being considered. Culturally and personally relevant literacy practices, such as the exploration of poetry, are not being advocated. NCLB, which is based on a skills-focused view of reading and a narrow range of quantitative reading research, is shaping educational practices across the United States.

Currently, in most schools, funding and time allocated for literacy activities is limited to programs supported by NCLB. However, the literacy instructional methodologies encouraged by NCLB do not meet the literacy needs of all learners (Hinchman, 2005). Furthermore, the restricted range of literacy methodologies do not take into consideration the social nature of literacy or the experience of the learner. This problem impacts the literacy experiences of children at Title I and culturally diverse schools. These schools receive federal funding for literacy that is tied to NCLB. Title I schools' literacy practices are based on a foundation of quantitative research. Yet, the use of reading programs developed from scientifically based research do not always yield

positive results for students and in some cases have a negative impact (James-Burdumy et al., 2009). Furthermore, according to the Reading First Impact Study Final Report, Reading First, which touted the use of reading programs that were scientifically based, did not yield gains in students' reading comprehension (Gamse, Jacob, Horst, Boulay, & Unlu, 2008). To better meet the needs of the learner and society, a wider range of research is needed to guide literacy practices.

A limited number of qualitative studies explore literacy experiences from the child's perspective, and even fewer explore children's experiences with poetry (Davis, 2007; Greene & Hill, 2005). Although children may not be able to fully articulate what they think about literacy activities, it is still important to listen to what they have to say. Through listening to children's perspectives we may better understand what motivates children to engage in literacy activities. This study contributes to the body of knowledge on literacy practices by exploring the experiences of children during poetry-centered literacy activities.

Purpose of the Study

Interest and motivation play a crucial role in literacy development (Marinak, 2006). In order to better understand children's motivation and interest in participating in poetry activities, the purpose of this study was to explore what elementary students experienced during poetry reading and writing. Insights the children revealed during this study may be useful in designing literacy experiences that motivate and engage elementary learners.

Over the past 8 years at a culturally and ethnically diverse Title I school in Alaska, poetry reading, poetry writing, and poetry performance have been a part of daily and weekly routines. Poetry Break, which is an opportunity for students to read and perform poetry with and for their peers, has been observed to be an eagerly anticipated part of each day. Students who may avoid reading and literacy activities in other school settings have been observed volunteering, on a regular basis, to perform poetry for a classroom full of peers. Students who are no longer members of the classes performing poetry have asked for permission to visit the classes performing poetry in to order to participate in Poetry Break. Although students have been observed engaging in poetry reading and writing, inquiry has yet to be made into why students are volunteering to participate in the poetry activities. Through interviews with students who in previous years participated in Poetry Break, this study explored how children describe their experiences of poetry activities.

Nature of the Study

A phenomenological method of inquiry was employed to explore what children experience during poetry activities. During individual interviews, 22 children in fifth through twelfth grade who experienced poetry activities when they were third or fourth grade students were asked to reflect on their experiences with poetry activities.

Research Question

How do children describe their experiences of poetry activities when they look back to their poetry experiences as third or fourth grade students?

Interview Questions

1. What do you remember about poetry activities?
2. What do you remember about Poetry Break?
3. How would you describe Poetry Break?
4. What were your feelings about Poetry Break?
5. What do you remember about poetry writing?
6. How would you describe your experience of writing poetry as a third or fourth grader?
7. Why did you volunteer to perform poetry in a public setting?
8. What else would you like to share about your experiences with poetry?
9. How does the experience of poetry activities affect your ability to express yourself now?
10. What have you done with poetry since third or fourth grade?
11. (If copies of class-constructed poems from the class the student was in are available, share the poetry with the participant.) What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?
12. (If copies of the participant's original poetry are available, share the poetry with the participant.) What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?

This is a brief introduction to the experiential nature of this study. Chapter 3 contains a more detailed description of the research methodologies that were employed during this phenomenological study.

Conceptual Framework for the Study

Bruner's (1996) psychocultural theory and the belief that an individual's experiences are pertinent and paramount in any endeavor were the philosophical and theoretical frameworks on which this research was crafted. Through these theoretical lenses, the purpose of this research became clear.

Bruner's (1996) psychocultural theory of education recognized the interconnection between individuals, education, and all aspects of culture. Exploring the nature of mind and the nature of culture in education, Bruner asserted, "A theory of education necessarily lies at the intersect between them. We shall, in consequence, constantly be inquiring about the interaction between the powers of individual minds and means by which the culture aids or thwarts their realization" (1996, p. 13). Through education, which is part of culture, children should be provided with the tools required to reach their fullest potential.

According to Bruner (1996), meaning making involves perspective. An individual's interpretation of meaning involves an interplay between versions of the world created through cultural influence and the individual's life history or experience. Forms of meaning making are constrained by human mental functioning and by the symbolic systems accessible by human minds. As a species, we have developed certain characteristics of knowing, thinking, perceiving, and feeling. Reality is constructed through meaning making.

Reality construction is the product of meaning making shaped by traditions and by a culture's toolkit or ways of thought. In this sense, education must be

conceived as aiding young humans in learning to use the tools of meaning making and reality construction, to better adapt to the world in which they find themselves and to help in the process of changing it as required. (Bruner, 1996, p. 19)

Bruner (1996) also suggested that, “Surely emotions and feelings are represented in the process of meaning making and in our constructions of reality” (p. 12). Just as individuals are never culture-free, they are not free of emotions and feelings.

Bruner (1996) proposed that education has consequences in the lives of individuals who undergo it that are crucial to the formation of self. Passing on knowledge and skill involves a subcommunity of mutual learners in interaction. The teacher orchestrates educational activities while encouraging others to share in the responsibility of the learning process. Furthermore, Bruner asserted that in the educational process, externalizing “rescues cognitive activity from implicitness, making it more public and negotiable,” creating solidarity in a group (1996, p. 24).

The psychocultural theory of education reflects the belief that education involves more than the subjects taught. “The chief subject matter of school, viewed culturally, is school itself. That is how most students experience it, and it determines what meaning they make of it” (Bruner, 1996, p. 28). Experiences in school impact an individual’s life and their development of self. Furthermore, Bruner asserted that emotions and feelings are always present in the educational process, especially where the formation of self is concerned.

Definition of Terms

Based on the psychocultural view of literacy that guided this study, a dynamic definition of literacy was selected. In this study, the definition of language and literacy offered by the Language and Literacy Researchers of Canada (LLRC) was used. “LLRC defines ‘literacy’ broadly, understanding that what it means to be literate is situational, and that individuals generally acquire numerous literacies as they navigate different linguistic spheres” (LLRC, 2008, para 1). According to the LLRC the nature of language and literacy are:

- ongoing, interrelated, and individualized processes;
- complex activities that involve the interplay of various individual and social factors;
- multifaceted and multidimensional interactions incorporating at minimum six language arts: speaking, writing, representing, listening, reading, and viewing;
- used for multiple purposes in diverse contexts;
- embedded in culture, society, and ideology (LLRC, 2008, para 2).

Poetry Break: In this study, Poetry Break is a literacy activity in which children self-select poetry to read and, if they so choose, volunteer to perform a poetic piece for an audience of their peers. There are two parts to Poetry Break. The first part is required of all students. Students read or rehearse poems either by themselves or with a group. These can be poems they have written themselves or poems from published poets. The second part of Poetry Break is optional. Students may volunteer to perform poetry for the class either by themselves or with a group.

Assumptions

Underlying this study was the assumption that an individual's experiences are what life is all about and quality of life should be of concern to everyone. From this perspective, literacy and language are processes to be used by individuals to improve the quality of life for themselves and others. Literacy and language are agents of social change.

It was assumed that students were able to reflect on and accurately describe the experiences they had during poetry activities. The data for this research were generated through conversations with children and it was assumed that the children were open and honest in the conversations.

For ethical purposes, children who were in the grade level I taught at the time I conducted interviews did not participate in this study. Therefore, former students were reflecting on poetry experiences they had from 3 months to 8 years prior to the interviews. It was assumed that students would remember poetry activities from when they were in third or fourth grade. It was also assumed that reading poetry that they had written would aid children in remembering poetry activities.

Limitations

Limitations are unavoidable in any research endeavor. Phenomenological studies are selected in order to understand lived experiences of individuals, and the nature of the process can be limiting. It is through communication of a memory of a phenomenon that lived experience is explored. Participation, memory, language, and interpretation can each be considered limiting factors in this study.

One of the limitations to this study was that children who did not remember or enjoy poetry activities might not have agreed to participate in the study. Another limitation was that former students may not have felt comfortable telling me, an adult authority figure, that they did not like the poetry activities that were a part of our daily rituals. This could have contributed to the mostly positive descriptions of poetry experiences.

Participants may not have had clear memories of the poetry activities they experienced as third and fourth grade students. Memories are not simple notions. According to Capra (1996), memories are always colored by emotion and memories can change over time. Levine (2002) proposed the idea of memory systems and suggested that “memory is a complicated multidepartmental operation” that is influenced by other systems (p. 91). Language plays a part in memory development (Gardner, 1983; Levine, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Vygotsky claimed, “The very essence of human memory consists in the fact that human beings actively remember with the help of signs” (p. 51). Language’s role in memory adds to the limitations inherent in relying on individual’s memory of a lived experience, as language also has limitations.

Language is both a pathway and a barrier to understanding and communicating perceptions. Through language and symbols, individuals bring forth their inner worlds. However, an individual does not always have language available to fully express what they are thinking and feeling. Language is shaped by perception, while at the same time language shapes the reality an individual perceives (Bertalanffy, 1968; Bruner, 1996; Capra, 1996; Senge, 1990). Language, while it provided the medium for communicating

the experience of poetry activities, may also have limited the participants' ability to communicate what they experienced during poetry activities. In order to ameliorate this, when I was unsure about what the child meant by their answer, I asked them for clarification. I listened to the interviews multiple times and made transcripts.

The process of interpretation can be considered a limitation in this qualitative study. Interpretation is required when seeking to understand what a child means through their responses to interview questions. The researcher and participants each have perceptions of the world shaped by a multitude of factors including language, culture, emotion, past experience, and values. These factors come into play when a participant wants to share ideas with the researcher. In the communication process, only parts of the whole picture can be transmitted. On the receiving end of communication, the researcher had multitudes of filters to process the story that was shared. Parts of the story that were not complete upon transmission could be lost, altered, or misinterpreted while meaning was constructed. There is no certainty that the researcher's understanding was the same as the participants' understanding, and most likely, given the multitudes of filters involved in processing meaning, the understandings were not exactly the same.

Delimitations and Scope

Only individuals who had experienced the phenomenon of Poetry Break were selected to participate in this study. Participants were third and fourth grade students who experienced poetry activities at a culturally and ethnically diverse Title I school. Purposeful sampling guided participant selection. Participants were selected to represent a diverse range of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. Twenty-five potential participants

were identified for this study and 22 participants were involved in this study. Data for this study were generated through individual interviews.

Significance of the Study

Seeking social change and the desire to positively impact the lives of children were the impetus for crafting this phenomenological study. Children are dynamic, thinking, feeling human beings. Their experiences are the foundation of their future lives (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1938/1997). If positive social change is to be enacted, then starting with making positive changes in the lives of children may be a promising first step. The key is to uncover what positive experiences have significant beneficial impact on the lives of the young. Though a great deal of research has been done on and with children, little of it explores the experiences of children from the perspective of children (Greene & Hill, 2005). From a child's perspective, reflecting on what they remember, this research explored what children experienced during poetry activities. This research was significant because by listening to what children say about poetry activities, educators may be better able to foster positive and motivational literacy-learning environments.

For centuries the experiences and perspectives of men have influenced theories of development (Gilligan, 1993). The voices of children are not always recognized. "Children, regardless of how they were perceived by society, have always existed even when their lived experiences may not have been of interest to philosophers or social scientists" (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 2). It is time to listen to what children have to say about their experiences.

Poetry is one of the oldest literacy forms, and has been used throughout the ages to entertain, aid memory, and allow individuals to express their deepest feelings and explore their lived experiences. Poetry was chosen as the focus of this study because it is a literacy form that should be accessible to all members of society (Jobling & Moni, 2000). Furthermore, poetry offers a medium for individuals to express and explore their experiences, which allows them to better understand themselves and their place in the world (Clary & Coulehan, 2005; Rosaen, 2003). The significance of poetry to unlock the feelings of individuals has been known for thousands of years (Douma, 2008). Research has been conducted on the use of poetry as therapy with adolescents and adults, and there is a journal, *Journal of Poetry Therapy*, dedicated to the study of the healing powers of poetry.

Although poetry can be used for expressing deep thoughts and feelings, this is not always the case. Ciardi and Williams (1975) noted, “Poetry is not uniformly serious” (p. 14). Poetry can be silly, playful and fun. It can be written and read for enjoyment, and as Ciardi and Williams suggested, poetry is a performance (p. 4). These qualities of poetry may be engaging for children.

While engaged in poetry reading, students may reap academic benefits from the acceptable repetition and their attention to language and meaning. Poetry can be read and reread, and in doing so, children may gain confidence and fluency (Wilfong, 2008, p. 11). At the same time, the structures, patterns, and rhythms, “the technicalities of the poetic devices” are inseparable from the meaning of a poem (Ciardi & Williams, 1975, p. 12). While reading poems, students may need to notice poetic devices in order to construct

meaning. Students are simultaneously paying attention to language and meaning. Another benefit is that students are reading, and as Krashen (2004) asserted, “When we read, we really have no choice—we must develop literacy” (p. 150). One benefit of reading poetry may be literacy development.

Poetry is not a literacy practice that is limited to the walls of educational institutions. Although poetry can be personal, it can also be very social. Lyrics can be considered poems put to music. Rap, with which students are very comfortable and familiar, is an acronym that stands for rhythm and poetry. Foster, Lewis, and Onafowora (2003) proposed improving educational practices by drawing on students’ cultural resources that motivate human learning. By incorporating language routines that are found in daily life into school life, the human-created boundaries of home and school are blurred. The use of poetry in the classroom can help blur this division in the area of literacy.

Poetry-centered activities can be implemented with minimal monetary resources. All it takes is a collection of poetry books, pencils, paper, teacher encouragement, and 20 minutes each day to implement poetry-centered activities such as Poetry Break. If cost is of concern for schools and classrooms, poetry may be an economical way to provide engaging literacy activities.

Poetry is a medium for self-expression, language and literacy development, and entertainment going beyond the market value of literacy. However, there is limited research on the use of poetry with elementary students. Extensive searches yielded no results for research on children’s experiences with poetry from the child’s perspective.

By listening to what children have to say about their experiences with poetry, educators may be better able to provide motivating and meaningful literacy experiences.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, the dynamic threads of this study have been explored in order to provide an organic tapestry through which this phenomenological research is presented. Brief reviews of literature on literacy and educational reform based on NCLB were provided in order to offer background to this phenomenological study. Additional threads of the literature reviewed are woven into a broader and more intricate tapestry in chapter 2.

Exploring the experiences of children during poetry activities was the purpose of this study. The psychocultural theory of education and the nature of experience were introduced as the framework on which this research was woven. Operational definitions, assumptions, limitations, scope, and delimitations were explicitly stated to keep the threads of the research from becoming too tangled. Details of the phenomenological methodology employed are woven in Chapter 3. The findings of the study are presented in Chapter 4 and the interpretations of the findings are presented in Chapter 5.

Significance of this study can be found in the social change that may occur through providing positive experiences for children. The following chapters provide a review of the literature, methodology, research findings, and interpretations with which to embroider the possibilities of social change.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this chapter, I review the research design and the conceptual framework that give shape and texture to this study while, through the lens of experience, I explore the selection of the phenomenological approach. Psychocultural theory and the significance of human experience in phenomenology are woven together to create the first section of this chapter.

Next, I provide a review of literature related to education, literacy, language, and poetry and explore the role of experience in educational goals and aims. Language and literacy education and social practices will be examined and I will ponder definitions of literacy and reading. In this chapter, I consider literacy purposes and the transactional theory of literacy. Finally, I present research on poetry, poetic expression, and poetic performance.

Through searches in multiple databases such as EBSCOhost, ERIC, ProQuest Dissertations and the Google search engine, literature related to this study was gathered for review. Search terms included educational reform, poetry, literacy, language, reading, culture, phenomenology, experience, and children. Choices in databases selected and search terms used were influenced by the focus of the research.

Research Design

Although there is not a set of fixed procedures for phenomenological research, van Manen (1990) suggested hermeneutic phenomenological research in the human sciences as a dynamic interplay of six research activities:

- (1) turning to a phenomenon which seriously interests us and commits us to the world;
- (2) investigating experience as we live it rather than as we conceptualize it;
- (3) reflecting on the essential themes which characterize the phenomenon;
- (4) describing the phenomenon through the art of writing and rewriting;
- (5) manipulating a strong and oriented pedagogical relation to the phenomenon;
- (6) balancing the research context by considering parts and whole. (pp. 30–31)

These methodological themes helped shape the composition of this research, which was designed to glean the essence of what children experience during poetry activities. Van Manen (1990) asserted that the purpose of phenomenological research is the exploration of lived experience. The dynamic nature of phenomenological research requires flexibility in the procedures and processes employed. Although research designs are useful in providing focus to phenomenological studies, the research process, participants, and researcher should not be constrained by that initial design. Essential elements of the research are not always predictable at the outset of the research.

Review of the Philosophical Foundation, Phenomenological Methodology, and Conceptual Framework

Psychocultural theory and the significance of experience each provided fibers through which the web of this phenomenological research was spun. Each of these theories is dynamic, multifaceted, and useful in exploring what children experience during poetry activities. Greene and Hill (2005) posited, “If the researcher’s work is embedded in a particular theoretical framework, the choice of method may flow

seamlessly from the researcher's prior commitments" (p. 16). Commitment to the holistic view provided in systems theory and the belief, advanced in psychocultural theory, that experience matters, led naturally to the selection of a phenomenological methodology.

Empirical and analytical methodologies have dominated science and research. However, these perspectives have not always taken into account the interconnected nature and situational context of all phenomena. The lens of systems thinking, however, focuses on the interwoven nature of the world. Capra (1996) claimed, "Systems thinking is 'contextual,' which is the opposite of analytical thinking. Analysis means taking something apart in order to understand it; systems thinking means putting it into the context of the whole" (p. 30). The parts of a system and even the sum of the parts of the whole system do not fully express the nature of the whole system. Once systems theory is learned and acknowledged, it weaves its way through the fibers of life. Wholeness is perceived where once there might have been fragments. Phenomenology, according to van Manen (1990), is based on the study of wholeness.

Individuals are irreducible wholes. In the quest to better understand human existence, however, components of existence have been the object of scientific inquiry. Lazlo (1972) recognized,

The classical scientific method led to a vast number of highly accomplished theories concerning man's behavior, dispositions, and even his subconscious. But it also led to the fragmentation of our understanding of human beings. In the midst of all the complex special theories, we have gained little real insight into human nature itself. (p. 60)

Scientifically based research has not lead to a complete and detailed picture of human nature.

Although there is no way to study everything at once, “Systems thinking gives us a holistic perspective for viewing the world around us, and seeing ourselves in the world” (Laszlo, 1972, p. 16). Qualitative research is employed as a way of viewing the “wholeness” of an experience (Creswell, 1998; Glesne, 1999; Merriam, 1998). Systems thinking fits well with qualitative and, in particular, phenomenological research. In the exploration of children’s experiences, taking a holistic view is cardinal.

The Psychocultural Theory of Education

Bruner’s (1996) psychocultural theory of education, where both the nature of mind and the nature of culture are taken into account, provided a foundation for this inquiry. Bruner offered nine tenets to guide the psychocultural approach to education.

1. The perspectival tenet: Meaning-making involves perspective.
2. The constraints tenet: Forms of meaning making are constrained by human mental functioning and by the symbolic systems accessible by human minds.
3. The constructivism tenet: Reality is constructed through meaning making.
4. The interactional tenet: Passing on knowledge and skill involves a subcommunity in interaction.
5. The externalization tenet: Externalizing rescues cognitive activity from implicitness, making it more public and negotiable, creating solidarity in a group.

6. The instrumentalism tenet: Education has consequences in the lives of individuals who undergo it.
7. The institutional tenet: Education in the developed world becomes institutionalized.
8. The tenet of identity and self-esteem: Education is crucial to the formation of self.
9. The narrative tenet: Story making is used to create a personal world (pp. 13–42).

In essence, the psychocultural theory of education recognizes that an educational system's primary goal should be to help individuals develop their identity and find their place in their culture. This is a complex matter that involves fitting the needs of the individual to the needs of the culture, while at the same time culture must be tailored to fit the needs of its members.

Learning is social by nature and, according to Bruner (1996), involves individuals becoming part of a subcommunity of mutual learners. Through interacting, learning is made external and explicit. Bruner proposed that education should equip individuals with the symbolic systems and language necessary for constructing meaning and reality.

Bruner (1996) asserted that the personal side of education is being neglected due to the focus on performance required by bureaucratic systems. The theorist advocated for educational institutions to provide individuals with opportunities to develop to their fullest potential. These aspects of the psychocultural theory of education influenced this phenomenological study.

Illuminating Experience in Phenomenological Research

In order to research experience, the concept of experience should be considered. “Lived experience is the starting point and end point of phenomenological research” (van Manen, 1990, p. 36). Further, “investigations of experience necessitate an understanding of what is meant by experience, because what is meant by experience will determine the extent or limitation of one’s access to another person’s experience” (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 16). In this section, the roles of language, culture, values, and emotion in experience are explored.

Experience is both the process and product through which individuals construct reality (Freeman & Mathison, 2009). Individuals experience and create their worlds through their own minds, which is not simply a thing but a concept that is much more complex and difficult to articulate. When it comes to understanding human psychological activity, “the method is simultaneously pre-requisite and product, the tool and the result of the study” (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 65). Meaning making involves perspective and it is through meaning making that reality is created, however the individual mind is not separate from the subtle interplay of biology and culture (Bruner, 1996). Experience is a dynamic concept including, but not limited to mind, biology, and culture. As systems theory suggested, everything is interconnected. “According to the theory of living systems, mind is not a thing but a process—the very process of life” (Capra, 1996, p. 172). With the notion of mind being the process of life itself, experience, which is both the product and process of life, is significant.

Past experiences shape present thinking (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1938/1997). “From the systems perspective, the human actor is part of the feedback process, not standing apart from it. This represents a profound shift in awareness” (Senge, 1990, p. 78). There is no way to remove individuals from their past and present experiences. Essentially, experiences are what make individuals who they are and impact their way of perceiving the world.

Ways of knowing the world can be referred to as mental models. According to Senge (1990), “We do not ‘have’ mental models. We ‘are’ our mental models. They are the medium through which we and the world interact. They are inextricably woven into our personal life history and sense of who we are” (p. xv). Mental models are the composite of experience.

Through individual experiences, each person constructs the reality in which he or she exists. Bertalanffy (1968) stated, “Man is not a passive receiver of stimuli coming from the external world, but in a very concrete sense creates his universe” (p. 194). Adding to this argument, Senge (1990) asserted, “We will probably never perceive fully the multiple ways in which we influence our reality. But simply being open to the possibilities is enough to free our thinking” (p. 170). Emotions, language, culture, and values each play a part in shaping the way an individual interprets and experiences the world while simultaneously being shaped by the way the individual perceives and experiences the world. Because this study focused on experience, the aspects of experience are relevant and are examined in the following sections.

Experience expressed through language. Experience is not dependent on language; however, language provides a framework through which the meaning of experience can be constructed and shared. Dewey (1976) suggested, “Language is primarily a social thing, a means by which we give our experiences to others and get theirs in return” (p. 34). Through language individuals are able to express the abstractions of both their inner and outer worlds (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). Language is a mediator and ambassador of human experience (Levine, 2002). Understanding the role of language in conveying experience is crucial to phenomenological research. “The phenomenological method consists of the ability, or rather the art of being sensitive-sensitive to the subtle undertones of language, to the way language speaks when it allows the things themselves to speak” (van Manen, 1990, p. 111). Phenomenological researchers must be aware of the impact of language on all aspects of the research and the research process.

Individual identity may be developed and transmitted through language. Capra (1996) asserted, “To be human is to exist in language” (p. 290). Even before individuals are born, they are surrounded by language. “Our language embraces us long before we are defined by any other medium of identity. In our mother’s womb we hear and feel the sounds, the rhythms, the cadences of our ‘mother tongue’” (Delpit, 2002, p. XVII). From the beginning of life, language permeates all aspects of human existence.

Language provides a medium for communication while at the same time language can limit the communication of what an individual is truly experiencing. Experiences and thoughts must be simplified and put into symbol systems before they can be

communicated, “Only in this way does communication become possible, for the individual’s experience resides only in his own conscious and is, strictly speaking, not communicable” (Vygotsky, 1962, p. 6). Similarly, Greene and Hill (2005) asserted, “Experience is interpretative and the medium by which humans interpret their encounters with the world is linguistic or at least symbolic” (p. 5). Forms of meaning-making are constrained by human mental functioning and by the symbolic systems accessible by human minds (Bruner, 1996). Humans create and construct language to express the ideas and meanings in the mind, yet that language may not accurately express the exact thoughts in human minds.

Language is a window into human nature exposing thoughts and feelings; however, these thoughts and feelings cannot be equated to the mere words that are aimed at their expression (Pinker, 2007). Although thoughts and feelings have a complexity that words cannot fully express, language is part of the voice through which individuals share experience. Gilligan (1993) reflected that voice, which includes language, is akin to what some people call “the core of self.”

Voice is natural and also cultural. It is composed of breath and sound, words, rhythm, and language. And voice is a powerful psychological instrument and channel, connecting inner and outer worlds. Speaking and listening are a form of psychic breathing. This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social and cultural order—a litmus test of relationship and a measure of psychological health. (p. xvi)

Language is more than the utterance of words.

Individuals use language to express the abstracts of thought and emotion that make up experience. Whether language is a social construct, an instinct, or an interwoven mixture of both, existence and experience are immersed in language and language is developed in a cultural context to serve the human need to communicate.

Language is the medium through which this research will be conducted and reported. Interviews with children will be the primary process through which data will be generated. According to Danaher and Broid (2005), “A phenomenology of children relies mainly upon data given through language, as the primary carrier of experience and meaning” (p. 221). Language will also be the primary vehicle for analyzing and reporting findings. Van Manen (1990) proposed, “Language is a central concern in phenomenological research because responsive-reflective writing is the very activity of doing phenomenology” (132). The nuances of language will be regarded in this research endeavor.

Experience as culturally situated. Human experience is situated in culture. Greene and Hill (2005) noted, “Interest in, and interpretation of, experience is also likely to vary in important ways from culture to culture. How we value and speak about experience is then, in large part, a function of a culturally specific process” (p. 5). From the time individuals are born, culture influences their existence. The way society interacts with an infant is based on cultural beliefs (Erikson, 1993). Because of cultural influence on experience from the time of birth, it is difficult to separate any form of knowing and

existence from culture, and understanding the role of culture in experience becomes a concern of the phenomenological researcher.

Experience is mediated in and through culture. People are created by and creators of the cultural systems in which they dwell. Culture provides a framework for thought, communication, and perception. Bruner (1996) asserted, “For however much the individual may seem to operate on her own in carrying out the quest for meaning, nobody can do it unaided by the culture’s symbolic systems” (p. 3). According to Bertalanffy (1968), “Social science has to do with human beings in their self-created universe of culture. The cultural universe is essentially a symbolic universe” (p. 197). Experience is bound in and perceived through culture. From an individual perspective, Dewey (1961) defined *culture* as “The capacity for constantly expanding the range and accuracy of one’s perception of meaning” (p. 123). Individuals perceive the world through cultural context. There is no human thought free of culture.

Cultures breed social paradigms. Capra (1996) defined a social paradigm as “a constellation of concepts, values, perceptions, and practices shared by a community, which forms a particular vision of reality that is the basis of the way the community organizes itself” (p. 6). Individuals exist within the social paradigms of their culture.

Countless cultural systems permeate human existence. Individuals exist within multiple cultures, and these cultures play a role in the development of an individual’s identity (Bruner, 1983; Gardner, 1983). In order to have an understanding of human experience the role of culture in individual development must be recognized.

Although culture is not the only factor that plays into how humans experience their inner and outer worlds, it is an important factor, and as Bruner (1996) pointed out, Nothing is “culture free,” but neither are individuals simply mirrors of their culture. It is the interaction between them that both gives a communal cast to individual thought and imposes a certain unpredictable richness on any culture’s way of life, thought, or feeling. (p. 14)

Through social interaction with peers and adults, children interpret and reinterpret their reality and cultures. Expressing this idea Freeman and Mathison (2009) proposed, “Individual development, thus becomes embedded in children’s collective weaving of their places in the webs of significance that constitutes their culture” (p. 9). Culture’s role in shaping an individual’s experiences should be taken into account when embarking upon phenomenological studies of children.

Values influence experience. Values are woven into the way people interpret and experience the world. There is a dynamic interplay between how values influence an individual’s experience of the world and how society’s values influence the experiences an individual will have. Outside of basic human needs, decisions individuals and societies make are based in value systems. According to Bertalanffy (1975) “The domain of human values is a system of symbolic standards with a cultural, historical and religious framework” (p. 49). Value systems can reside at the conscious or subconscious level. People act based on their values, and value systems mediate actions. Laszlo (1972) claimed, “Values are goals which behavior strives to realize. ... Nothing that pursues an

end is value-free” (p. 78). Regardless of individuals’ awareness of their value systems, value systems color their experiences of existence.

Value systems define humanity and are paramount in individual and social paradigms. Bertalanffy (1975) asserted that the “symbolic world and the realm of human values” are what make humans into humans (p. 50). Along a similar vein Laszlo (1972) proposed,

Values define cultural man’s need for rationality, meaningfulness in emotional experience, richness of imagination, and depth of faith. All cultures respond to such suprabiological values. But in what form they do so depends on the specific kind of values people happen to have (p. 76).

Through values individuals interpret and evaluate their experiences. Bertalanffy (1975) noted most views of human behavior do not include value. “What has been lost—because it was never included in the original premises—are specifically human features of responsibility, free decision, and true human values” (p. 125). Value systems are part of human identity and experience. Because values influence the perception of human experience, values were considered in this phenomenological research.

Emotions color experience. Emotions permeate all experience. Capra (1996) pointed out, “neuroscientists have discovered strong evidence that human intelligence, human memory, and human decisions are always colored by emotions, as we all know from experience.” (p. 68). According to Zautra (2003), “In fact, emotions pervade all our sensory experiences to a great extent and give those sensations meaning” (p. 4). Although

emotions are felt in the body, it is not the bodily response that produces the emotion. Emotions are embedded in how individuals experience the world.

Regardless of the nature of emotion, humans experience emotions at all times in all cultures throughout the world. From the biological perspective, culture does not shape emotion, but this does not mean that emotion is culture free. Rather it is the reactions to and identification of emotion that are influenced by culture. It is the relative value that is placed on emotion that is informed by social and cultural mores, which in turn influences how a person experiences specific emotions (Zautra, 2003).

Offering another view on emotions, Ellis (2005) proposed, “Curiosity, love, inspiration, loneliness, despair, existential anxiety, lust for adventure, the thrill of intellectual stimulation, the demand for social cooperation and freedom from oppression, the quest for an overall sense that life is worth living” (p. 15) are complex human emotions. Furthermore, Ellis asserted that these complex emotions should be credited with enactive, not simply reactive meanings. Complex emotions can be viewed “as occupying a central place in the most basic motivational structure of human beings” (2005, p. 221). Complex emotions need to be taken into consideration when motivation is of concern.

Emotions are present in all aspects of human existence, and some emotions are more sought than others. Emotions influence actions that individuals take, while at the same time emotions are infused in perception of experience. The significant role of emotion in children’s motivation and experience made recognizing emotion critical in carrying out this research on the experiences of children.

Concluding thoughts on aspects of experience. Language, culture, values, and emotions each play a part in shaping children's experiences. Each of these aspects was considered throughout this research. Merriam (1998) claimed, "Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people have constructed, that is, how they make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world" (p. 6). The belief that experience is significant in the life of a child was paramount to the theoretical framework through which this phenomenological research was crafted. It was an interest in children's lived experience that inspired this research.

The Role of Experience in Educational Goals and Aims

The educational goals and aims of a society influence what is permissible in a school setting and therefore the educational experiences that children will have. Dewey (1938/1997) claimed that experience should be the means and goal of education. Dewey observed that "education in order to accomplish its ends both for the individual learner and for society must be based upon experience—which is always the actual life—experience of some individual" (p. 89). In a similar vein, Chickering and Reisser (1993) suggested that human development is the purpose of higher education. Ultimately, this could be said of all educational endeavors. If experience and human development are the goals of education, it is important to know what children experience during various educational activities.

Education, according to the United Nations (UN) Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26 (1948), is a right guaranteed to all individuals in all societies. Furthermore, Article 26 declared, "Education shall be directed to the full development of

the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” (UN, 1948). Although this was a goal of the UN, each individual country has been left to pursue that goal in its own way and manner.

Educational goals and aims of a society are based on the beliefs held in the society. Decisions about what members of a society should learn are based on values and cultural beliefs. “The question What shall be taught? is never answered definitively without a thorough exploration of the companion question Why?” (Noddings, 2003, p. 81). One of the difficulties in deciding what should be taught is the task of making explicit the values held by a society and the individuals in the society. According to Bruner (1996), “What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young” (p. ix). Expanding on this idea, Vanderstraeten (2001) claimed “Education is a form of action that is attributable to intentions; it is a form of intentional socialization” (p. 385). In pluralistic societies, cultural groups and individuals in a society may not have a common view of what socialization and education should entail. “These differences lead to divergent definitions of what constitutes the problem of education, and the best solution to that problem” (Marschall & Shah, 2005, p. 164). There are many educational stakeholders in society and these stakeholders have a variety of beliefs that are not always compatible with one another.

Developing the goals and aims of educational systems may not be an easy task. When addressing the goals and aims of education Bruner (1996) asserted, “It is a complex pursuit of fitting a culture to the needs of its members and of fitting its members

and their ways of knowing to the needs of the culture” (p. 43). Furthermore, as educational goals and aims take shape, they may begin to take on a life of their own. As Mead (1964/1999) noted, once a decision is made about what is necessary to teach children, we start to formalize education. This can lead to “the school in which the conscious need to teach has become dominant over the felt need to learn” (Mead, 1964/1999, p. 47). Viewing education from a historical perspective in which schools have evolved over time, Gardner (1983) noted, “The relative absence in schools of a concern with deep understanding reflects the fact that, for the most part, the goal of engendering that kind of understanding has not been a high priority for educational bureaucracies” (p. 8). Educational aims and goals need to be dynamic and evolving in order to meet the continually changing needs of individuals as well as the needs of society.

Although schools have been evolving, they have not necessarily done so in a way that best serves the interests of the society and the individuals in the society. For individuals to contribute to society in positive ways, a deep understanding of individual and world issues is necessary. Educational institutions are not changing in a way that meets the evolving needs of individuals and society (Berliner, 2009; Marschall & Shah, 2005).

Currently, the educational systems in the United States and around the world are in various states of reform, and frequently these reforms are based on the perceived need to compete in the global economy. Noddings (2003) observed, “At the beginning of the twenty-first century, educational discussion is dominated by talk of standards, and the reason for this emphasis is almost always economic” (p. 84). The view that education can

solve societal ills is pervasive (Bruner, 1996). Education is one of the most familiar and public institutions in the United States. Each individual, with some exceptions, has had access to education at some point in life. “Perhaps because teachers and schools are so open to public scrutiny and are so vulnerable to criticism, quick-fix cure-alls can appear very attractive at first” (Garan, 2002, p. 29). Along the same vein, as Garan (2002) and Allington and Cunningham (2002) lamented, “We always seem to be searching for the single quick fix that will solve the problems of schools in the United States” (p. 14). However, there is no instant solution.

The dynamic nature of humans, society, and culture prevents a permanent cure for all societal and educational woes. Education has frequently been organized to meet the economic needs of the society. Yet Noddings (2003) asserted, “There is more to individual life and the life of a nation than economic superiority” (p. 84). The idea of life being about more than economic gains opens the discussion of educational goals and aims at a broader spectrum.

Some ideas on educational goals and aims could be garnered from various cultural perspectives on education. Reagan (1996) offered a Native American view of education in which the community was responsible for the moral, social, and emotional development of the child. Through the oral tradition, values were passed on, character was shaped and individuals found their place in society. Education was viewed as an integral part of social life rather than something separate from it.

This traditional view of education ties back to the UN’s assertion that education should be for the full development of each individual’s personality. Developing a

philosophy on the relationship between culture and the individual within the educational system, Bruner (1996) proposed, “A system of education must help those growing up in a culture find an identity within that culture. Without it, they stumble in their effort after meaning” (p. 42). Considerations of culture and the individual should play a role in shaping educational goals and aims.

In pursuing the full development of children’s personalities, the sacrifices made by children through educational endeavors should be considered. Erikson (1993) noted, “Every group, of whatever nature, seems to demand sacrifices of its children which they later can bear only in the firm belief or in the determined pretense that they were based on unquestionable absolutes of conduct” (p. 125). One of the sacrifices currently being made in education is that the focus on individuals is aimed at the individual as an intellectual being (Chickering & Reisser, 1993). However, humans are dynamic multifaceted beings who exist in multiple cultural, social and emotional realms. Not considering the multifaceted nature of the individual limits the educational opportunities provided for children. If, as Bruner (1996) asserted, education always has consequences in the lives of those who undergo it, children should not need to make sacrifices in order to be educated. Perhaps a more humane approach to education could be taken by listening to Noddings (2003) who proposed, “If we accept happiness as an aim of education, we will be concerned with both the quality of present experience and the likely contribution of that experience for future happiness”(p. 251). Exploring what children experience during educational activities in order to provide more positive experiences is a step toward future happiness.

Literacy and Language Education

Literacy and language education, like all other forms of education, are based on beliefs and values. In order for literacy education to be meaningful, it should take into account the needs of the culture as well as the needs of the individual. As mentioned before, currently education seems to be driven by economic needs and literacy education is part of the economic thrust. Tett (2003) noted that although there is talk of social inclusion and citizen participation, literacy is still seen as a way of gaining an edge in the global economic market. Literacy is viewed as a tool for working and being a consumer. Because of this, literacy is defined for the learner rather than negotiated with the learner. The learners' perceived literary needs are not taken into account.

If self-awareness and development of self are valued, then literacy should be modeled as a tool in reaching these ends. Noddings (2003) noted, "Educational aims always reflect the aims—explicit or implicit—of the political society in which they are developed" (p. 88). UNESCO (2008) proposed that literacy education should be accompanied with education for citizenship and self-awareness in order for literacy to be meaningful for individuals and to serve as a medium for transforming societies. The view a society takes on literacy and literacy education implies the values of the society.

Ensuring that all people have access to the resources that help them meet their basic human needs is universally valued. Reduction of poverty is a humane goal. UNESCO (2008) asserted that literacy is a universal feature that is linked to poverty reduction, economic growth, and wealth creation. UNESCO's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper was influenced by two theories of education. Both the human capital and

an integrated approach to development were considered. Human-capital theory is based on the belief that with more education comes a reduction in poverty. The integrated approach to development, which was less prominent in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, “promotes education both in its own right and for achieving economic, social and infrastructural targets in other sectors. In promoting literacy, an integrated approach responds best to rights-based and functional rationales” (UNESCO, 2008 p. 40). Literacy serves multiple purposes.

Literacy, according to UNESCO (2008), is an entry into other realms of education and society. According to Jung and Ouane,

Literacy is not a magic wand that will transform poverty into wealth or ignorance into knowledge. Although an investment in education and literacy is an investment in human resources, we must see literacy from the perspective of the user, how literacy enables persons and groups to achieve their own rights and goals. (2001, p. 333)

It is not what literacy can do on its own, but what people do with literacy that makes a difference. Literacy can be a tool used for social change.

Language and Literacy as Social Practices

Language and literacy exist for social purposes. Bruner (1996), Dewey (1976), Gardner (1983), and Vygotsky (1978) each pointed out the importance of the social nature of language and literacy. People learn languages in order to be able to communicate with others. Bongartz and Schneider (2003) found social interaction to be a key part of language development. Freeman and Freeman (2000) pointed out,

“Acquisition happens when we are involved in real communication. We pick up language as we attempt to understand and produce meaningful messages—as we use language for real purposes” (p. 21). This fits with Dewey’s (1976) view that language is essentially social and when it is removed from its social nature, language becomes difficult to learn. With this in mind, it makes sense that an individual should take an active and social part in the learning of language.

Literacy is a dynamic multifaceted social phenomenon that cannot be separated from a cultural context (Gee, 2001; Jung & Ouane, 2001; Nelson & Damico, 2006). All peoples have literacy practices, and what constitutes literacy is determined by the societies needs (Commeyras, 2000; UNESCO, 2008). Based on the society’s needs, specific literacies are fostered in the individuals in the society. Demands for literacy have also lead to compulsory education with literacy requirements. Compulsory literacy requirements have yielded over 100 years filled with systematic literacy research (Stubbs, 1980). The complex nature of literacy encourages its study from multiple disciplines including psychology, sociology, linguistics, anthropology, politics, history, education, and curriculum studies (Hannon, 2000; Stubbs 1980).

Attempts at Defining Literacy

Historically and from multiple disciplines, the definition of literacy has been debated (Hannon, 2000; Stubbs, 1980). With multiple disciplines engaging in literacy research, Stubbs noted, contradictory definitions of literacy have been put forward. In its simplest and most common definition, literacy has become synonymous with reading and

writing. However, definitions of literacy are continuously evolving (Pressley & Fingeret, 2007; UNESCO, 2008).

Constantly shifting social and cultural systems add to the complexity of defining literacy. Begoray (2001) asserted that “the theoretical conception of literacy is undergoing a metamorphosis” (p. 201). Literacy is no longer limited to reading and writing text. Now, people are expected to be adept at interpreting other sign systems.

Hannon (2000) suggested that one reason a pluralist view of literacy should be taken is that literacy is embedded in culture. Since there are many cultures, it should follow that there are many types of literacy. Hannon further asserted that a unitary or pluralist view of literacy comes from whether the primary focus of literacy is literacy skills or the social nature of literacy.

Looking at the cultural influence on literacy and addressing the issue of illiterate versus literate, Blackledge (2001) wrote,

The same person may be regarded as “illiterate” in one culture, while appearing to be quite literate in another culture. When a number of cultures co-exist within the same society it is more likely that a range of versions of what constitutes being literate will be encountered (Ferdman, 1990). “Illiteracy” therefore is as much a social construction as “literacy.” (p. 295)

Cultural purposes for literacy give shape to the definition of literacy within the culture.

Not only is literacy bound in culture, it is also bound by time and space. Jung and Ouane (2001) explored the complexity of literacy as a concept.

Literacy is not a simple commodity that can be added to any specific situation; it does not have the same consequences in every context. ... The conceptualization of literacy as a sociohistorical tool implies the recognition of its potential to do different things in different situations, because literacy is reshaped in every single context of use. (p. 321)

The exploration of the concept of literacy offered by Jung and Ouane demonstrates the organic nature of literacy.

The difficulty in defining literacy may lead to an omission of a definition of literacy in some research endeavors. This may have been the case with the NRP when they published the Report of the National Reading Panel in 2000. Although there was no definition of reading or literacy offered in the report, the report has continued to influence reading and literacy practices across the United States.

From an international perspective, in 2005 UNESCO, offered a working definition of literacy that emphasized context and use.

Literacy is the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts.

Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve his or her goals, develop his or her knowledge and potential and participate fully in community and wider society. (p. 21)

Addressing this definition of literacy, in 2008, UNESCO stated, “Since literacy is a plural and dynamic concept, neither this nor any other definition is the final word” (UNESCO, 2008, p. 18).

Building on the pluralistic view of literacy and addressing the evolving nature of literacy, UNESCO (2008), offered the following perspective on literacy:

Rather than assuming a divide between literate and illiterate, researchers propose a continuum, with differing levels and uses of literacy according to context. Thus, there is no single notion of literacy as a skill which people possess or not, but multiple literacies. We all engage in both oral and written practices and in learning new literacies at different stages of our lives, for example, the literacy demands of digital technologies. The concept of situated literacies draws attention to how the social, cultural, and political context shapes the ways in which people acquire and use literacy. (UNESCO, 2008, p. 17)

According to Medina (2003), regardless of the way literacy is defined, “Researchers and literacy educators must acknowledge how their personal life experiences and narratives influence their perceptions and constructs of what literacy means and the ways those definitions inform research and teaching” (p. 393). Tett (2003) asserted that ideally, individuals in a community should define literacy based on their perceived needs; however, for this study the researcher chose a broad definition of literacy.

Keeping in mind the dynamic and ever-evolving social nature of literacy, it was the LLRC’s pluralistic view of literacy and language that were selected to guide this research. Literacy and language are viewed as complex, multifaceted processes. “Literacy is a process not an end point” (UNESCO, 2008, p. 21). Regardless of the definition of

literacy, it should be emphasized that it is what individuals do with literacy that makes literacy meaningful.

Literacy Purposes

Literacy can serve many purposes for both individuals and societies depending on the needs of individuals and societies. According to Rockwell (2001), “Literacy is multiple, and is appropriated in distinct ways, in the course of particular lives” (p. 230). Based on their wants and needs, individuals employ literacy for some purpose. Furthermore, literacy practices are only sustainable when they have a direct bearing on people’s lives (Doronilla, 2001).

Although literacy serves individuals and their purposes, it exists beyond individuals. Literacy is situated in culture. Triebel (2001) noted, “From historical evidence and from sociological conception it is clear that literacy and the process of becoming literate is more than alphabetization on the level of the individual. Literacy cannot be separated from politics, social structure, culture or economy” (p. 42).

Just as literacy practices are only sustainable when they have a purpose, specific literacy forms are only sustainable when societies deem them to be meaningful. For example, the Mycenaean writing system known as Linear B was used for recordkeeping; however, it died out in the Middle Ages when the Greek palace system was destroyed. Literacy and language forms that are not useful to individuals and society eventually become extinct (Thomas, 2001).

Literacy forms and practices must have a purpose for individuals and cultures. UNESCO (2008) suggested that more studies are needed to look at literacy purposes.

This study explored how children experienced literacy activities revolving around poetry, and provided insight into the literacy purposes of children.

Reading

Although literacy is more than just reading and writing, reading continues to be central in the default definition of literacy. Many studies claiming to research literacy are actually studying reading. Reading, like literacy, can be viewed from multiple perspectives. Currently in educational reform, a skills-based view of reading dominates the educational and political landscape. According to NCLB reading is a complex system through which the reader derives meaning from text:

The term *reading* means a complex system of deriving meaning from print that requires all of the following:

- (A) The skills and knowledge to understand how phonemes, or speech sounds, are connected to print.
- (B) The ability to decode unfamiliar words.
- (C) The ability to read fluently.
- (D) Sufficient background information and vocabulary to foster reading comprehension.
- (E) The development of appropriate active strategies to construct meaning from print.
- (F) The development and maintenance of a motivation to read. (p. 126)

This skills-based definition of reading has led to a narrow range of reading instructional methodology in schools and the motivational component has been ignored.

Schools are adopting reading programs that support these specific reading skills in order to reinforce those skills that are prevalent on reading tests. Valencia and Buly (2004) pointed out that test scores from state tests have tended to dominate decisions about program adoptions. However, Garbarino (1992) asserted, “To offer a program designed for a textbook norm or even the average child in the class is sure to sour many children on their introduction to school” (p. 102). Buly and Valencia contended, “As we have heard a thousand times before, and as our data support, one size instruction will not fit all children” (p. 228). Furthermore, Dennis (2009) noted, “When students are not taught according to their individual abilities and needs, but instead are taught based on the premise of a one-size-fits-all instructional program, we are not providing them with opportunities to climb the literacy ladder” (p. 288). Similarly, Woolley (2008) pointed out,

There are many environmental and personal factors that contribute to reading success. Reading comprehension is a complex interaction of language, sensory perception, memory, and motivational aspects. However, most existing assessment tools have not adequately reflected the complex nature of reading comprehension. Good assessment requires a multifaceted approach to reading diagnosis and flexible interventions in order to cater for individual learning needs. (p. 51)

In order to meet the needs of all learners, educational assessment and instructional practices need to become more individualized, keeping the learner in mind.

In the United States, Title I and high-poverty schools have been targeted for literacy reform and standardization of reading programs through textbook adoptions. Some states, and through them, school districts, received Reading First funding were required to use scientifically based reading instruction in order to improve students reading achievement. According to the Reading First Impact Study (Gamse et al., 2008), Reading First did have a significant impact on decoding skills for first graders. However, in spite of the extra funding and time spent on scientifically based reading instruction, the Reading First Impact Study found that no statistically significant impact was made on student reading comprehension (Gamse et al., 2008). Similarly, a study conducted by the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance (2009) of four supplemental intervention programs implemented at low-income schools indicated that these programs were not beneficial for students. “Reading comprehension test scores were not statistically significantly higher in schools using the selected reading comprehension curricula than in control schools. In fact, students’ reading comprehension test scores were statistically significantly lower in treatment schools than in control schools” (James-Burdumy et al., 2009, p. xxxii). Based on the results of these studies, the use of standardized reading programs should be questioned.

The reports of these studies may not have been surprising for some educators and researchers. “The negative portrayal of high-poverty schools led us to ignore what the scientific evidence suggests is the most critical factor in fostering the reading achievement gap—opportunity to read” (Allington, 2002, p. 14). Adding to this perspective, Walker (2003) suggested, “When students think of themselves as readers

and writers, they actively engage in learning” (p. 186). Not only do students need to think of themselves as readers in order to be able to read, they need to be provided with reading material that contains text that is accessible to them. Martin (2003) suggested that if reading is always difficult, students will not have a positive attitude toward reading nor will they be motivated to read. Reading is more than a skills-based process that can be tested and improved through programs.

Reading is a very personal yet social endeavor. Readers who are focused on their emotional reaction to literature are more likely to have a deep understanding of what they are reading. “Research suggests that student readers can thrive when they have permission to openly savor and articulate their reading experiences, freely responding to language that may challenge, stimulate, and surprise—all at once” (Eva-Wood, 2004b, ¶ 12).

It is a commonly held belief that interest is a motivating factor in what students choose to read (Flowerday, Schraw, & Stevens, 2004; Guthrie, Perencevich, Tonks, & Wigfield, 2004; Marinak, 2006). Opportunity to read allows students to explore text they might find interesting. According to Krashen (2004), “Free voluntary reading (FVR) is the foundation of language education” (p. 1). FVR is “reading because you want to” (p. 1). Krashen cautioned that FVR alone is not sufficient language instruction; however, Krashen noted,

In-school free reading studies and “out of school” self-reported free voluntary reading studies show that more reading results in better reading comprehension,

writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development. Reading and test studies confirm that reading develops vocabulary and spelling. (2004, p. 17)

In this way, reading may beget reading.

Rousing children's interest in reading should be a goal of reading instruction. "An important goal of literacy teaching is to awaken children's interest in language and literature. The aim is to give them, during their first school years, a lasting positive attitude towards reading and writing" (Merisuo-Storm, 2006, p. 111). Empowering students to find their passions and interests in the written word may help individuals access a world they would otherwise never experience. Martin (2003) lamented,

Let's hope passion becomes a central feature of approaches to teaching literature ... and that the aim of teaching strategies is explicitly to produce readers for life.

However, this is unlikely to happen while literature is a major element in tests which are so high stakes for teachers and schools. (p. 17)

Although the current educational-reform movement in the United States has described reading as a skills set, it is apparent that there is much more to reading and meaning making than testable skills. "Because of the highly personal nature of literary reading, future theories must be reader driven—humanizing text processing without discarding the scientific approaches that can serve to ground theoretical conceptions of literary reading" (Eva-Wood, 2004b, p. 190). Perhaps the view of reading as a set of skills may need to be revised in order to include the personal nature of literacy.

The Transactional Theory of the Literary Work

Addressing the multifaceted and dynamic nature of the reading process, Rosenblatt (1978) proposed a transactional theory of reading. The transaction theory emphasizes the social nature of language, literacy, and reading. Reading is an event in which the reader engages in a “transactional” relationship with the text. The reader and text are not separate. The transactional theory of reading is much like a systems theory of reading, where all systems are interwoven and connected. The reader of the text views the text through mental models. These mental models include culture, emotion, values, and past experience. All of these systems are incorporated in the process of reading and meaning making whereas the text provides the guide for the meaning. With the transactional theory of reading, each transaction with a text is a new experience, as meaning making is contextual.

Rosenblatt (1978) offered two types of reading that exist along a continuum. *Efferent reading* and *aesthetic reading* are the terms Rosenblatt used for these reading purposes. In efferent reading, “the reader’s attention is focused primarily on what will remain as the residue *after* the reading—the information to be acquired, the logical solution to a problem, the actions to be carried out” (p. 23). On the other end of the continuum is aesthetic reading. “In aesthetic reading, the reader’s attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (Rosenblatt, 1978, p. 25). Each of these types of reading serves a purpose.

Poetry experiences, which were the focus of this study, tend toward an aesthetic stance to reading. According to Ciardi and Williams (1975) poetry is to be experienced (p. 3). The study explored these “lived experiences” and how children remember them.

Poetry

Because of the highly personal nature of poetry, the aesthetic stance should be taken when dealing with poetry (Hall et al., 2003; Eva-Wood, 2004a). Ciardi and Williams (1975) noted that through experiencing poetry individuals also experience themselves as human beings (p.3). Poetry touches the heart of what it means to be human and the way it is studied should reflect the intent of poetry.

Poetic Expression

The poetic process possesses the potential to empower individuals to unravel the tangled threads of their thoughts, emotions, and experiences. Through the process of reflection, individuals may better understand the threads of their existence and be able to weave these into a poetic tapestry that can be interpreted by themselves and others. In this way, the inner thoughts of an individual can be shared.

Poetry can open individuals to a broader perspective on the world. Through her studies on literacy responses, Eva-Wood (2004a) observed, “Readers who actively engage poetic language can be sensitized to the textures and flavors of life experiences that might have otherwise remained inexplicable” (p. 173). Thus, reading and thinking in poetic language can change the perceived experiences of individuals in fundamental ways.

Inner perception can also be unlocked through poetry. Rosaen (2003) noted that poetry was an efficacious tool for individuals who wished to illuminate their own history and background. College students found that in writing poetry, self-reflection and awareness were fostered. The process of reflection, encouraged in poetry creation, individuals become more aware of themselves and in doing so become more empathetic to others.

Poetic self-reflection can also be used as a therapeutic method. Barron (1974) observed, “Among the vast array of communicative procedures that may be utilized, poetry too has a therapeutic legitimacy. Broadly speaking, the poetry of the therapeutic scene is found in human contact. When contact is made creativity is potentiated” (p. 90). More recently, but in a similar vein, Clary and Coulehan (2005) recognized that poetry could be used as a therapeutic tool. They also found that the use of poetry allowed palliative care clinicians an opportunity to explore and reflect on their feelings and improve their interactions with patients. Through poetry clinicians were taught to harness the power of words, symbols, and metaphor in order to influence patients and promote healing. Palliative-care clinicians in the study were able to use poetry to connect emotionally with their patients. At the same time, poetry provided an outlet for the individuals to better understand their own emotions.

Baker, McFerran, Patton, and Sawyer (2006) found that writing lyrics, which are much like poetry, helped adolescent girls express their emotions in ways that other forms of therapy did not help them express. Writing lyrics also helped the adolescents develop positive self-images, and it helped them develop their identities. Music therapy has been

acknowledged as a way for individuals to increase their control over emotional expression (Baker et al., 2006).

Poetry is also a means for reaching students with diverse abilities and backgrounds. Olson-McBride and Page (2006) found poetry writing to be beneficial on multiple levels for special-needs students including improved interactions among individuals. Adolescents who participated in a camp where poetry was used as therapy were able to communicate and express themselves better by working with poetry. The intent of Olson-McBride and Page's research was to determine if poetry therapy intervention had the potential to positively impact children with a physical, emotional, or cognitive disability. Students participated in reading, writing, and talking about poetry. Positive changes in the students' group interactions and self-confidence were noted. Students' self-confidence as writers improved and their writing abilities improved as well. Students were also able to talk about feelings through poems. Poetry writing and sharing were avenues for students with special needs to connect with others. Students were able to explore their emotions. Poetry writing was beneficial for both academic growth and emotional development.

Poetry can also be used as an interdisciplinary form of reflection. Wyatt-Smith and Cummings (2003) pointed out the need for reflection as part of the educational process. However, they found students were given few opportunities for reflection. "In short, there seemed few, if any, strategies for developing students as critically reflective life-long learners" (p. 55). Olsen (2004) also saw reflection as crucial to the education process, claiming "Nurturing reflective thinking is designed to put students in the driver's

seat so they may learn to direct their own learning, the core quality of a lifelong learner” (p. 291). Frye, Schlagal, and Trathen (2010) found that scaffolding writing for elementary school-age students through the use of poetry in the content areas of science and social studies was beneficial. “Writing informational poetry may seem counterintuitive, but our recent experiences with students and acrostics have proven to be both productive and enlightening. Encoding information in poetic form is a thoughtful and thought-provoking way to capture and retain important content” (p. 595).

Connecting self-directed learning and poetry, Pike (2000) found that allowing students the freedom to interpret and respond to poetry in a way that was relevant to them gave students a better understanding of it. Students were able to make judgments about poems based on the power of a poem to move them, and they were able to connect to poetry written over 100 years ago. Connections to the poems made by the students provided opportunities for the teacher to extend students’ understanding of the poem. Perfect (1999) also found the power of students connecting to poetry. Perfect knew they had made a connection to poetry when they chose to respond to literature or life through poetry. Young adults with Down syndrome also found poetry to be a powerful tool to connect to popular culture and value their own experiences in a way that no other literary form had allowed (Jobling & Moni, 2000). Poetry is a way to value all perspectives. Researchers have found that students learn best when they are able to bring their own experiences to the stage (Jimenez, 2000; Kinginger, 2002; Nieto, 1996; Pewewardy, 2002; Wenden, 2002).

Poetry provides a portal for individuals to explore themselves and their connections to the world. Perhaps poetry is a prime example of the idea “that literacy is a process of ‘coming to self-consciousness’ not only discovering but also creating oneself” (McGill-Franzen, Lanford, & Adams, 2002, p. 449). Ciardiello (2010) conducted a case study on the use of social-justice poems with elementary-age students. Through reading and writing socially just poems, students were able to develop empathy.

In a democratic classroom, reading and writing social justice poetry is not a frill or luxury in the literacy curriculum. Through its cultivation and expression, the democratic values of justice and empathy are encouraged as part of democratic citizenship training. (p. 467)

Poetry is a very personal yet social literacy practice. Poetry is a literacy that gives power to the people as individuals and communities. Although research has been conducted on the benefits of poetry to individuals and communities, studies have not been conducted to explore what children experience during poetry activities.

Poetic Performance

Poetry performances require an individual to make meaning of the poem and then convey that meaning through multiple modalities.

In performance, languages other than literal languages come to the fore. These include the languages of the body, of such things as emotion, symbol, action, place and rhythm. Add to this the vast range of connotations that can be placed on words that are spoken and you begin to see the complexity of the messages that are processed in and through performance. (Wright, 2001, p. 261)

In this way, poetry performances are experiences where some of the multiple intelligences proposed by Gardner (1983) are recognized. Gardner considers poetry to be “the linguistic intelligence exemplified” (p. 73).

Poetry performance can be as basic as poetry reading. Wilfong (2008) developed a poetry academy as an intervention method for improving reading performance. Through multiple reading of poems, third grade students were able to increase the number of words they were able to read per minute and they were able to recognize and comprehend more words. They also showed improved attitudes toward reading.

Rather than having students read poems, Gordon (2010) conducted a study where students in primary and secondary school listened to recorded performances of poetry. They were given an opportunity to respond to the poems in verbal discourse. Gordon proposed that, “Considering the relationship between the modality of a heard poem and what pupils do with its sounds in shared conversation can tell us something more of what they make of patterns and structures, can reveal what they ‘notice’”(2010, p. 50). By listening to and talking about poems, students learn the nuances of poetry.

Poetry provides an opportunity to play with language. Pramling (2009) asserted, “Every observer of young children is also aware of children’s natural inclination towards wordplay, spontaneous rhyming, punning and singing” (p. 377). Broner and Tarone (2001) referred to this type of language use as ludic language play. According to Broner and Tarone, although parents and teachers may think that students are at school for academic learning, students view their role as also being social, and this is where language play frequently enters the picture. By creating puns and playing with language,

students are learning and having fun while doing it. Playing with language is universal. Children across cultures are frequently exposed to rhyme, word play, and figurative language. As Perfect (1999) pointed out, “It nurtures a love and appreciation for the sound and power of language” (p. 728). Hoping to harness the power of poetry, Elster (2010) suggested educators, “Use poetry in the classroom to emphasize the meaningful experiences of poetry—group performance, interest in words and their meanings, discovery of the resources of language” (p. 55). Throughout life, poetry can be used as a tool to encourage the joy of language.

Smith (2010) conducted a case study to explore what seventh-grade students experience when writing and performing poetry. Smith found that, “When students present original writing orally, their voices speak of their personal experiences and their abilities to create a place for themselves in the academy” (p. 202). Performance was also a motivating force for the students. “These seventh grade students verbalized concepts of audience, mentioning how writing for their peers motivated them to improve both text and presentation” (Smith, 2010, p. 206). Students wanted to connect with each other through poetry.

Poetry has the power to invoke emotional responses from the audience (Jobling & Moni, 2000; Perfect, 1999; Pike, 2000). Poetry connects us to each other through ideas, images, and emotions. “The song, the chant, the ritual and the poetic seem to strike the chord of communality evoking a sense of togetherness” (Barron, 1974, p. 89). The social aspect of poetry may engender community.

Poetry writing, reading, and performing are beneficial endeavors that are accessible by everyone. Moreover, positive experiences with poetry may inspire a passion for poetry.

If the aim of teaching poetry is delight and wisdom, the pedagogical methods chosen should make these ends likely. It means also that, in monitoring the effects of our work, we will look for signs of joy, deep thought, and eagerness to read more and hear more. (Noddings, 2003, p. 252)

Although there is research that indicates that poetry reading may increase children's ability to read fluently (Calo, 2011; Wilfong, 2008), and that poetry reading brings pleasure to the recipient, there is little research exploring what children experience during literacy activities involving poetry. Research has been focused on the outcome of literacy practices rather than what children experience during the process.

Discussion, Analysis, and Conclusion

The conceptual framework for this study included, the psychocultural theory of education and the premise that experience matters in the life of individuals. Through the review of this framework, the phenomenological methodology of this study was explored. Next, I discussed educational goals and aims, and presented definitions of literacy. Literature related to literacy and poetry was reviewed, noting gaps in the research. Although much research has been done on literacy, little research has been conducted on what children experience during poetry-based literacy activities.

With children spending so much time in educational institutions, perhaps there should be an obligation to provide positive experiences for children. Education has

consequences in the lives of individuals who undergo it (Bruner, 1996). It seems inevitable that education has a pertinent role in social change.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Children's experience was at the heart of this research. Guiding this research was the question, how do children describe their experiences of poetry activities when they look back to their poetry experiences as third or fourth grade students? "Children in most societies are valued for their potential and for what they will grow up to be but are devalued in terms of their present perspective and experiences" (Greene & Hill, 2005, p. 3). Educational settings are not exempt from this trend. One of the problems with the contemporary educational reform movement in the United States is that the experiences of the child in the social context of learning and literacy are not being considered. Currently, driven by NCLB, quantitative studies are shaping literacy practices. A meager number of studies explore literacy experiences from the child's perspective and fewer explore children's experiences with poetry. In keeping with the goal of exploring and documenting children's experiences with poetry, a phenomenological research design was employed. In this chapter, I explain the rationale for the research design and justify the adoption of a qualitative paradigm. The role of the researcher and context of the study are described. Next, I specify criteria for selecting participants and delineate measures for their ethical protection. The chapter includes methods of data generation, analyses, and reporting procedures. Wrapping up this chapter is a brief synopsis of the exploratory study that influenced the choice of methods selected for this research.

The Qualitative Paradigm

Each researcher has entered their studies with their values, beliefs, and personal history, coloring and creating their perspective. What an individual wants to understand

about the world, the questions asked, and the research methods employed are shaped by their paradigm. It was with an interpretivist view of the world that I embarked on this quest to better understand children's experiences with poetry.

Qualitative research is the inquiry process chosen when the researcher is searching for a holistic picture of a social phenomenon in a natural setting. The goals of qualitative research are understanding, describing, contextualizing, interpreting, hypothesis generating, and meaning making. By nature, qualitative research is inductive. According to Merriam (1998), "Qualitative research is an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with as little disruption of the natural setting as possible" (p. 5). Similarly, Creswell (1998) proposed

Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting. (p. 15)

Qualitative research enables a researcher to gather threads of thought in order to weave an intricate tapestry of words that depict the complex nature of a human problem or social phenomenon.

According to Moustakas (1994), there are certain common features of qualitative research. Among these features is the focus on human experience. Experience is viewed as a whole rather than as isolated parts, which fits well with the systems theory paradigm discussed in chapter 2. Explanations and measurement are not the goals of the researcher

in qualitative research. Meaning and essence of experience are sought, leading to a greater understanding of human nature. The emphasis on human experience, which is viewed holistically in qualitative research, is the reason the qualitative paradigm was selected for the exploration of children's experiences with poetry.

Justification of a Phenomenological Study

Phenomenology, according to Merriam (1998) and Moustakas (1994), is an underlying philosophy of qualitative research. In justifying a phenomenological study it is important to distinguish the phenomenological method from the philosophy of phenomenology that permeates the qualitative paradigm. Van Manen (1990) asserted, "From a phenomenological point of view, to do research is always to question the way we experience the world, to want to know the world in which we live as human beings" (p. 5). As a philosophy, phenomenology is about experience.

The qualitative traditions of ethnography, case study, grounded theory, and phenomenology each uncover various aspects of human experience. Each of these traditions was considered for this study. The following research question guided the selection of the research methodology: How do children describe their experiences of poetry activities when they look back to their poetry experiences as third or fourth grade students?

Ethnographies focus on societies and cultures to describe or interpret group behaviors, perceptions, values, and beliefs (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Through extensive observation, formal and informal interviews, and the collection of artifacts, data about the cultural groups are collected. These data are then interpreted from a

sociocultural view. According to Merriam, “An ethnography is a sociocultural interpretation of the data” (1998, p. 14). Elements of a sociocultural view are present in this research; however there will not be a sociocultural interpretation of data. The goal of this research was to explore how children described their experiences with poetry activities, not to describe the behaviors and values of the group. Therefore, the ethnographic method was not selected as a research model for this study.

The case-study model was also considered for this research. Case studies are in-depth and detailed studies of a bounded system or a case (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Creswell suggested that “This bounded system is bounded by time and place, and it is the case being studied—a program, an event, an activity or individuals” (p. 61). Along the same lines, Anderson, Herr, and Nihlen (1994) asserted, “A case study is narrowly focused on a particular person, site, or scene” (p. 170). Case studies yield rich, holistic descriptions and analyses of single or multiple cases. Although holistic and rich descriptions and analyses were sought in this study, the purpose of the study was not to analyze or describe a particular event, program, activity, or individual. On these grounds, the case study model was rejected.

Grounded theory was another model considered for this research. “In this research approach, the focus initially is on unraveling the elements of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 4). However after these elements have been studied, grounded theory is focused on inductively developing a theory that is grounded in the real world or data from the field (Creswell, 1998; Merriam, 1998). Developing a theory was not the purpose of this study, and because of this, grounded theory was not pursued as the design for this study.

Phenomenological studies are concerned with understanding the basic structure or essence of experience about a phenomenon. Creswell (1998) suggested, “A phenomenological study describes the meaning of the lived experience for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon” (p. 51). The purpose of this study was to explore how elementary students describe the essence of their experiences during poetry activities. Therefore, a phenomenological design suited the purpose of this study.

Research Question

The following research question guided the body of this research: How do children describe their experiences of poetry activities when they look back to their poetry experiences as third or fourth grade students?

Interview Questions

1. What do you remember about poetry activities?
2. What do you remember about Poetry Break?
3. How would you describe Poetry Break?
4. What were your feelings about Poetry Break?
5. What do you remember about poetry writing?
6. How would you describe your experience of writing poetry as a third or fourth grader?
7. Why did you volunteer to perform poetry in a public setting?
8. What else would you like to share about your experiences with poetry?
9. How does the experience of poetry activities affect your ability to express yourself now?

10. What have you done with poetry since third or four grade?
11. (If copies of class constructed poems from the class the student was in are available, share the poetry with the participant.)What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?
12. (If copies of the participants original poetry are available, share the poetry with the participant.)What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?

Researcher's Role

According to Danaher and Broid (2005), “Phenomenological researchers cannot and should not try to avoid their own intentionalities. The phenomenon chosen, the questions asked, and the subjects approached, are all intentional acts” (p. 223).

Researchers influence studies whether this is explicitly stated or not. In order to illuminate the research questions and provide a “fuller phenomenological interpretation,” Danaher and Broid suggested writing anecdotes pertaining to the phenomenon that will be studied (2005, p. 224).

Recognition that a particular phenomenon exists is prerequisite to any phenomenological study. Over the past 14 years, in various school settings, I have been offering poetry experiences for my elementary school students. Conversations during chance meetings with former students have frequently involved student-initiated comments about poetry performing and writing. With all of the curriculum taught and activities offered, the overwhelming focus on Poetry Break left my curiosity piqued.

Adding to the intrigue, in recent years, some former students of both a grade-level team member and mine have found ways to leave their current classrooms in order to join

a 20-minute Poetry Break. Elementary age children are volunteering to read and perform poetry in front of a class that is not their own. Additionally, some students complain when Poetry Break is removed from the schedule, and child-led impromptu Poetry Breaks have been witnessed during indoor recesses. Over several years, these phenomena have been repeatedly observed in both my team member's classroom and my classroom and have elicited the wonder and amusement leading to this research.

I was more than the designer of the study. According to Merriam (1998), one of the characteristics of qualitative research is, "The researcher is the primary instrument for data collections and analysis" (p. 7). Graue and Walsh (1998) made a distinction between collecting data and generating data, asserting that,

Data are not "out there" to be collected by objective researchers. Instead, they come out of the researchers' interactions in a local setting, through relationships with participants, and out of interpretations of what is important to the questions of interest. (p. 73)

I generated data with emphasis on my role in the generating process. In this study, I conducted interviews with individual participants. Throughout the process, I analyzed the data, and at the conclusion of the study, through this dissertation, I presented the findings.

Dealing with Researcher Bias

Researchers' attitudes and beliefs cannot be removed from qualitative research; they can only be acknowledged, documented, and monitored (Graue & Walsh, 1998, p. 126). Researchers need to be sensitive to the biases and subjectivity inherent in qualitative research (Merriam, 1998, p. 22). To receive feedback and identify possible

bias, peer review and debriefing happened on a weekly basis during the research process. Written accounts and audio recordings of these sessions were kept on a password-protected computer. According to Creswell (1998), this process “keeps the researcher honest” (p. 202).

Sample and Population

The participants in this study were individuals who, at some point over the past 8 years, were members of third and fourth grade classes that included poetry activities as part of the daily and weekly routines. These classes were in a culturally diverse Title I elementary school where more than 73% of the student population hails from ethnic minority groups. Eighteen languages are spoken in the school. Participants for this study were purposefully selected to represent multiple ethnic groups. Students who were currently members of my class or over whom I had authority did not participate in the study.

Sampling Procedure

Former students were identified through class lists archived over the past 8 years by my grade-level team member and me. Individuals were invited to participate in this study through telephone contact (see Appendix A for the phone script). After initial contact, I distributed a consent form to be signed by the participant’s parent or guardian and an assent form to be signed by the participant. Telephone numbers and addresses were obtained through public directories. Individuals who returned the assent and consent forms through mail or in person were considered for this study.

Sample Size

According to Creswell (1998), long interviews with up to 10 participants is a suitable sample size for a phenomenological study. However, it was assumed that some children would not talk on the subject of poetry for an hour or more. Based on this information, 22 participants were included in the individual-interview portion of this study. Initially, 25 interview participants were recruited to account for likely attrition and interviews where the research questions were not answered.

Gaining Access to Participants

To work with students in the selected school district, I followed the district's research- and survey-approval process. The process included writing a proposal and filling out an application to conduct research. One of the requirements for conducting research in the selected district was that I worked with Walden University's Human Subjects Review Committee, and that the approval from the committee be attached to the application. Walden University also had applications for research that I filled out and submitted to the Walden University institutional review board (IRB). Walden University policy required me to gain assent to interview children through guardian signatures on consent forms. Participants were also asked to sign assent forms. Upon completion of the IRB process for Walden University, the application to conduct research was submitted to the selected district. Initially, my proposal included showing students videos of themselves reading poetry when they were in third or fourth grade. These videos were recorded with permission from parents and guardians for use during parent-teacher conferences. The school district approved the study with the condition that I not use the

videos because they were not recorded for the purpose of this study. Initially, I had planned to offer participants gift certificates for participating in the study, however the school district guidelines did not allow monetary compensation. Instead, participants were offered a book of their choice. In order to conduct interviews on school grounds, permission was received from site administrators to use the facilities.

Data Generation

According to Danaher and Broid (2005), there are no rules or procedures that must be applied universally in phenomenological research: “The unity of phenomenology is found, instead, in the manner that method is conceived in such close relation to the subject matter: meaningful experience” (p. 217). Although there are no universally applied procedures, formal and informal interviews have been the primary instruments for generating data in phenomenological studies. Freeman and Mathison (2009) asserted, “Interviewing may be the most ubiquitous data-collection strategy in the social sciences” (p. 87). It is through interviews that the researcher and participants can explore the essence of experience of a given phenomenon.

For this study, individual interviews were employed as data-generating instruments. Interviews have provided an opportunity for researchers to explore how people feel about events that have happened or are happening. They also provide a window to the perspective of others’ perceptions of reality (Anderson et al., 1994). Individual interviews have offered children and adolescents a chance to voice their thoughts, share experience or reflect on events, through a child–adult interaction (Freeman & Mathison, 2009, p. 88).

Interview Procedures and Ethical Protection of Participants

For individual interviews, participants were invited to meet me at my classroom or at their school at a time that was convenient for both the participant and me. At the time of the interview, the participants were reminded that their participation in the research was voluntary and that they had the power to terminate the interview at any time. The research and interview questions were shared with the child. If a poem the participant wrote was available, this was also shared with the participant.

During the interviews, I took notes. The sessions were audio recorded allowing me to listen to the sessions multiple times. I transcribed all interviews. Dates were documented for all interviews using an audit trail. To preserve confidentiality, I followed the procedures described in on my IRB application (approval number 04-15-10-0113802).

Method of Data Analysis and Structure of Narrative Report

Isolating thematic statements was the method of analysis for this research. Van Manen suggested three processes for isolating thematic statements: “the wholistic or sententious approach; the selective or highlighting approach; and the detailed or line-by line approach” (1990, p. 93). The wholistic and selective highlighting processes were used in order to analyze each interview. Interviews were analyzed first as a whole. Then each interview was viewed through its parts. Themes from multiple interviews were compiled in order to describe the essence of what children experience during poetry activities.

Using the wholistic approach, each interview was read in its entirety. Next, the overall essence of the interview was reduced to a single phrase. Once the essence of the interview has been generated, each audio recording was listened to again while the transcript was read in its entirety in order to construct a poem that captured the essence of each interview. I chose to distill the interviews into poems because poetry gets at the heart of experience. According to Faulkner (2007), “This observation about poetry as a means to enlarge understanding and move closer to what it means to be human elucidates the impulse of some researchers to use poetry as a means of representing research” (p. 218). The humanizing experiential nature of poetry is why I chose to include poetry as part of my research. However, as Lahman et al. (2010) pointed out,

Regarding representation of research, it is interesting to note a shift in concerns about research credibility seems to occur as soon as a researcher moves from representing data in prose to representing it in more aesthetic forms such as photos, drawings, or poetry. (p. 46)

Although poetry may not be a widely accepted as a means to represent research, the use of poetry is in keeping with the purpose of this study, which is to bring to light what children experience during poetry reading and writing.

Two poems were created for each interview. As Glesne (1999) pointed out, there is no rule for transforming interview transcripts into poetry. For the poems I created, I decided that only the words of the participant would be used. For the first poem I created for each interview, I used the method Aultman (2009) employed: I kept the order of the interview intact. In order to get at the essence of the individual’s poetry experience, I

removed words, and even entire sections of the interview. I added punctuation and line breaks and grouped the phrases into stanzas making sure that the meaning and essence of the interview was illuminated. For the second poem I used the method that Glesne (1999) and Carr (2003) employed: As I did in the first poem, I only used the words of the participant. I pulled phrases from anywhere in the text and juxtaposed them, as long as the meaning and voice of the participant remained intact. For both poems only the words of the participants were used; therefore, the poems were similar.

During and after the process of rendering individual interviews into poetry, thematic statements were isolated through a selective or highlighting approach, as described by van Manen (1990). Statements were isolated in order to uncover the essence of what children experience during poetry activities. While reading the transcripts, any phrases that stood out and seemed to be related to the phenomenon were highlighted.

Transcripts were read multiple times until the exploration of themes were exhausted. As Creswell (1998) suggested, these phrases were grouped into thematic units. Tables were created for each theme that emerged, and each interview was read in order to see if the theme was present in the interview. As themes emerged, notes were taken and the themes were compiled into phenomenologically sensitive paragraphs.

Exploratory Study

During the winter of 2008, an exploratory study focusing on children's experiences with poetry was conducted. Three participants from a Title I school were selected for the study, and individual interviews were conducted. The interview questions

presented in this proposal are a slightly modified version of the questions asked during the exploratory study.

In the exploratory study, interpretive poetics, described by Rogers, Casey, Ekert, and Holland (2005) in *Researching Children's Experience Approaches and Methods*, along with a modification of the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method of analysis of phenomenological data, described by Moustakas (1994), were employed in order to uncover the essence of what children experienced during poetry activities. Although both yielded descriptive information, it was determined that van Manen's (1990) phenomenological data analyses would be used for this study.

Summary

Phenomenological studies are designed to explore experiences. This study was crafted to give voice to what children experience during literacy activities focused on poetry. "The moral conviction behind this kind of research is that a deepened sense of children will translate into social relations among adults and children that are more humane for all" (Danaher & Broid, 2005, p. 233). In Chapter 4, I present the results of the study. Chapter 5 contains a discussion and conclusion of the results as well as recommendations for further research.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore what elementary students experience during literacy activities focused on poetry. Literacy activities such as Poetry Break have been observed to be an eagerly anticipated part of daily classroom rituals at a culturally diverse Title I school in Alaska. In this study, Poetry Break refers to a literacy activity in which children self-select poetry to read and, if they so choose, volunteer to perform a poetic piece for an audience of their peers. There are two parts to Poetry Break. The first part is required of all students. Students read or rehearse poems either by themselves or with a group. These can be poems they have written themselves, or poems from published poets. The second part of Poetry Break is optional. Students may volunteer to perform poetry for the class either by themselves or with a group. Poetry Break was a central focus of the interviews for this study, as participants were asked to reflect on their experiences with poetry.

Although there is not a set of fixed procedures for phenomenological research, van Manen (1990) suggested phenomenological research in the human sciences is a dynamic interplay of six research activities: investigating experience, reflecting on essential themes, describing an experience through writing and rewriting while balancing the research through considering the parts and whole of the research (pp. 30–31). In this chapter I describe the process I used to generate data, investigate experience, and reflect on essential themes. Findings are presented as data poems and essential themes that were constructed through the art of writing and rewriting. A discussion of quality is followed by the conclusion.

Data-Generating Process

Selection of Participants

Because this was a phenomenological study exploring how students described their experiences with poetry, participants were selected because they had participated in poetry activities when they were in third or fourth grade. In order to protect students, those who were currently members of my class, the grade level I teach, and over whom I had authority were not considered for the study. Using 8 years of chronicled class lists, a purposeful sample of 25 participants representing multiple ethnic groups was identified. See Table 1 for school demographic information.

Table 1

Student Ethnicity by Grade Range

	White	African American or Black	Alaska Native or American Indian	Asian or Pacific Islander	Hispanic	Multiethnic
Third to fifth grade	22%	9%	7%	36%	11%	15%

I used public records including the local telephone directory and Internet searches to find telephone numbers in order to contact the parents or guardian of the possible participants. Contact information on four of the students originally identified was not available through public records, so four more students were identified as potential participants.

For seven of the participants, I saw the parents in person before I started making phone calls: I told these parents about the study and let them know I would be contacting

them by phone. Phone calls were made to the parents and guardians of the 25 potential participants, and if they agreed and the student was interested in participating in the study, I offered to mail the consent form to the participant's home. Although my initial plan included using the U.S. mail service, all of the parents and guardians wanted me to send the consent form using e-mail, they wanted me to send the form home with the student, or they said they would sign the form at the time of the interview. For the families that wanted the form through e-mail, I explained that the consent form would need to be printed out and signed before I would be able to meet with the student. It was agreed that forms e-mailed or sent home with students would be returned at the time of the interview. In some cases, however, students visited my classroom and brought me signed consent forms before we had an agreed official time and location for the interview. These forms were collected and kept in a locked cabinet.

Interviews

Times and locations for interviews were made through face-to-face contact, follow up e-mails, and phone calls with parents and participants. Although I offered to meet with students at their current schools, all participants wanted to come back and visit their alma mater.

Interviews were conducted before school, after school, and on teacher in-service days over the course of 4 months in the fall of 2010. Of the 25 students invited to participate in the study, 22 returned consent forms and scheduled interviews. Before each interview started, I went over the assent form with the participant and answered

questions. Once the participant's initial questions had been answered, the participant signed the assent form.

Before I started the interview, I encouraged participants to ask questions and ask for clarification if they did not understand a question. I reminded the participants that the interview was completely voluntary and that they could stop the interview at any time. I also reminded the participants that the interview was completely confidential, and I asked the participants if they would like to pick the name I would use for them in my paper. If students did not choose a name, I picked one for them from characters in literature.

Participants were reminded that the interviews would be audio recorded. I explained that I would be the only person to listen to the interview and that I would be typing up, word for word, everything the participant said in order to use the participants' words to describe what they experienced during poetry. I reminded the participants that this research was about what they remember, think, and feel about poetry.

System for Record Keeping of Generated Data

Throughout the duration of this study, field notes were kept using a laptop computer with word processing. I also kept a handwritten journal for reflections and notes. In order to assure security, the laptop was password protected, and the journal was kept in a locked file cabinet. Phone logs were kept, recording the dates and times of the telephone contacts of potential participants. Scheduled interview dates and times were kept on a calendar on my personal computer.

When assent forms and consent forms were received at my school, they were kept in a locked file cabinet. At the end of the day, I took them home and put them in a locked file cabinet.

During the interview process, field notes were taken both in a journal and on a copy of the interview questions. After each interview, the script with notes was inserted in the journal. Field notes included gestures, sounds, and impressions that might not have been picked up through the audio recording. During interviews, I kept my writing to a minimum in order to focus on what the participants were saying. After the participant left, I wrote a brief reflection of the interview to capture my impressions and thoughts at that moment.

Audio recordings were generated of all interviews. To assure that the interview audio was clearly captured, two, and on some occasions, three audio-recording devices were used. The audio was recorded in both WinMedia format and MP3. After each interview, the files were downloaded to my password-protected laptop.

Verbatim transcripts of each interview were created from the audio recordings (see Appendix B for a sample transcript). Microsoft Word was used to type the transcript of each interview, and the interview was saved in a file using the participant's pseudonym.

Data Analyses

Using the holistic approach suggested by van Manen (1990), I listened to the audio recording of each interview in its entirety, and the entire interview transcript was

read multiple times for each interview. Next, the overall essence of the interview was reduced to a single phrase.

Then, audio recording and transcripts for each participant were reviewed multiple times in order to construct poems that highlighted what each participant experienced during poetry activities. The poems were constructed using only the words of the participants. However, in some cases, in order to group thoughts on a theme, meaningful phrases may have been moved.

Throughout the process of poem construction, thematic statements were identified through the selective highlighting described by van Manen (1990) and grouped into the thematic units recommended by Creswell (1998). In order to track the presence of specific themes in each interview, a table was created. Transcripts were read again and information was recorded on the table. Notes were taken on themes as they emerged and descriptive paragraphs for each theme were developed.

Participant Profiles, Essential Phrases, and Poetic Rendering

In this section participants are introduced and an essential phrase and poetic rendering of each interview are offered. Participant profiles and poems are presented by participant grade level, from youngest to oldest. In each grade level, participants are introduced in alphabetical order by their pseudonym. Participant demographic information is displayed in Table 2.

Table 2

Grade, Ethnicity, and Bilingual Ability for Each Participant

Participants	Grade level	Ethnicity	Bilingual
Cherry Lee	5	Hmong	Yes
Chia Shi	5	Hmong	Yes
Eliza	5	Caucasian/Hispanic	No
Isabel	5	Hispanic	No
Jakia'it	5	Hmong	Yes
Joachim	5	Native Alaskan	Yes
Kitty	5	Caucasian	No
Lilly	5	Hmong	Yes
Rose	5	Hispanic/Native Alaskan	Yes
Shao Yeng	5	Hmong	Yes
Tyler	5	Caucasian	No
Xia	5	Hmong	Yes
Jillian	6	Hmong	Yes
Maya	6	African American/Caucasian	No
Demetrio	6	Hispanic	Yes
Alice	7	Caucasian	No
Ruby	7	African American	No
Sabastian	7	Filipino	Yes
Ariel	9	African American/Caucasian	No
Leilani	9	Pacific Islander	Yes
Willow	10	Caucasian	No
John	12	African American	No

For each participant, the poem offered is the version I wrote that most clearly spoke to the essence of the participant's experience. In the first poems I wrote, I used the method Aultman (2009) employed: I kept the order of the interview intact; in order to get at the essence of the individual's poetry experience, I removed words and even entire

sections of the interview. Poems written with this method are labeled *Form A*. The second poems I created were written using the method that Glesne (1999) and Carr (2003) employed: I only used the words of the participant in the poem as I pulled phrases from anywhere in the text and juxtaposed them, keeping the meaning and voice of the participant intact. Poems written using this method are labeled *Form B*. Regardless of the method chosen, each poem contains only the words of the participant.

Cherry Lee

Cherry Lee was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been a student in my fourth-grade class. She was a bright, hard working, and dedicated student who was eager to learn. According to Poetry Break sign up books, Cherry Lee volunteered to read poetry on a regular basis. Cherry Lee is Hmong and speaks both Hmong and English. At Poetry Break, if the group Cherry Lee was working with included struggling readers who spoke Hmong, she would, in Hmong, explain the meaning of poems to the other students.

“I *love* writing poetry,” was the essence of Cherry Lee’s interview. One could hear the pride in her voice as she talked about her experiences with poetry.

Cherry Lee’s Poem (Form B)

You gave me a poetry book
 Yeah I remember when we were doing poetry
 At first I was sooo shy to read
 Then Mai Chee said it’s okay
 I start reading
 Then it was fun to do

Um I remember
 That it was sort of fun for me
 I don’t know about other people’s opinion
 But my opinion is that it’s fun
 Sometimes you will get shy too

I remember I was too shy
We were having a party of Poetry Break
I was shy
That's how I remember
My mom was coming
But they just told me
Because my mom was busy

Mai Chee said it's fun
So I just say okay
She say lets do it today
So I just agree
Because if we're friends
And I don't listen to her
She won't really want to be my friend
Yeah but it's okay for me
Because she's my friend
She's good for me

One time
Do you remember
The page that I write
The sun shining on my face
We were in nature
She corrected a lot
It made the poetry just amazing for me
That was my favorite page in the whole book
Also in nature
We are going outside
And we are discovering nature
I love writing poetry

I remember when we were in class
I write
"I would give you a bowl of wishes
But what if they were gone"
My sister liked that one
Yeah

It just makes me think of peaceness
Like you know
I'm peace already
Like I'm just joining the world

For me
I feel like that

It will be hard
If you don't really know how to speak English
It was hard for me
Yeah
It was fun sometimes

It makes me think of the old time
In fourth grade
And liked writing
I think 'cause you say
It's no right or wrong
So I just guess and guess
I still remember
The bowl of wishes
I remember that paper
Yeah
I thought of that idea
Just wrote it
That's my favorite one

Yeah poetry can be fun
If you like reading
If you like reading rhythms
Yeah on writing there's no right and wrong
It's just your mind thinking
Yeah what you think is right
If you think of anything that is fun
Or like fun to read
Just write it

When we were first starting our writing poetry
Yeah I wasn't that good
Then you guys said
We are going to write
You know my poems got better

My sister Sang said
Oh I like everything that you wrote on your poem book
I said, "You can have my book"
She said, "Oh really!"
And she was happy

She said
 When I read your poems
 It just makes me in love with it
 Like that
 And it just makes me feel so happy
 Like that

Chia Shi

Chia Shi was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in my fourth-grade class. Chia Shi is Hmong, and she speaks both Hmong and English. She was a very quiet student who was incredibly hard-working. Although she was quiet most of the time, she would volunteer to read poems at Poetry Break almost every day.

“Shy and fun,” was the essence of Chia Shi’s interview.

Chia Shi’s Poem (Form B)

When you perform
 It’s like kind of like scary
 You’re kind of like shy
 When you get more into it
 It’s not that scary anymore
 Then you can always perform
 Whenever you want

Sometimes it’s hard to get into groups
 ‘Cause sometimes you’re just shy
 You don’t want to go up by yourself
 When you try to find a group
 They already have like enough in the group
 So you’re just left out
 You just don’t want to do it
 So you just don’t want to sign up

When you do find people
 It’s really hard to find a poem
 ‘Cause all of us don’t like the same poems
 So when you find your group
 And you find a poem
 Then like you always want it to be your turn

Because you don't like waiting

You feel like writing poetry...

You feel like writing poems

But when it's about sharing

You're always shy

You can write as many poems as you want

But then if the teacher says you were supposed to perform

At least one

You would be really shy

Shy

Embarrassed

Sometimes scared

In fourth grade it was fun

Have fun

Just to like take out your wiggles

It's also challenging when the words are hard

Like when you need rhyming stuff

You could just think of poetry

Write poems and share them

At school

Not at fifth grade

We don't do much writing

I write them but...

Like

Like whenever I have nothing to do

I just randomly write

I look around my room

Whatever I see I just write about

It's fun

Poetry Break is fun

It's just like our time

You can spend time reading them

And have fun with them

Eliza

Eliza was in fifth grade at the time of the interview, and she had been in my fourth-grade class. She was bright, cheerful, and intelligent. She was very social, and she

seemed to enjoy having the opportunity to visit with her friends whenever she could.

When she was in my class, Eliza volunteered to read poetry regularly, and as a fifth-grade student, she visited both Mr. Mah's and my class during her recess in order to participate in Poetry Break.

"It's really fun to like express what you're feeling," was the essence Eliza's interview.

Eliza's Poem (Form B)

We used to do Poetry Break
 Sometimes I would make up my own poems
 Read them to the class
 It would be fun
 There were these singing books
 Where instead of just reading it normal
 You would sing it in a tune

It's fun
 I like when we get to do it in a group
 With other kids
 Different kids
 Instead of just the same people

In Poetry Break you had to do it
 In expressions
 'Cause sometimes you wouldn't understand
 What they're talking about
 Or what they meant
 So instead of saying it normal
 They would say it loud
 Or funny
 Or happy
 Or sad
 So they would get the poem better

Yeah
 I wanted to do it again
 Because it's really fun
 And see the other kids do it too

I wanted to show people
What poetry's about
Read different poems

You would be able to make up your own
Write it in your poetry journal
Read it to the class
It was really fun
If we messed up
We wouldn't be like just erase it all
And write a different one
We would write the same topic
But different words

We would write poems
The "I would give you poems"
Give them to our parents
We would type them up on the computer
I worked hard
I remember just writing an example
"I would give you a frisbee of light"
Instead of writing why
And what it might do
I remember writing that
Then rewriting it
Then fixing it
I worked hard and it was fun
It's pretty good
Yeah

But
Sometimes when I have nothing to do
At home
I like get my book
And I write poetry
So I write a poem
Um it doesn't matter
It's like if I just got done doing something
I'd probably write about that

More often we should write it in class
We should write more poems
We should write it more often
It's really fun

To express what you're feeling

Isabel

Isabel was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and she had been a very active and social student in my fourth-grade class. She struggled with reading and writing; however, she appeared eager to perform poetry several times each week. Isabel is Hispanic.

“Proud and awesome,” was the essence of Isabel’s experience with poetry activities.

Isabel’s Poem (Form A)

I remember
 We used to stand up there
 Do acting and poetry acting out
 Everybody used to go up and perform
 Like every single day
 If they wanted to

Signing up for poetry
 Poetry tellers
 Call their names up
 Go up there and perform

A person goes up there
 Acts out
 Like the person who wrote the poetry

My feelings
 Awesome and shy
 When I went up there
 The first time

My feelings were kinda like
 Feeling awesome
 Up there on stage
 Up there on the carpet
 Everyone kept looking at me

Proud and awesome

Poetry writing
Was good too
I love writing
Writing poetry too

Oh
My feelings about it
Are like being quiet and calm
You can write faster doing that
And that's how I felt in fourth grade
How I did it

I have done writing at home
Doing poetry since I remember from fourth grade
Typing on the computer
Printing it out
Writing about the holidays
Stuff like that
I have been writing about
The moose
The summer vacation

Poetry is awesome
You should write about it

I volunteered
I wanted to get up there
Do actions and poetry
Stuff like that
Do it with my friends too
I wish I could do it again

Right now
I feel like I'm going to get up
And do poetry
Because it was fun last year

Jakia'it

Jakia'it, who picked this pseudonym because it means “the sun shining very brightly,” was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in Mr. Mah's

fourth-grade class. She was a cheerful and social student who frequently expressed her enjoyment of school. Her concern for the welfare of her friends was evident. Jakia'it is Hmong and speaks both English and Hmong.

“Poetry is a fun exciting thing to do,” was the essence of Jakia'it interview.

Jakia'it's Poem (Form A)

Poetry
A fun exciting thing to do
Reading
A really fun activity
Impressed with poetry

In California
Poetry wasn't really
Popular
I came over here
Learned all about poetry
How fun it is to do

Poetry Break
A break where you
Could just leave everything down
Go to the carpet
Just try to have fun
We could read
Have fun
Make
Do poetry
Sign up
Come up to the stage or a crowd
Then just read
At the end we don't clap
We snap

Poetry Break is
A fun and easy thing to do
If you're bored
Just grab a book
A poetry book
Just read

Poetry Break
It's really really
Fun to do
Instead of keeping
Your feelings to your heart
You could just split it
Bounce it out on the paper
If it's private
Then don't say it
But if it's something
You really want to say
Make it on the paper
Try to make it into poetry
Then just spit it out
Out of your mouth

I remember that Mr. Mah
Asked the Hmong students
To write Hmong poetry
We did
We actually performed it

I experienced that it was fun
Easy to do
You could really meet new people
Write
Compare to each other
If you have something in common

I performed because
I want to show everybody
Poetry is a fun thing to do
You should really try it

Impress how fun it is
Impress people to not be shy
It's just fun
People looking at you
You don't need
To look at them
You can just look at the book
Just read
And then

When it's over
Just take a deep breath
Just go sit back down

Express
When I'm sad
Write poetries to my friends

I write poetry because it is so fun
Whenever I stay home
My mom's still watching movies
Instead of reading a book
I just take a pencil
Just keep on writing
Poetries

I still do
I still just pick up the pencil and I write
Because when I write it
It makes me feel good
It makes me remember the times
When I'm in fourth grade
Everyone was reading the poems

You should really try it
If you try it
When you're sad
You can write about it
Get together
Explore many new things
You could explore
You could explore
Sound poetry
Where they have one to two players to read
You could explore

When you say it
Sometimes
You may have already read it
But when you read it
You feel like
When you read it
That feeling is in your soul
Right now

It feels like you feel
 Right now
 It's really um nice

Pleasure
 We actually get
 Poetry Break
 Because in fifth grade
 No more

Joachim

Joachim was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in my fourth-grade class. Prior to that, he lived in rural Alaska. In the beginning of the year, he was rather shy; however, he tended to make friends quickly. He was reluctant to write; however, when he did write he was incredibly creative. According to Poetry Break sign-up books, he volunteered to read at least three times each week. Joachim is Native Alaskan. At the time of the interview, Joachim was dealing with a family tragedy and the overall tone of the interview was subdued.

It was difficult to identify an essence for Joachim's interview because he answered most of the questions with "I don't remember."

Joachim's Poem (Form A)

I don't remember anything
 I don't remember it that much
 I don't know
 I don't know

Well I do remember it
 But I don't know

I mostly remember the field trips
 Going swimming
 Mostly going to
 The Performing Arts Center

Weird
 Not very good writing
 Yeah
 Not really
 Not really

Kitty

Kitty was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in my fourth-grade class. I remember Kitty as a bright, creative, and imaginative fourth-grade student. She volunteered to perform poetry almost every day. She would rush in from recess and not want to get her coat off, because she was eager to get to the poetry books and sign up to perform. She frequently created props to go with her performances. During conversations with Kitty and through the interview process, she reminded me that she had been required to attend anger-management classes and sessions because she was not able to express herself or deal with her anger in appropriate ways. Kitty is Caucasian, and her aunt is raising her.

“It made my feelings come out,” was the essence of Kitty’s interview.

Kitty’s Poem (Form B)

You would sign up for Poetry Break
 There would be the
 What-cha-ma-all-it, the host
 That would read your name
 Sometimes you could go up with a partner
 Sometimes you could go up independent
 Or with a group of three, four and so on
 When we did go up there
 Sometimes
 People would have these poems
 Be doing hand motions with them
 At the end of every performance
 When they are done

We would snap

Well usually I would be very ecstatic
 About Poetry Break
 Everyday
 Because I would be thinking
 About what kind of props I would put in it
 To make it seem realistic
 Like I was the person that made the poetry myself
 Usually I would find people that were doing the same poetry
 And didn't know what kind of props they wanted
 I would join their group to help them

There would be some books that I would want to pick out
 Because I would look at two poems
 Choose one for today
 One for tomorrow
 During the performances though
 It's like one time chance
 One time chance only

Well, I never did feel shy
 Poetry Break seemed a very fun thing to do
 I really, really liked it
 And it didn't depend if I was first
 Or last
 Sometimes I would always be last
 But I didn't care really
 As long as I got up there and performed for everybody
 It makes me feel glad to entertain people
 Make them laugh

Well sometimes
 I would be thinking
 And usually I'd sit down for maybe one minute
 Listen to what other groups are saying
 If I hear a poetry that I'm doing
 I will immediately go and do something different
 Because I do not want it to be exactly the same
 And the audience to be bored

When we would write them
 First we would brainstorm
 We would use ideas

Thoughts that may have happened
But if we were writing a fantasy
Maybe something that we've heard before

In my mind
I become very creative about poetry
I love poetry so much
It just makes me happy
Like say I'm sad
And you tell me to write poetry
Give me a pencil and I start writing

It would be very quiet
And... well...
We would get our books out
I would brainstorm some
Then sometimes
Depending on what my feeling is
That's what I'll be writing about
If I'm feeling angry
There's lightning in the clouds
If I'm happy
It's a very sunny day
With moose and bears and butterflies

Sometimes there would be moose out there
Usually I would go take a look
Something would pop up into my head

If you find it out
You should write some brainstorming ideas
Pull out words
Make a poem
It would be easy
'Cause to me
I think about nature
Dragons
Pull words out
Make poems
And it would always turn out a perfect poem

A bit hard to think
Because I would have the same ideas
I would want to make something different everyday

But if I'm having a difficult day
I would sit down
Calm myself down
Do some poetry
Make myself feel better

Well, before that I would never get up for anything
Would usually just be plain
Independent
Barely ever talk
I wouldn't do anything
I didn't really even know what poetry was
But when you started teaching me how to do poetry
It made my feelings come out
Because it expressed how I was feeling so much
And it didn't make me feel independent
Or lonely anymore
I really love poetry so much
My aunt knows that
That's how I come up with poetry so easily

I could poetry write out of thin air
I mean that literally
I will talk about thin air

Sometimes I will write anger poems
But that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm angry
I can be angry and write a really mean poem
I can be really happy
Write something way beyond fantasy
Like a moose with wings
Flying in the sky

I'd write a mean poem to take my anger out
Then I'd look at it and I cheer myself up
Because I would be like
Wow! I'm that angry
Wow!
What in the world

I went to that group at like 2:00
Like sometimes
Half way through poetry and I wouldn't get to do it
Sometimes a little sad

Sometimes I'm like, "Do I really have to go?"
Ugh

Well
Doing it sometimes with you
Would make me feel like I'm not independent
I can do this
It made my self-goals
Get stronger and stronger

Doing that sometimes
Would make me think about math
Math would make me think about science
Science would make me think about reading
And reading would make me think about poetry
The weirdest stuff can make me think about poetry

Lilly

Lilly was in fifth grade at the time of the interview, and she had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class. According to Poetry Break sign-up books from when she was in Mr. Mah's class, Lilly volunteered to read at least three times each week. Lilly is Hmong, and she speaks both Hmong and English.

The feeling that poetry was "exciting" was the essence of Lilly's interview.

Lilly's Poem (Form A)

I remember
You had to practice first
Practice then write it
Somebody
Call our name
Go up
Read the book
Done
They have to snap

Feeling happy and excited

Kind of shy

When I was on the stage
A little shy
And
A little happy

I want to know how to
Know how to read the book
I need to practice
Read faster

What I would like to share on poetry is
Poetry is not that hard
To read faster
Not slow
I want to read
About the book
Feelings

Only back in fourth grade
I remember some of the people
Getting their ideas
Raising their hand
Excited that time
I'm still thinking about how
The sentence makes sense
How to write faster
My own poems
And other people's poems too

I want to say
That poetry is fun
Taught you how to read faster
When you write poetry
Taught you how to write faster

Rose

Rose was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class last year. She was shy and quiet, choosing not to speak often, even with her peers. Yet, she volunteered to read at Poetry Break nearly every day.

Occasionally, as a fifth grade student, she chose to visit Mr. Mah's class and perform at

Poetry Break, rather than going out to recess. Rose is of a racially mixed background. Her mother is Native Alaskan, and her father is Hispanic.

“Happy and exciting,” was the essence of Rose’s interview.

Rose’s Poem (Form A)

It’s fun
Reading funny poems
The other kids laughing
We read it in front of the audience

It made it fun
Because we get to read it
You get to practice it
Then you get to read it
In front of everybody
Happy

My Auntie and them wanted to see me
Because it’s fun reading the poems
Poetry is fun and funny to read

Read it
At school
When I come down
To Margolo’s room

When Mr. Mah told us
We could come down to his class
Then we started reading poetry
With the other kids
We could come down
During recess
If we want to
We started going down
We read poetry
Happy and exciting

Shao Yeng

Shao Yeng was in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class and had been in fifth grade at the time of the interview. She was cheerful and outgoing. She is Hmong and speaks both Hmong and English. She frequently participated in Poetry Break by joining with her friends to perform a poem. As a fifth-grade student, she asked to come back to the fourth-grade class to participate in Poetry Break whenever she could.

"It's lots of fun, and you have friends to read with you too." was the essence of Shao Yeng's interview. Although the interview only lasted 8 minutes, fun was a recurring theme.

Shao Yeng's Poem (Form A)

It's lots of fun
 You have friends to read with you too
 That's it

Poetry Break
 You pick your own page
 To read with your friend
 Or read your own one

You had to sign your name on the book
 Then after they call your name
 You go on the stage
 Say the poem

I would tell a person
 Poetry is fun
 You can read with other people
 You can make like dance
 Like noise
 Whatever you like
 You could do a play
 Up on the stage

Fun happy and glad

We write our own
 Then after that
 You could make it sound
 Like it's in a real poetry

It was kinda hard
 When I write
 Because I think a lot

If you do it then
 You make fun
 You have fun
 You're not bored like other people
 They don't want to

I'll say that poetry will be
 Fun and exciting

Excited disappointed sad mad
 In our house
 Write about poetry
 Then next day
 Bring it
 Read it to the class
 To make my feelings
 My sad feeling out

Tyler

Tyler was in fifth grade at the time of the interview, and had been in my fourth-grade class. He was a creative young man who wanted to spend most of his day working by himself and drawing. However, at Poetry Break, he would volunteer to read to the class and work with his peers. Tyler is Caucasian.

“It's about fun,” was the essence of Tyler's interview.

Tyler's Poem (Form B)

Someone signed
 That's if you wanted to do it

But if you didn't want to do it you still had to read
Everybody just had five minutes to practice
They all went over and went down the list
Like Hattie was first on the list
The fabulous Hattie do your poem
And then it was me
Tyler
The wonderful Tyler
Come do your poem
We had the people who read the list down
They had to say something good about that person
And they could read a poem too

I did that sloppy poem
Where there's that guy who's sloppy
I remember that I wasn't just doing whatever poem I wanted
I was going from like page one
To page two
To page three
But then everybody was like
"Why don't you just do a poem?"
I was like, "Yeah, I know right?"
'Cause there were all these really weird poems

I'm trying to picture everybody there
Hearing everybody go
Whoo! Yeah!
Whoo! Yeah!
Oh, yeah! They snapped!
Yeah!
Give us some poetry love!

Fun
Oh yeah
Learningful
I'm not scared of going up in front of people
In front of a lot of people
I could go up in front of the whole school
I wouldn't be stage fright
It's fun

Well it makes more social I guess
I mean having everybody listen to each other
Sit by each other

Talk and stuff

We get to write a poem of our own
 Then we would type it on the computer
 I made a Halloween one
 Made another one
 We made fall poems
 And I think we made Christmas poems

Before I couldn't really do poems
 Now I can
 Like show my feelings better
 Like before I didn't know how to describe as good
 Like I'm happy right now...
 I'm so fabulostically happy right now

In fact
 My mom put a picture of me
 And that poem
 In a picture holder
 She put it right by the T.V.
 Love
 Goodness
 It made me happy that my mom was happy

I have talked about it
 And well
 We don't really do much poetry
 In fifth grade
 Yeah
 It kinda sucks

It's not just writing or for money
 It's a lot of like emotion involved
 Poetry's easy
 I feel like people shouldn't think poetry is all about
 Um...
 Well poetry is fun
 It's about fun
 Kind of
 A part of it is about fun
 It's also about expression
 Yeah

You don't even have to rhyme
 But it's best to rhyme
 Because it sounds way more better
 'Cause you don't have to rhyme
 To make poetry
 Life is poetry
 Because everything you say is kind of poetry

Xia

Xia was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class. According to Poetry Break sign-up books from when he was in Mr. Mah's class, Xia volunteered to read at least three times each week. Xia is Hmong, and he speaks both Hmong and English.

Poetry is "fun and funny" was the essence of Xia's interview.

Xia's Poem (Form A)

I like to write about poems
 They are fun and funny
 Poetry is like fun to read
 For us to read
 And the rest of the class to listen
 I like to write poetry
 About things that are funny and cool
 'Cause people like to read poems
 About funny and cool things

Poetry activities
 Fun and cool
 You got to be the one
 Who will stand up
 Read to the classroom
 Listen
 And after that
 Sit
 And then they snap

Poetry Break
 Is when you sit

And you get a break
To read poetry to classes
Your classmates listen
And after that
You had a break
And you have to go back to work

I always laughed
When I found poetry books that I like
Funny
I would laugh so hard
That I couldn't even stop the laughter

Think
Look outside
Fall or summer
Write about them
Poetry
You make poetries
You write poems
About what you see and think

It's fun to read poetry
In front of everybody
For like fun
Make everybody know poetry
And poems

When you write
Then you think of something
And then you write
And that makes your feelings out

I've done writing at home
About the summer
What I did
Some fall things
That I saw outside
Take what I saw
Add some information
Write into my journals
In my poetry journals
Done
Put them away

Outside to look at it again

When I get mad
 I write about
 Why I get mad
 What
 Who made me mad
 And I feel happy
 Wrote what I did
 And I feel happy

When I was in fourth grade
 Me and my friends
 Were writing poems together

Jillian

Jillian was in fifth grade at the time of the interview and had been in my fourth-grade class. She was a hard-working student who seemed to enjoy school. She frequently volunteered to read poetry. She is Hmong and speaks both Hmong and English.

“It’s fun,” was the essence of Jillian’s interview.

Jillian’s Poem (Form A)

We did a lot of typing
 Of poetry
 A lot of writing
 When we got back from field trips
 We did a little Poetry Break
 We read a lot of poetry books

Kids
 Whoever wants to
 Sign up
 And do Poetry Break
 Pick out a book
 Get probably five minutes
 Practice
 Then they go up
 Perform it
 In front of the class

Some poetry books
Were funny and fun to read
Something fun
You could do everyday
Mostly do
With your class

I was in fourth grade
I did poetry
I felt I could just be free
Write things
That are on my mind

We did a lot of poetry writing
And reading
When we were done writing
We had to do a final draft
Type it up

When we do poetry writing
I could like be myself
Write what I feel inside
Or just write something funny
That I remember

It was fun doing it
I enjoy reading poetry books
And writing
I just like volunteering

My class
We had good poetry books
We had good teachers
That know how to write poetry

I've become a better reader
Know how to like
Speak better English
Knowing my words and my vocabulary

I think I improved a lot
From doing a lot of writing
It was fun doing these

We would like do it everyday
 Mostly everyday
 Our poetry journals
 Would almost fill up
 We had like a couple pages left
 It was fun in your class doing poetry

It's really good
 Like you could learn a lot of things
 Learn more words
 Know more of your vocabulary
 And have like ideas and things

In front of an audience
 You could show them
 That it's really fun
 And they could like try
 Volunteer and do poetry too
 One day

Maya

Maya was a sixth-grade student in middle school at the time of the interview.

Maya had been in my fourth-grade class. She was outgoing and energetic. She seemed more focused on the social aspects of school than on academics. Poetry Break sign-up records indicate that Maya volunteered to read poetry to the class almost everyday. She comes from a mixed racial background. Her mother is Caucasian, and her father is African American.

“Do anything,” was the essence of Maya’s poetry experience.

Maya’s Poem (Form A)

Teaches you literature
 Fun
 Expresses yourself
 Tells other people
 It's okay
 Just get on stage

Do anything

Poetry is a chance
You can get your friends together
Just do a random skit
Yeah

Fun
Entertaining
Excitement
Joyful
That feeling where
I didn't want it to end

If I was having a bad day
I would always think
Poetry Break is coming
So don't worry about it
Really happy

It's easy
I mean
I use to think it was hard
But
All you do is just think
About your similarities
To other peoples writing
Just throw it on paper
Cool

The time that I didn't have
A specific thing to write about
I kinda just wrote about
Anything I wanted
I kinda made up
My own characters in the poetry
Showed other people my writing
Without getting
Oh that sucks
Because it's my writing

Just show people my moves
How I'm cool like that
I can just go on stage

Just be like
Yeah

Poetry isn't just like
Oh the leaves outside fell on the ground
It doesn't have to be slow
It taught me how
It doesn't have to be all slow and smooth
You know
It could have some rhythm and beats to it
You could actually just have
Like a certain tone to it
You don't have to read it
Just like your reading a book

I wasn't really shy or anything
To do it in classes
Because there were
All sorts of people doing it
Everybody was doing it
So there was nothing to be shy about
Me
I don't care what other people think
'cause I mean
I wasn't the only weird person
In the room at that time
There was all sorts of people
Weird
Crazy

Poetry
It's not a place where you can read
Like you're reading a book
It's a place to show
Your feelings and your emotions

I didn't think poetry did anything in life
But it actually helps with a lot of things
Like learning words
In language arts is it gives you hints to words
Things that you wouldn't think you'd know
But, you do

Poetry doesn't have to be something boring

Where you have to sit at your desk all day
And just like read it on a piece of paper
It can be something where you can get up
And just show everybody
What you can do

Don't be afraid
Just go up on stage
In front of somebody and just talk
I mean that helped a lot
In life
Just made me
Not shy of anything

Made me want to get
My emotions and my heart
Out there to other people
Just tell them
Hey
This is some cool stuff
This is the cool beans right here
You gotta get a spoon and eat it
It's not nothing nasty, it's good

I mean
You got to get your point across to people
Because if you're shy
It's not going to get you anything
You have to keep trying
If you want something
You have to go for it

Poetry's not something that anybody
Can make fun of
Because it's somebody else's writing
It's not a test
It's not something on the SBA's
It's your mind
Your thoughts
Things that I thought about

It's not wrong or right
If you do poetry
There's not a wrong

Or a right
Answer to your writing
It matters if you did it
And how you felt about it

I've told people a lot about my writing
I've thought about
Joining other groups
Clown Club and talent shows
Stuff like that
Because Poetry Break
Just helps you out
You can do this on stage
You can do anything
Just go up there
Completely do anything

I'm involved with a lot of things
It's funny
Because I just started out
With a piece of paper on stage
In front of my class
And it got me far

Creative
I remember writing it
I mean
I think wow
I was in fourth grade
And I wrote this
And people that are in sixth grade now
Think that it is so hard
To get a piece of paper and a pencil
And write a rhyme, a rap, any writing
But I was in fourth grade and I wrote that
And that shows a lot

Don't give up
Keep trying
I did that

I remember when I was in fourth grade
I would be sitting at my desk
I'd get really mad

Because I didn't know what to write
 And what I think now
 Is that I just didn't try
 If you try you get really far

When I stepped up to the plate and tried
 I mean I wrote it
 I did it
 I typed it up and everything
 And it worked
 And here I am two years from that time
 Talking about it

I look at it now
 And I'm like
 That's a lot
 Whoa
 Oh my gosh
 Back then that time it was nothing
 Now it's like art
 And there's writing
 There's literature
 I mean
 I could show that to somebody
 And actually teach them something from it

Demetrio

Demetrio was a sixth-grade student in middle school at the time of the interview; he had been in my fourth-grade class. Looking back at Demetrio as a fourth-grade student, I remember a humorous young man who enjoyed being the center of attention. Demetrio is Hispanic.

“Awesome,” was the essence of Demetrio’s interview.

Demetrio’s Poem (Form A)

In fourth grade
 With my friends
 We had a little journal
 Wrote our name

Like Ms. Cat Women
 Or Boo Boo
 Or something
 We used to sing and say our poetry names
 Say the poetry in the poetry book
 We could have partners
 Sometimes
 We would usually act it out
 Sometimes
 Say it like in different voices
 I said it in like a little teenage girl voice
 I think the poem was called "The Doctor"

Awesome amazing inspiring
 A lot of things
 It's like boom bam pow
 It's like awesome
 It's like words I can't say
 Because I don't know how to say them
 But it's like awesome

Happy
 Kids
 It's going to be awesome
 I'm going to tell them
 It's going to be awesome

Awesome
 Writing and thinking about poetry
 You have to get one topic
 Write about it
 Things that inspire you
 You could write about that

Black was my favorite color
 So I wrote about that
 Like black is the color of my hair
 And stuff like that
 It's cool

You can write a lot of things
 Like rainbows and stuff
 Pink and purple and blue
 Colors

And animals
And stuff

I'm good with small crowds
Not big crowds
'Cause then it's kind of scary
Like when I was little
I would do that all the time
In front of small crowds
It's like a monster in your closet
When you're little
Performing in front of big crowds
Not small crowds
Like the classroom

It's kind of fun
When you can act it out and be yourself
It's like cool that you can
Inspire other people by doing that too

It kind of feels great expressing yourself
Like you can let go
Of your emotions and feelings
In the poetry
If it's a sad poem
You can share your feelings
About that to other people
They will probably listen

That one homework poem
A lot of people kept saying that poem
Because they hated homework so much

I wrote about it
Shared my feelings with it
Kinda made it sound funny
To the little group in the class

I wrote one poem in fifth grade
I still have it
In my room
Somewhere

Poetry

It's inspiring
 I would yell in their face
 If they don't get mad at me
 It's awesome!
 Woo!
 Yeah!
 You should do it too!

Alice

At the time of the interview, Alice was a seventh-grade student in middle school. Alice had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class. She was rather reserved with adults; however, she was quite social with her peers. I remember her struggling with reading and writing. According to Poetry Break sign-up books from Mr. Mah's class, she volunteered to read at least three times each week. Alice is Caucasian.

"It's fun," was the essence of Alice's interview. Alice's interview was rather short; however, the phrase "It's fun" came up twice, and she also stated, "It felt good."

Alice's Poem (Form A)

I remember like doing a different poem every time
 Sometimes it was scary
 I remember a lot of times
 You had to do rhyming words
 Rhyming words into writing them

It felt good
 Sometimes I would do it with friends
 But not all the time

I sometimes write them
 At home
 Sometimes at school
 Like for assignments and stuff

I just like make words
 Put them together sometimes
 I don't know what kind

I don't do it that much

I remember doing it
Saying it at our poetry tea

The crystals that we had in the room
We would look at them
Write about them

It's good
It's fun

Ruby

Ruby was in seventh grade at the time of the interview. She had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class. As a fourth-grade student she was an outgoing and social girl. Ruby volunteered to perform poetry for the class almost everyday. Through conversations and the interview process, Ruby revealed that she still enjoys being the center of attention. At the middle school she attended, she sometimes volunteered to read poetry on "Talent Tuesdays." She explained to me that this is when students get up on the stage and perform for their peers during lunch. Ruby's mother and father are both African American.

"It's fun to do poetry," was the essence of Ruby's interview.

Ruby's Poem (Form A)

It was fun
And um like
We were allowed to read our own poetry
Or like
Say poetry from other people's books
Like Shel Silverstein

It was like
A small part of our day
After lunch

Then you had to say your poetry
You had to write your name on a paper
If you wanted to say poetry
If you had a long poem
You had to put your name last
That's what I remember

Fun, interesting, cool, awesome, great

There were different types of poetry
That we could write
There are like all different kinds
We learned how to write
All different kinds of poetry
Like sonnets
Yeah

It felt like sometimes
Difficult
Yeah
Difficult
And sometimes
It like depends on which ones you're writing
Some of them are easy and fun
It was all interesting though
To learn different ways of writing poetry

I'm not really scared to get up
In front of people
And do stuff
It was fun

I thought that if I volunteered
My friends would too
So, yeah
I guess my friends like to follow me
During poetry

It's fun
It's fun to do poetry
I like poetry

Some poems tell me
Not be scared

To do stuff
To step up
If there is an activity
Just jump at it
Grab whatever

I wasn't scared to do other stuff
Like in Clown Club
Because I practiced with the poetry
Like reading out loud

I write more poems now
We have Talent Tuesdays
And sometimes I read poems for that
It's in front of your whole lunch
You do whatever you want
In front of them
On stage

Oh!
What I think about my writing
It's good for a fourth grader
I guess
I think it was my first time writing
About a serious poem
I remember that other time
I wrote like that maze poem
That was creepy
I like that poem
It's nice and cheerful

At first
When I was performing it
Up in front of everybody
I felt a little nervous
Yeah
I feel nervous now

I haven't really practiced
That type of poetry in a long time
I usually do the easy ones
I don't do the specific ones anymore

Your kids should do it

Because doesn't it like help you with school
 Your writing
 Your language arts
 It will help you with your writing
 Because, you have to think of words
 That go with your poem
 Other than just like throwing words
 On the paper
 And just turning it in

Yeah
 It's good for school
 Your mind
 And relaxing
 When I'm really frustrated
 I just write it on paper
 Like my problems and stuff
 Then I can turn it into a poem
 I like that
 Yeah

Sabastian

Sabastian was a seventh-grade student in middle school at the time of the interview. He had been in my fourth-grade class. I remember a young man who started the year off rather shy. He didn't talk very often; however, over the course of the year, he began to become more gregarious. According to Poetry Break sign-up books, he volunteered to read at least three times each week. Sabastian is Filipino.

"Poetry is fun," was the essence of Sabastian's interview.

Sabastian's Poem (Form A)

Practice first
 Get in a group
 Or read by yourself
 Poetry Break
 After you practice it a little bit
 You perform

Poetry Break
Time where you can
Read out to the class
And no one is going to tell you
The right or wrong answer
No right or wrong thing to say
Just a time for fun
To practice your reading

They were fun
Sometimes hard
Because reading
I had troubles with that
But now
I'm pretty good at reading
Now

We used to practice
It helped us a lot
With our reading skills
We got to learn some new words
While we were reading some of the poetry
It helped me a lot with reading

We made some haikus
Making a poem can be about anything
It can describe your feelings
And just like out of the blue
You can just make a poem
Out of anything
Anything that you see

It was kind of hard
You sometimes can struggle
If you don't know what to write it was hard
And sometimes easy

I can get stage fright away from me
So I will be comfortable reading
In front of anybody
If we were reading in class
Like right now
I would be comfortable to read
Because I'm used to it

Like reading now
 In front of everyone
 It's normal

It's usually more fun
 When there is more than one of you
 'Cause if you say something wrong
 The other person will say it right
 It was more fun

Poetry is fun
 More funner than reading
 Sometimes
 And it's shorter
 And it's just fun to do poetry
 Like even writing one
 Then publishing it
 Could be fun

Ariel

Ariel was a freshman in high school at the time of the interview. Ariel had been in Mr. Mah's class when she was in fourth grade. She was cheerful in a quiet and somewhat shy way. Although she seemed shy throughout most of the day, during Poetry Break she would almost always perform by herself or with part of a group. She was serious about her work and would not put off her work even if the work was difficult. She comes from a mixed racial background. Her mother is Caucasian, and her father is African American. Before the interview, she told me she was looking forward to going to college. She talked about doing well in school and getting good grades and shared that she was involved in sports and other school activities. Because of her busy schedule, it took 6 weeks from my initial contact before she had time to participate in an interview.

“Let us do our own thing!” was the essence of Ariel's interview.

Ariel's Poem (Form A)

I remember having Poetry Break
Like everyday
We got to
Pick your group
Pick a piece of poetry
I thought that was fun
Like you got to pick
Didn't like have everybody
Read the same one
Or anything

We did do a lot of the poetry writing
From our own stuff
Not like copy this and add a word
But, you guys let us do our own thing
I thought that was cool.

Having to say it like in front of everybody
It could be embarrassing sometimes
Having to sign up
Pick your group name
With your friends
And then
Listening to everybody else

It's hard to describe it but I remember...

Oh
I liked Poetry Break
Something I looked forward to everyday
To go be like
"Oh! Lets do this poem!"

It was always hard for me to pick
Like one thing to write about
That made sense to other people
But it was fun
To have to think about it
Figure out stuff

A lot of people it comes easy
It's like click shshshs
It was hard to just think of a poem
About one certain thing that made sense

An open space
Where there wasn't really a lot of judgment
If we messed up
Or if the poem was weird

With my own age and people
That's easier
Like a random group or crowd
That's the hard one

I know it's fun to write
When you have something on your mind
It's easy
Sometimes poetry can be made into a song
Made into a paper
It's fun to just start off with poetry

It did help me to not have to try to hide
If I'm mad I don't have to sit and be mad in the corner
I can easily say something about it
Probably from speaking to the classes together
Or up at the Jammy Jam
Because a lot of poems have like the emotions
And stuff based on it
So that was probably easier

Sometimes I try to write poetry on my own
But it takes a long time
'Cause once again
I kinda can't focus on like one idea
'Cause it kinda just hops around

I remember coming together
Having everybody decide on words
Parts to put in it
Picking and choosing and writing

They sound a lot more like
When people think about fourth grade
They don't think about poems like this
So I think it's kind of cool
We did do stuff that like wouldn't be
Regular poems to hear

It was about like lots of different feelings
And stuff that happened

When we wrote these
I think it must have been the times
When everybody was arguing and stuff
I think that's probably what sparked up
Doing one like on this
Every class has a time when everybody is just angry

That's when we saw the moose outside our classroom
We had to write poems about it
I do remember when it was out there
Then it walked past
You could hear the other class talking about it too
I think that's probably why
We were probably writing poems about it
About moose
I must have been like really stuck on moose.

I think it's really good
I remember people having a lot of really good poems
I always wanted to try to have good poems
That other people would read
And be like
"Oh wow she writes good!"
not just like
"I have to say this is good
because she's nine
and wrote a poem."

I think I was
It seemed like I was
Like emotional or something
It does show a lot of emotions
Like most poetry does

It's really hard to remember back
But I do remember
Writing poems
Sharing them with the class

Poetry doesn't always have to be about
Sad stuff or emotions

Like the moose one
 It could be about a pencil
 Or anything
 It can still be good

A lot of adults think
 It has to be like deep and touching
 But everybody get(s) that from different stuff

A lot of poems we read in English class are very serious
 You could still have a good poem
 Without it being like serious
 Or like kind of blah
 Like you read tons of poems about people being sad
 But you don't read a lot of poems about moose poop

Leilani

Leilani was a ninth-grade student in high school at the time of the interview. Leilani had been in my fourth-grade class, and she was active and social. According to Poetry Break sign-up books, she volunteered to read at least three times each week. During the interview Leilani revealed that poetry is important in her life. During the interview, I gave her a published poetry anthology that included poems she and some of her classmates had written. She was so enraptured with the poems that she was reading the book as the interview ended. She asked to take my copy of the book, and because of her obvious enjoyment of the poems, I couldn't refuse. Leilani is of Hawaiian and Samoan parentage.

Poetry, "It's like your life," was the essence of Leilani's interview.

Leilani's Poem (Form B)

First we would all go into either you or Mr. Mah's room
 We would sit there
 You guys would have this bucket full of books
 Poetry books

We would grab it
Everybody would take a turn going up
We would just read it out
Everybody would just have fun with it
Laugh and everything
It just like brings us a close bond
It's like a family
It really is like a family
I love this school so much

It's kinda like yoga
It like calms you down
I was always so active and I really liked doing that
I always did do it with my friends
We would have lots of fun with it
Even if we messed up
Everyone knew it really doesn't matter
Everybody just laughs along with us
We would still have our poetry
It's just like really, really nice
It's just really tight

I remember breaking it down into syllables
Finding words
Haiku that doesn't rhyme so much
But like made sense
I remember having fun with it
Some of the poetry I wrote was with my friend

I remember writing a lot of poems
Especially in your class
I remember we use to write them in a book like this
That had a scroll
I remember sitting down and staring at a blank piece of paper
For a really long time
Then I would come up with a subject
I remember teachers helping me
I remember you helping me too
We would type it up
Everybody would just tell each of their poems
It's like another thing that brings us closer

Well to look back at it now
It's just something that comes

Like tries to come natural

Well now
I really write down everything that happens in my life
It's like a journal
When I'm walking in the halls at school
There are posters about poems

My sister
She would write poetry
So would my dad
She made a poem about California
Got a really big certificate
She told me how that made her feel
I was like
Oh okay! Maybe I'll try it
And the next thing you know
I come to this school and I got poetry
She still writes poetry
Sometimes she reads my journal
I let her read my journal
And she would make poetry out of it
And I'm like
What?
How do you do that?

I really like love poems
It's just really romantic
Really, really romantic
I really like it

It should happen
It's like an exercise
It's like food
You can't survive with out food
You're always going to need to eat food
And that's what poetry is like

Poetry could help a lot of kids
Even when they are young
Even when they get older...
And adults
And elders

I didn't even think I would be that smart
From my point of view
I know I like poetry that looks similar to all of these
When I look at this
It's just like... I saw my name
And I'm like
Are you sure
You probably made an error or something

They say that kids are immature
When you are fourth grade you are still considered a little kid
And when you look at like their writings
It just like
Blows up

Actually I think poetry is another way to let your emotions out
Whether it's like anger or just anything
Poetry is a never ending story
When I'm writing
It's like poetry to me
Now when I'm writing
I'm bringing emotions
The way you feel
Or what's on your mind
Or what's happening
Nowadays or when I'm bored I write
I write a lot
I write about a lot of things
It's another way to get like really de-stressed
Or relaxed
Or if you just want to do it for fun

Nowadays a lot of people
A lot of girls
Especially girls
Have a lot to lose
They go through more stuff than most men do
When you are a teenager you have low self-esteem
And again poetry can help
All different movements make poetry
Can really help you
It's a guidance

In order for you to go to California

You have to look at the map to get there
 Without that map you can't get there
 That's what poetry is like
 You're going to need that map
 In order to get there

Like if say there's this guy that likes you
 It's this one opportunity
 It's not like he's going to stick around
 It's like a 50/50 chance that you will be able to go out with him or not
 It's like poetry
 Poetry is an opportunity
 Once that opportunity comes you should take it

I think poetry has more value than just writing
 It's like your life
 Some people put their life and heart
 Into all their writing
 And some people don't even have the time
 To sit down
 And actually look at it

It can help me in different ways
 You can have poetry about anything and everything

Willow

Willow was a sophomore in high school at the time of the interview. Willow had been in Mr. Mah's class for third and fourth grade. She is Caucasian. Willow was very involved in school activities and sports. Due to her hectic schedule, it took 2 months to schedule an interview with her.

"I love poetry. ... I want to be in the fun!" was the essence of Willow's interview.

Willow's Poem (Form B)

I remember when
 Class would get together
 We would like read aloud
 Everybody would start rapping the poetry
 That was really funny

I just like learning
Didn't have to memorize
It was fun just to learn the poetry
Reading it out loud
In front of the class

It was really fun
Kinda loud sometimes
But I really liked it
I like really liked it

At first I was shy to do it out loud
Then I realized that everybody
Was having a lot of fun with it
And I'm like
Oh! I want to have fun with it too
Then I got really into it
Like every day
We would do it
I would get really into it
Yeah, yeah I want to be in the fun!

I remember
I remember
third and fourth grade
I didn't know what poetry was
I didn't know how to do it
Mr. Mah would like be
Like this is how you do it
I'd make my own poetry
I'd be making my own stuff
it would like flow
I'd like it

It's helped me a lot
Just it's helped me a lot
Instead of writing a diary
Trying to do poetry
Working it out
Being happy and sad
Like mixed emotions

I loved poetry

Got in high school
Got really busy
I loved it
Like forever
I loved it
It just kind of like
Left me though

Like dude you should do it
For one
It's like awesome.
For two
You just need to do it
'Cause it's fun

Go to the elementary schools
Like learn what they're doing
Go when they're doing the Poetry Breaks
They could get to know what you guys are doing
They could put it in the newspaper
Publish their work
Because these kids are good

Have them come in for poetry
I know it sounds hard
But come in for Poetry Break
Then go back to their class
Be like this is how it's going to go down guys
We're going to have all of these poetry books
You guys read and figure out what you want
Then have a Poetry Break
I think the whole school
Would be like
Really good at that

Like man!
I remember that like it was yesterday
OHHH!
The memories
I want to go back to third and fourth grade

John

John was a senior in high school at the time of the interview. John had been in Mr. Mah's fourth-grade class. He was an active, outspoken boy who frequently enjoyed being the center of attention. Through our conversation and the interview process, John revealed that he is currently interested in comedy, performance, and music. John is African American.

"Involved," was the essence of John's interview.

John's Poem (Form A)

I remember everybody was involved
 We all sat in a circle
 Everyone got a turn to read
 I think that we would pick our poems
 That we wanted to read
 We would each come up
 Read a poem

I know that some people wrote their own
 It's easier to express yourself
 Instead of just like having
 One person get up there and read
 It involved everybody

For the people who like to write
 It was a way
 To feel more accepted
 Because everybody was
 Up there reading

It was fun
 I know that
 I was more into poetry after
 'Cause before then
 We barely read poetry
 Until that class
 Fourth grade

It's hard
Well it was hard
It was easy to just rhyme words
If you wanted to make sense
Then that's when it got
A little bit harder
And it's fun if you're making it fun
It was easier that way

Experience
I mean I like that form of writing
I like it better than doing essays
And the little day diary things and all that
I think it was easier
To get your thoughts on paper
through poetry

I like to be in the spot light
I don't know if that's the same for others
I mean
I like people watching me
I also like poetry
So I guess that was a good way
For me to do both at once

I think we should have more
About poetry
And
Creative writing in school
'Cause after fourth grade
There really wasn't that much emphasis on poetry
In high school
Then we like read one and two poems
I would like to hear a lot more of that
Especially since I'm into music

I like writing songs and stuff like that
I feel if we had more poetry
In school
Then it would help people like me
Instead of just like strictly
Essays and persuasive writing
If we had more of a blend
It would be better

Reach everybody

I've been really into music
I like writing songs
I felt like my background
Having the Poetry Breaks
Helped me
To like interpret what I want to say
Put it into words
Make it more understandable
For other people
I think that's how poetry
Has helped me in my music writing

I decided I'd rather have it be a hobby
Instead of like making it a job
Something that I have to do
I'd rather just do it because I want to
I guess it's just fun
Like seeing what I can think up
And what I can do
Sometimes it's hard to even think of lyrics
I feel like making lyrics
Is harder than making music
For me

I think it's good to have
As part of the curriculum
I feel like a lot of kids are missing out
You just get a lot of the same stuff
You don't get to see every part of writing
I don't think that's good for people

There could be somebody out there
A really great poetry writer
But he was never exposed to that
So I feel like we should have
Everybody should get
A taste of each part of writing

I feel like that would be good
For the kids that like the spotlight
Also for the kids
That are kinda timid or scared

'Cause then it would get them more comfortable
 It will make them more social
 Where they're more comfortable
 Getting up in front of the class
 They don't have to want the spotlight
 But they wouldn't mind being in the spotlight
 I think that helps the class as a whole

I don't think that there were any kids
 Who were too afraid to talk to each other
 After poetry and everything
 Everybody was cool with each other
 That was good

Themes and Findings

Through coding and analyses of interviews, 10 themes that reflect the essence of children's experiences with poetry were generated. Initially 29 themes were considered; however further analyses of the statements led me to combine themes that seemed to be addressing the same essence of experience. The 10 themes are listed in Table 3.

Fun

Fun was the essence of what most children expressed they experienced during poetry activities. Of 22 participants, 21 mentioned fun in their description of their experiences with poetry. Although sprinkled with seriousness, these 21 interviews were frequently filled with laughter, and they had a light cheerful mood. It was as if the pleasure that students experienced during poetry activities was being revived during the interview process.

Table 3

Participants and Themes Present in Interviews

Participants	Themes ^a									
	F	CS	WF	EmO	ExO	C	CC	IRW	HW	P
Cherry Lee	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Chia Shi	X	X	X			X	X		X	
Eliza	X	X	X	X	X	X			X	
Isabel	X	X	X	X						X
Jakia'it	X	X		X	X		X			
Joachim										
Kitty	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Lilly	X	X						X		
Rose	X	X	X							
Shao Yeng	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	
Tyler	X	X		X	X		X			X
Xia	X	X	X	X	X		X			
Jillian	X	X		X	X	X		X		
Maya	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Demetrio	X	X	X	X	X	X				X
Alice	X	X	X							X
Ruby	X	X	X	X		X		X	X	X
Sabastian	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X	X
Ariel	X	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	X
Leilani	X		X	X	X	X	X	X		X
Willow	X	X		X			X	X		
John	X	X			X	X	X	X	X	

Note. Codes for Theme Titles are F = Fun; CS = Being Center Stage; WF = Working with Friends; EmO = An Emotional Outlet; ExO = Expressing Oneself; C = Choice; CC = Creating Community; IRW = Improved Reading and Writing; HW = Hard Work; P = Pride in Accomplishment; ^aX = A response indicating this theme in the interview.

One participant was so excited to share his thoughts about poetry, that he started the interview before I was able to ask any questions. When I turned the recording devices on he began,

My name is Xia, and I am in fifth grade, and I am a mediator, and I like to write about poems because they are fun and funny. And poetry is like fun to read, and for us to read, and the rest of the class to listen.

Xia's introductory statement was focused on the fun that he associated with poetry, and the rest of his interview reflected this overall theme. His description of Poetry Break alluded to it being a time of fun, separate from the regular academic school day,

Poetry Break is when you sit and you get a break to read poetry to classes and your classmates to listen. And after that, you had a break, and you have to go back to work. Poetry Break takes like 15 minutes to do or 20.

When I asked him to describe his feelings about Poetry Break, he enthused, "It's funny and cool and I always laughed when I found poetry books that I like. Funny. Then I would laugh so hard that I couldn't even stop the laughter."

Maya and Ariel both spoke about anticipating the fun involved in poetry activities. When asked her feelings about Poetry Break Maya offered,

Excitement. Joyful. Umm I had that feeling where I didn't want it to end. And like, if like, I was having a bad day I would always think Poetry Break is coming so don't worry about it. And just like really happy and that's all.

Similarly, Ariel responded, "Oh, I liked Poetry Break. It was fun and something I looked forward to everyday. To go be like, 'Oh, let's do this poem or stuff like that.'"

Ariel also found poetry writing to be fun.

I know it's fun to write poetry. Like when you have something on your mind, it's easy. And like sometimes poetry can be made into a song or made into a paper. So it's fun to just like start off with poetry.

Jillian also remembered poetry writing as a fun activity. "The thing that I remember most is that we did a lot of writing and things and it was fun because you gave us silly ideas too and then it made it kinda better to write and type." When it came to Jillian's thoughts on Poetry Break she shared that it was, "Something fun you could do everyday and mostly do with your class."

Kitty's feelings about Poetry Break were that it was "Fun, exciting, probably after recess, a pretty good thing to do." Willow shared, "It was really fun. It got kinda loud sometimes but I really liked it. I like, really liked it."

Not knowing that her opinions on Poetry Break were similar to other participants, Cherry Lee shared, "I remember that it was sort of fun for me but I don't know about other people's opinion, but my opinion is that it's fun." Later in the interview she used playful body language and vocal gestures to express the rhythmic nature of poetry, "Poetry can be fun if you like reading, or, like, if you like reading rhythms. Sound like that, 'ya and yah.'"

Sabastian also brought up the rhythmic nature of poetry when he was talking about the fun he experienced doing poetry,

Yeah, it was more fun. I forgot that song [referring to a poem]; it's the one with, um, I forgot what the poem was called. ... Poetry is fun. It's more funner than

reading sometimes. And it's shorter and it's just fun to do poetry. Like even writing one, then publishing it, could be fun.

Like Xia, who considered Poetry Break to be a break from schoolwork, Sabastian did not consider poetry reading to be in the same category as other reading.

When Chia Shi reflected on Poetry Break, she spoke about poems as if they were friends, "Poetry Break is fun and it's just like our time to like you can spend time reading them and have fun with them."

Jakia'it and Shao Yeng both expressed that the fun of Poetry Break can be a remedy for boredom. Jakia'it asserted, "Poetry Break is a fun and easy thing to do. If you're bored just grab a book, that's a poetry book, and just read." When asked why she volunteered to read poetry, Shao Yeng shared, "'Cause if you do it, then you make fun, you have fun, and you're not bored like other people. They don't want to ... I'll say that poetry will be fun and exciting."

When asked what she would like to share about Poetry Break, Willow asserted, "If somebody's never done Poetry Break I'd be like, 'Dude, you should do it! For one, it's like awesome. For two, you just need to do it 'cause it's fun.'" Tyler offered, "I feel like people shouldn't like think poetry is all about um ... Well poetry is fun. It's about fun, kind of. A part of it is about fun, and it's also about expression, yeah."

Isabel was so enthused about the pleasure she experienced during poetry activities that she was ready to reenact Poetry Break during her interview. "Right now I feel like I'm going to get up and do poetry because it was fun last year!"

Being Center Stage

Performing poetry provided students with an opportunity to feel like they were the center of attention. Twenty of the participants spoke about their desire to perform in front of an audience of their peers. Although some participants mentioned feeling shy about performing, they still wanted to perform.

Poetry Break was an activity done on the floor in front of classmates; however, Jakia'it described the experience as including a stage and a crowd:

Poetry Break is a break where you could just leave everything down. Go to the carpet. Just try to have fun. We could read, have fun, make, do poetry. Like these people, they sign up their name, and they just come up to the stage or a crowd, and then they just read. And, then at the end, we don't clap, but we snap.

Jakia'it enjoyed performing poetry, and she wanted other people to try it. "I performed because I want to help you and I want to show everybody that poetry is a fun thing to do, and you should really try it."

Xia's reasons for volunteering to read poetry to the class were also about having others know the joy of poetry. When asked why he volunteered for Poetry Break, he stated, "Because it's fun and amaze to read poetry in front of everybody for like fun. And to make everybody know poetry and poems." He also felt

that poetry activities is like fun and cool, because like you got to be the one who will stand up and read to the classroom, [the class] to listen, and after that you come and sit, and then they snap.

Rose also mentioned that the performance part of poetry was a time when she could bring laughter to her classmates. When asked about her memories of poetry activities, Rose recalled, “Reading funny poems and the other kids laughing. . . . Um, it made it fun because we get to read it, and you get to practice it, and then you get to read it in front of everybody.” It wasn’t as though Rose thought she had to read poetry; it was that she got an opportunity to read it in front of her friends.

Like Jakia’it, Xia, and Rose, Jillian wanted to perform for an audience in order to pass on the fun of poetry, “It’s fun to do in front of an audience because then . . . you could show them that it’s really fun and they could like try to volunteer and do poetry too one day.”

For some of the participants, the performance aspect of poetry went beyond reading poetry. For them Poetry Break was a time to show their acting skills.

Shao Yeng remembered, “You had to sign your name on the book and then after they call your name you go on the stage and say the poem.” Although she was talking about performing poetry, she later added, “You could do play up on the stage,” referring to acting a poem out.

Demetrio also recalled acting out poetry; “Sometimes we would usually act it out sometimes. And we used to say it like in different voices. Like, I said it in like a little teenage girl voice.” When I asked him why he volunteered to perform each day he claimed,

Because it’s fun. I’m good with small crowds not big crowds ’cause then it’s kind of scary like when I was little, I would do that all the time in front of small

crowds. It's like a monster in your closet with you're little and performing in front of big crowds, not small crowds, like the classroom. So, but it's kind of fun when you can act it out and be yourself. It's like cool that you can like, you can inspire other people by doing that too.

For Maya, performing poetry gave her a chance to show people what she could do. When asked why she performed every day, she replied, "Just to show people my moves and like how I'm cool like that and I can just go on stage and just be like [At this point she recited the poem "School Dayz Rap" by Shields with a rap rhythm.] and stuff like that. Yeah." Later in the interview she added,

Poetry doesn't have to be something boring where you have to sit at your desk all day and just like read it on a piece of paper. It can be something where you can get up and just show everybody what you can do.

Isabel also spoke about acting when referring to Poetry Break,

I remember we use to stand up there and do acting and poetry acting out and stuff like that. ... Everybody used to go up and perform like every single day if they wanted to ... signing up for poetry and we used to have poetry tellers to call their names up and go up there and perform. ... I would describe it like a person goes up there and acts out like the person who wrote the poetry.

When asked about her feelings on poetry, Isabel also brought up performing,

My feelings were kinda like feeling awesome and stuff like that up there on stage, well up there on the carpet, and everyone kept looking at me. The reason I

volunteered for that is because I wanted to get up there and do actions and poetry and stuff like that and do it with my friends too.

When I asked John why he performed poetry he explained, Probably because I like to be in the spot light, I don't know if that's the same for others but ... I mean, I like people watching me and I also like poetry so I guess that was a good way for me to do both at once.

For Kitty, the performance aspect of poetry is something she eagerly awaited.

Well usually I would be very ecstatic about Poetry Break everyday because I would be thinking about what kind of props I would put in it ... to make it seem realistic like I was the person that made the poetry myself. When we did go up there sometimes ... people would like have these poems and then be doing hand motions with them and then ... [She is smiling and doing dramatic poses.] And at the end of every performance, when they are done, we would snap.

For Kitty part of the purpose of performing was to entertain the audience.

Well, sometimes I would be thinking. And, usually I'd sit down for maybe one minute and listen to what other groups are saying. And, if I hear a poetry that I'm doing, I will immediately go and do something different because, I do not want it to be exactly the same and the audience to be bored.

Kitty felt a sense of pleasure by entertaining other people.

Well, I never did feel shy, and Poetry Break seemed a very fun thing to do because I really really liked it, and it didn't depend if I was first or last.

Sometimes I would always be last, but I didn't care really as long as I got up there

and performed for everybody. It makes me feel glad to entertain people and make them laugh.

Shy.

Although there was not a question related to shyness, while 8 participants were talking about performance, the idea of feeling shy came up. During her interview, Ariel shared, “I remember having to say it like in front of everybody, and it could be embarrassing sometimes.” Demetrio used the metaphor of performing giving him a feeling like there was a monster in the closet, and the more he performed, the easier it was for him to get over that feeling. Kitty mentioned that she never did feel shy about performing. Maya claimed something similar.

I wasn't really shy or anything to do it in between classes. You know that, but, because there were all sorts of people doing it. Everybody was doing it, so there was nothing to be shy about. And me, I don't care what other people think. 'Cause I mean I wasn't the only weird person in the room at that time. There was all sorts of people.

Later in the interview, Maya shared how performing poetry for the class helped her feel comfortable in front of crowds.

I've thought about joining other groups and stuff and Clown Club and talent shows and stuff like that because Poetry Break just helps you out with you can do this on stage. You can do anything. Not just a little piece of paper. You can just go up there and completely do anything. And I technically thought about it throughout that time and it works. And I mean when I got up there, I did a lot of

things with myself. And I still am in sixth grade. I'm involved with a lot of things, and it's funny because I just started out with a piece of paper on stage in front of my class and it got me far.

Ruby felt nervous the first time she performed her own poem, "Yeah, like I was at first like I was ... when I was performing it up front of everybody, I felt a little nervous." Like many of the other participants, Ruby found that performing at Poetry Break helped her feel more comfortable performing in other venues. "Yeah I wasn't scared to do other stuff like in Clown Club because I practiced with the poetry stuff, like reading out loud."

Sabastian also claimed that he performed in front of the class in order to get over the feeling of being shy. When asked why he volunteered, he replied,

So I can get stage fright away from me. And so I will be comfortable reading in front of anybody. Then, so like if we were reading in class like right now, like I would be comfortable to read it because I'm used to it. Like reading now in front of everyone, so yeah. It's normal, yeah.

For some of the participants, the feeling of being shy only lasted the first few times they performed. According to Cherry Lee, "At the first time, I was so shy to read but then ... my friend said it's okay, so I start reading, and then it was fun to do. I like being the emcee sometimes." Like Cherry Lee, Willow felt shy the first time she performed poetry,

Um, I think at first I was shy to do it out loud, and then I realized that everybody was having a lot of fun with it, and I'm like oh I want to have fun with it too. And

then so I got really into it. Like every day that we would do it, I would get really into it.

Chia Shi echoed a similar sentiment,

Um, when you perform it, it's like kind of like scary, and you're kind of like shy. But when you get more into it, it's not that scary anymore and then you can like always perform it whenever you want.

Other participants performed in order to help other students not feel shy. Jakia't said she liked to perform in order

To impress how fun it is. To impress people to not be shy. It's just fun. ... If you go up there, you don't need to depend on those people looking at you. You don't need to look at them. You can just look at the book. Just read, and then when it's over, just take a deep breath and just go sit back down.

John suggested that Poetry Break was a time that students could get over feeling shy.

I feel like that [Poetry Break] would be good for the kids that like the spotlight and also for the kids that are kinda timid or scared. 'Cause then it would get them more comfortable and it will make them more social to where they're more comfortable getting up in front of the class. And, it doesn't make them, they don't have to be like, they don't have to want the spotlight, but they wouldn't mind being in the spotlight.

Feeling shy or having stage fright is not necessarily a negative feeling. While talking about Poetry Break, Isabel explained, "My feelings were like awesome and shy

when I went up there the first time.” Lilly shared a similar sentiment about how she felt performing poetry, “Kind of shy and when I was on the stage I was a little shy and ... and a little happy.”

Working With Friends

As previous quotations from participants indicated, working with friends was an important part of many of the participants’ poetry experiences. Fifteen of the participants brought up working with friends in relation to poetry activities.

For Willow, her initial response to why she read and performed at Poetry Break was centered on her friends. When I asked why she volunteered she responded, “Oh, ‘cause my friends did it.” When I asked her to tell me more about that she mentioned that poetry was fun and she was thinking, “Yeah, yeah I want to be in the fun!”

Cherry Lee’s response to why she performed was similar to Willow’s. Cherry Lee’s initial reason for reading poetry was, “Because my friend said it’s fun, so I just say okay. Then she say let’s do it today, so I just agree to because ... we’re friends.”

Ruby also brought up working with friends; however, where Willow and Cherry Lee volunteered because their friends were doing it, Ruby volunteered to get her friends more involved. “I thought that if I volunteered, my friends would too. So, yeah, like I guess my friends like to follow me. I guess. During poetry that’s one thing.” Ruby liked the feeling of being a leader, and Poetry Break gave her an opportunity to do that.

Kitty also took a leadership role in working with friends. “Usually sometimes I would find people that were doing the same poetry and didn’t know what kind of props they wanted and I would join their group to help them.”

For some students working with friends during poetry activities was about having fun. According to Shao Yeng, “It’s lots of fun and you have friends to read with you too.” Sabastian’s thoughts were similar however he added that working with others provided a safe situation for making mistakes: “It’s usually more fun when there is more than one of you ‘cause if you say something wrong the other person will say it right.”

Leilani also focused on the fun factor of working with friends while reading and writing poetry, “I remember having fun with it. Um, some of the poetry I wrote was with my friend.” Later in the interview, Leilani shared,

I was always so active and I really liked doing that and I always did do it with my friends and we would have lots of fun with it. Even if we messed up, everyone knew it really doesn’t matter. Everybody just laughs along with us. And sometimes we would have snacks and stuff and we would still have our poetry. And it’s just like really really nice. It’s just really tight.

Eliza stated, “I like when we get to, like do it in a group, with other kids, and like different kids, instead of just the same people.”

Chia Shi described the social negotiation that sometimes happened when a group was being formed.

Sometimes it’s hard to get into groups, ‘cause sometimes you’re just shy. You don’t want to go up by yourself. And when you try to find a group, and they already have like enough persons in the group, so you’re just like left out. So you just don’t want to do it. So you just don’t want to sign up for it. But when you do find people, it’s really hard to find a poem ‘cause all of us don’t like the same

poems. And then so when you find your group, and you find a poem, and then like you always want it to be your turn because you don't like waiting.

Poetry Break was a time where students were given an opportunity to work with their friends, and that is something that the participants remembered and appreciated.

An Emotional Outlet

Reading and writing poetry can be an emotional outlet. Seventeen of the participants shared that reading or writing poetry provided an opportunity to reflect on their emotions, and in some cases, alter their emotional state. Demetrio found that Poetry Break gave him the ability to express negative emotions.

It kind of feels great expressing yourself like you can let go of your emotions and feelings and stuff in the poetry. Like if it's like a sad poem you can like share your feelings about that to other people. And, they will probably listen. Like that one homework poem, a lot of people kept saying that poem because they hated homework so much. [Recites a few lines of the poem "Homework" by Jack Prelutsky.]

When I asked Demetrio what he has done with poetry since being in fourth grade, he offered, "Well I know I wrote about it. Shared my feelings with it."

Maya brought up that poetry is about emotions: "Um, poetry is a, um, it's not a place where you can read like you're reading a book. It's a place to show your feelings and your emotions." Maya felt that poetry performance was a way to become empowered, and she felt that all people could benefit from poetry.

It like made me like want to get my emotions and my heart out there to other people. Just tell them, hey this is some cool stuff. This is the cool beans right here. You gotta get a spoon and eat it. It's not nothing nasty. It's good. And, I mean that's what you got to get your point across to people, because if you're shy it's not going to get to anything. You have to keep trying. If you want something you have to go for it.

Kitty shared that before she started participating in Poetry Break, she felt socially isolated. For her, poetry was a social and emotional outlet for expressing her feelings and connecting to her peers.

Well, before [Poetry Break], usually I would never get up for anything. I would usually just be plain, and independent [alone]. I would barely ever talk. I wouldn't do anything. But, I didn't really even know what poetry was. But, when you started teaching me how to do poetry, it made my feelings come out, because it expressed how I was feeling so much. And, it didn't make me feel independent or lonely anymore.

For Kitty, poetry was a mood-altering experience. "In my mind I become very creative about poetry because I love poetry so much. It just makes me happy. Like say I'm sad and you tell me to write poetry, give me a pencil and I start writing." She described her experience of writing poetry:

Well, it would be very quiet. And ... well ... we would get our books out I would brainstorm some and then sometimes, depending on what my feeling is, that's what I'll be writing about. Like it's a day of the week, if I'm feeling angry there's

lightning in the clouds. If I'm happy, it's a very sunny day with moose and bears and butterflies. ... Sometimes a little bit hard to think because um, I would have the same ideas but I would want to make something different everyday. But if I'm having a difficult day, then I would sit down. I would calm myself down and I'd do some poetry. And I'd make myself feel better.

Later in the interview Kitty shared more about how she used writing poetry to deal with anger, "I'd write like a mean poem to take my anger out and then I'd look at it and I cheer myself up. Because I would be like, wow, I'm that angry. Wow! [laughs] What in the world?" When asked about her feelings about poetry she shared,

Well, usually not even anger. I'd usually always be happy because um. ...

Sometimes I will write anger poems but that doesn't necessarily mean that I'm angry. I can be angry and write a really mean poem but I can be really happy and write something way beyond fantasy. ... Like a moose with wings flying in the sky.

When asked if poetry had affected his ability to express himself, Xia spoke of the process of writing poetry for emotional release, "It's when you write and then you think of something and then you write and that makes your feelings out." Xia further explained, "When I get mad I write about why did I get mad and um what, who made me mad. And, I feel happy. And, [I] wrote what I did, and I feel happy."

When it came to expressing herself Ariel shared,

I think it did help me to not have to try to like hide if I'm mad. I don't have to sit and be mad in the corner. I can easily say something about it more. ... Because a

lot of poems have like the emotions and stuff based on it. So, that was probably easier.

Reflecting on her poetry writing, Ariel mused, “I think I was, it seemed like I was like emotional or something. Because it does show a lot of emotions, like most poetry does.”

Shao Yeng said she still writes poems at home. When I asked her why she still writes poems, she responded “‘Cause to make my feelings, my sad feeling out.” At this point, Shao Yeng paused, and looked lost in thought. She appeared as though she was going to cry. Willow also explained that she wrote poetry at home after experiencing poetry writing in school. “It was like instead of writing a diary it was trying to do poetry and stuff like working it out ... being happy and sad and stuff like mixed emotions.”

Learning to write poetry taught Tyler how to express his feelings through word play. “Well, before I couldn’t really do poems, and now I can make, like show my feelings better. Like before I didn’t know how to describe as good. Like I’m happy right now. I’m so ‘fabulostically’ happy right now.”

Jillian explained that poetry writing was a time that she felt free to share what she felt inside. “Well when we do poetry writing and stuff I could like be myself and write what I feel inside of me or just write something funny that I remember from things.”

For some students, poetry writing had a calming effect. Isabel expressed, “Oh, my feelings about it are like being quiet and calm and you can write faster doing that and that’s how I felt in fourth grade, how I did it.” Ruby commented that poetry was good for “your mind and relaxing.” Ruby continued, “When I’m really frustrated, I just write it on

paper like my problems and stuff and then I can turn it into a poem. I like that. Yeah.”

Cherry Lee also shared the calming effects of poetry,

Well, I’m not sure, but then I don’t know... it just makes me think of peaceness [peacefulness]. Like you know, I’m peace already, but like I’m more in peace.

And like, I’m just joining the world. For me, I feel like that.

When it came to poetry writing Eliza suggested, “We should write it more often and it’s really fun to like express what your feeling.” Jakia’it also felt it was helpful and fun to express her emotions through poetry reading and writing.

My feelings about Poetry Break are that it’s fun. It’s really like it’s really, um, fun to do, and you could like put your, instead of keeping your feelings to your heart, you could just split it like bounce it out on the paper, and if you, if it’s private, then don’t say it. But if it’s something that you really want to say, then just make it on the paper, make it, try to make it into a poetry, and then just spit it out. Out of your mouth.

Jakia’it used poetry to mend relationships with her friends. She explained, “It helps express me by sometimes when I’m sad, I write poetries to my friends. And, at least they know it’s them. So, that’s how we come back together, have fun, have great times.”

Jakia’it felt so strongly about other people using poetry as an emotional outlet that she extolled the virtues of poetry:

You should really try it. If you try it like, yeah you’re welcome, because like sometimes when you’re sad you can write about it, and then you guys could get together and explore many new things. You could explore. You could explore

how there are sound poetry where they have one to two players to read. And, you could explore that when you say it, sometimes you may have already read it, but when you read it, you feel like sometimes when you read it, that feeling is in your soul right now. So sometimes it feels like you feel right now. And, it's really, um, nice.

Leilani believed that all writing has the potential to be a way of altering her mood. "It's another way to get like really 'destressed' or relaxed or if you just want to do it for fun." When it came to poetry writing, she stated, "Actually, I think poetry is another way to let your emotions out, whether it's like anger or just anything."

Leilani felt that poetry could be of significant benefit to young women who are dealing with the issues involved in growing up in today's society.

Nowadays a lot of people, a lot of girls especially, girls have a lot to lose and they go through more stuff than most men do or guys. And like nowadays, and when you are a teenager, you have low self-esteem. And again, poetry or writing, or singing, or doing sports can even help. Like all different types or ways and all different movements makes poetry. And it can really help you. It's like a guidance. Like in order for you to go to California, you have to look at the map to get there. So without that map you can't get there. So that's what poetry is like. You're going to have to need that, your map.

Using poetry as an emotional outlet was a powerful theme for many of the participants. This aspect of poetry affected 17 of the participants.

Expressing Oneself

Thirteen of the participants shared how they used poetry to express themselves.

Poetry activities gave Maya a channel to open herself up to others,

It expresses yourself, and it tells other people that it's okay to just get on stage and do anything. And, poetry is a chance that you can like get your friends together and just do a random skit, I guess.

For some, poetry could capture the moment. Xia observed, "Think and look outside. If it was snowing, or fall, or summer, then you write about them. Poetry. And, then you make poetries. And, you write poems about what you see and think." He could connect the world to his thinking and express it through poetry.

Outside of the classroom setting, Kitty felt that poetry writing unlocked other creative avenues:

Poetry also expressed my drawing abilities. Because writing poetry, it just made me also have pictures in my mind. And sometimes after I do poetry, when I'm like at home, my aunt would give me some drawing time. And, I'd go and I'd have like this entire notebook that I could draw in. I'd flip it open I'd draw on the side where it was like that, and I'd draw dragons, fields, meadows, mountains, trees.

Kitty felt she had to express her poetic images in both words and images.

Poetry Break could also be a time of cultural expression. Jakia'it recalled, "I remember that Mr. Mah asked the Hmong students to, um, write a Hmong poetry and we did. And, we actually performed that, and Mr. Mah really liked it." She was invited share

her culture and language, and her vocal tone in the interview indicated that she was feeling proud.

John, a senior in high school and the oldest participant in the study, felt that there were social benefits to the open forum of expression he experienced during Poetry Break.

It's easier to express yourself. Instead of just having one person get up there and read, it involved everybody. And, for the people who like to write, or whatever, then for them it was a way to feel more accepted, because everybody was up there reading and everything.

For John, poetry was a vehicle that made it easier for him to express himself.

“Well I like it [poetry writing] better than doing essays and the little day diary things and all that. I think it was easier to get your thoughts on paper through poetry.”

John's work in poetry has helped him express himself in multiple forms.

Well since, I want to say my freshman year, I've been really into music and everything. And, I like writing songs and everything. And, I felt my background in having the Poetry Breaks and everything has helped me to interpret what I want to say, and put it into words, and make it, make it more understandable for other people. And, so I think that's how poetry has helped me in my music writing and everything.

For many of the participants poetry opened up avenues of expression that they had not enjoyed before. For some, the effects of poetry transcended the classroom and entered other areas of their lives.

Poetry is Personal; There is No Right or Wrong

Some of the participants shared that Poetry Break was a safe time to express themselves without feeling judged. Ariel felt that Poetry Break was a safe setting for self-expression. “It was an open space where there wasn’t really a lot of judgment if we messed up or if the poem was weird or anything like that. So that was probably easy.”

When it came to poetry writing, Ariel explained,

Poetry doesn’t always have to be about like sad stuff or emotions. Like the moose one ... it could be about a pencil or anything, and it can still be good. Because a lot of adults think it has to be like deep and touching. But, everybody gets that from different stuff.

Cherry Lee was pleased to share, “On writing, there’s no right or wrong; it’s just your mind thinking.” Cherry Lee continued to talk about the idea that she could write whatever she wanted during poetry writing time. For her, it was important that she could express what she wanted to.

Maya also felt strongly about the idea that there is no right or wrong in poetry writing.

Poetry’s not something that anybody can make fun of because it’s somebody else’s writing. It’s not a test. It’s not something on the [Standards Based Assessments]. It’s your mind. Your thoughts. Things that I thought about. ... There’s not a wrong or a right answer to your writing. It matters if you did it and how you felt about it.

Knowing that her poetry wouldn't be considered to be right or wrong, Maya believed, "I could of just like showed other people my writing without getting like an, 'oh that sucks,' because it's my writing." Later in the interview Maya continued,

Poetry isn't just like, "oh the leaves outside fell on the ground." It doesn't have to be slow and it taught me how it doesn't have to be all slow and smooth. You know, it could have some rhythm and beats to it and stuff ... how you could actually just have like a certain tone to it. You don't have to read it just like you're reading a book.

Echoing the sentiments of Ariel, Cherry Lee, and Maya, Sabastian explained,

Poetry Break is like a time where you can, um, read out to the class and no one is going to tell you the right or wrong answer. Like, no right or wrong thing to say. And um, just a time for fun and to practice your reading.

Participants' perception that there is no right or wrong answer to poetry allowed them to express themselves.

Choice

Of the 22 participants, 13 brought up the idea of choice when discussing their experiences in poetry activities. Ruby shared, "It was fun, and um, like we were allowed to read our own poetry or like say poetry from other peoples books, like Shel Silverstein." Alice thought that choice allowed for variety. "I remember like doing a different poem every time."

Jillian recalled that whether you performed or not was a choice. "Kids they, um, whoever wants to sign up and do Poetry Break, they pick out a book and they get

probably five minutes to do practice, and then they go up and perform it in front of the class.”

Whether she worked alone or with a group was part of the choice that Shao Yeng remembered. “Poetry Break you pick your own page to read with your friend or read your own one.” Later Shao Yeng shared, “I would tell a person is that it was like it was like um, poetry is fun and you can read with other people and you can make like dance like noise ... whatever you like.”

Looking back, choice stood out for Ariel.

I do remember having the Poetry Break like everyday where we got to pick like your group and pick a piece of poetry and I thought that was fun. Like you got to pick and didn't like have to everybody read the same one or anything.

When it came to writing Ariel added,

So we did do a lot of the poetry writing from our own stuff, not like ... some people just give you papers and they're like copy this and add a word. But, you guys let us do our own thing and I thought that was cool.

Later in the interview, Ariel compared what she did with poetry in fourth grade to the poetry she experienced in high school. She remembered writing a poem about moose feces, which spurred the following comment,

A lot of poems we read in English class are very serious. And you could still have a good poem without it being like serious or like kind of blah. Like you read tons of poems about people being sad, but you don't read a lot of poems about moose poop.

She seemed to be yearning for more choice.

Maya reveled in the opportunity to have control over her own writing. She felt poetry writing was, “Cool, because that was just like the time that I didn’t have a specific thing to write about. I kinda just wrote about anything I wanted. And I kinda made up my own characters in the poetry.”

Kitty so enjoyed the choices she could make when selecting poetry to read at Poetry Break that she would plan in advance and hide poetry books for future use.

There would be some books that I would want to pick out, because after Poetry Break [she makes a gesture as if she is hiding the books], because I would, um, look at two poems and choose one for today and one for tomorrow.

Choice was also important in Kitty’s experience in writing poetry. She enthused, “I could poetry write out of thin air, and I mean that literally. I will talk about thin air.” At this point Kitty started laughing. Kitty had also shared that she could write about things “way beyond fantasy.”

Demetrio shared that he thought that writing poetry was

Awesome. Writing and thinking about poetry ... you have to get like one topic and write about it. Mostly. Like things that inspire you, you could write about that and stuff. Like summer and pets, dogs, animals. Things like that. Make up, for girls, and what could be for boys? I don’t know. Dark colors or something. ... Black was my favorite color so I wrote about that. Like “black is the color of my hair” and stuff like that. It’s cool. Like I was saying ... you can write a lot of

things about stuff. Like rainbows and stuff and pink and purple and blue and colors like that and animals and stuff.

Like Demetrio, Sabastian felt there was choice in poetry writing. “Making a poem can be about anything. . . . It can describe your feelings and just like out of the blue you can just make a poem out of anything. Anything that you see.”

Eliza felt that she had the choice to change her mind about what she was writing. It was really fun and um like if we messed up we wouldn't be, like if we wanted the same thing, we would like not just erase it all and write a different one. We would write the same topic but different words.

Summarizing the theme of choice and freedom in poetry activities, Jillian related, “Um, when I was in fourth grade and I did poetry, I felt I could just be free and write like things that are on my mind.” Students were given license to read, write, and perform poetry in a variety of ways. This left the students feeling empowered to make choices.

Creating Community

Poetry activities provided opportunities for participants to develop social bonds. Ten of the 22 individuals interviewed described community creation through shared poetry experiences.

Tyler commented that Poetry Break was social, and when I asked him what he meant by that he explained, “I mean having everybody listen to each other, and sit by each other, and talk and stuff.” His observations brought to light that Poetry Break was a focused community time. It was a time to be together, where group members are recognized, listened to, and acknowledged.

In a similar vein, Willow remembered poetry being a time in which “the classes came together,” whereas Ariel shared, “I remember having to sign up and pick your group name and stuff with your friends. And then, listening to everybody else and stuff.” Coming together as a group and listening to each other were part of the Poetry Break ritual.

Eliza noticed that relationships and interactions were fluid. During poetry activities, group members voluntarily changed, and everyone had an opportunity to work with everyone else. “It’s fun and ... I like when we get to, like, do it in a group with other kids. And, like, different kids instead of just the same people.”

Kitty and Jakia’it felt that poetry writing and sharing was a vehicle through which people could get to know each other. Kitty explained,

Sometimes my stories [poems] will be teaching you something and you don’t even know it, something about me. Like, that dragon thing. You saw how creative my pictures were, my poetry was. That would tell everybody else that I literally love dragons. See, you’re learning something that you didn’t even know, just by looking at that stuff.

On a similar note Jakia’it offered,

It’s easy to do and that you could, like, really meet new people ... they write it ... if you guys compare to each other, like, if they talk about ice cream and you like ice cream too, so you guys have something that’s in common.

Written expression in the form of poetry was a powerful tool for socially bonding.

Each of the four high school students who participated in this study connected poetry activities with community building. As I have already noted, Ariel, a freshman, and Willow, a sophomore, each shared thoughts on poetry being a time to come together as a group and listen. For Leilani, a freshman, and John a senior, the community aspect of poetry activities was a theme that resonated throughout their interviews.

In describing Poetry Break, Leilani recalled,

Everybody would take a turn going up. We would just read it [poetry] out and everybody would just have fun with it, laugh and everything. It just, like, brings us a close bond. ... It's like a family. It really is like a family. I love this school so much.

When it came to writing poetry, Leilani reminisced,

I remember sitting down and staring at a blank piece of paper for a really long time. And, then ... I would come up with a subject. And, I would remember teachers helping me. I remember you helping me too. And, we would type it up, and everybody would just tell each of their poems. And, then it's like another thing that like brings us closer. That's what I kinda remember.

John reflected,

I remember everybody was involved. It was fun. Um, I remember we all sat in a circle, like a half circle or whatever and everyone got a turn to read. And I think that we would pick our poems that we wanted to read from the books and then we would each come up and read a poem.

Like Kitty and Jakia’it, John felt that community was built through sharing poetry writing.

It’s easier to express yourself. Instead of just like having one person get up there and read, it involved everybody. And, for the people who like to write, or whatever, then for them it was a way to feel more accepted, because everybody was up there reading and everything.

When it came to everyone having a chance to be in the spotlight John asserted,

I think that helps the class as a whole, because I don’t think that there were any kids who were too afraid to talk to each other or anything ... so like after poetry and everything everybody was cool with each other. So, I think that was good.

Participants remembered poetry activities contributing to creating community in the classroom. For the high school participants who were looking back, bonding as a community was a prominent theme in their interviews.

Improved Reading and Writing

Although there was not a question that asked the participants if they thought poetry improved their reading and writing skills, 11 of the participants spontaneously indicated that they felt their reading or writing skills improved through poetry activities.

Willow reflected on writing poetry,

I remember ... I was in Mr. Mah’s class third and fourth grade ... I didn’t know what poetry was. I didn’t know how to do it or anything like that. And Mr. Mah and you would like, be like, “Oh this is how you do it.” ... I’d make my own poetry and he would be like, “Oh, well, you should add this,” and [I would] be

like “Oh, okay. Cool, thank you,” and then like I’d be making my own stuff and it would it would like flow and everything and I’d like it. ... It was fun.

Later in the interview, Willow shared that both she and her mother believe that poetry experiences helped her with reading.

It’s helped me a lot especially like reading out loud in my fluency and stuff. Just it’s helped me a lot and my mom was talking about that the other day. She was like, “Yeah, if it wasn’t for Mr. Mah’s class, you would have been like behind, low and stuff,” and I was like, “probably.”

Leilani believed that through poetry writing, she was learning about writing, and she began to see poetic elements in other forms of writing. “As I was writing, I was learning more. The more I learn, it’s like more poetry. I don’t know, it’s like everything I look at, every writing that I see is like poetry.”

Like Leilani, Maya found that poetry activities helped her in other aspects of reading and writing.

What I’ve learned is I didn’t think poetry did anything in life, but it actually helps with a lot of things like learning words and remembering things about poetry. And what I’ve learned is in language arts is, it gives you hints to words and things that you wouldn’t think you’d know. But, you do.

Ruby found poetry activities to be beneficial to her reading and writing, and she suggested that poetry is something that students should do.

It’s fun and like your kids should do it, because doesn’t it like help you with school? Because like your writing, like your language arts, it will help you with

your writing and stuff. Because, you have to think of words that go with your poem other than just like throwing words on the paper and just turning it in. Yeah. It's good for school.

When asked what his feelings about Poetry Break were, Sabastian responded, They were fun. Sometimes hard, because reading, I had troubles with that. But now, I'm pretty good at reading now. Yeah, we use to practice it. It helped us a lot with our reading skills. And we got to learn some new words while we were reading some of the poetry. And yeah, it helped me a lot with reading.

Eliza noticed that Poetry Break helped her classmates read with more expression in order to convey meaning.

'Cause in Poetry Break you had to do it in expressions, 'cause sometimes you wouldn't understand like what they're talking about or like what they meant. So, instead of like saying it normal, they would say it like loud or funny or happy or sad so they would get the poem better.

As a student learning English, Jillian noticed that poetry activities helped her with language acquisition. "I've become a better reader and know how to like speak better English and all those things." Later in the interview, she added more about her improvement in writing,

I think I improved a lot from doing a lot of writing. And, it was fun doing these because we would like do it every day, mostly every day. And, like our poetry journals, it would almost like fill up. We had like a couple pages left, so it was fun to do it.

Toward the end of her interview, Jillian once again brought up the language improvement aspect of poetry activities, “It’s really good like you could learn a lot of things from it ... learn more words, and know more of your words, and know more of your vocabulary and things and have like ideas and things.” Through poetry, Jillian began to have a better grasp of the English language.

Through class-constructed poetry writing, Lilly began to think about her own writing. When I asked her how she felt after reading class poems, she responded, “Excited ... that time when I’m still thinking about how the sentence makes sense and how to write faster.” She explained that she would be thinking about how to write her own poems while the class created poems together. At the conclusion of her interview when I asked her if there was anything else she would like to share, Lilly responded,

What I would like to share on poetry is, poetry is not that hard to read faster and not slow. ... I want to say that poetry is fun and taught you [to] know how to read faster. And when you write poetry, it taught you how to write faster and think about the story [poem].

With the improvement that Shao Yeng saw in her writing, she believed that she sounded like a “real” poet, “We write our own, then after that, you could make it sound like it’s in a real poetry [book].” With reading and writing practice through poetry, students began to see themselves as readers and writers.

Hard Work

Hard work was a theme that came out in 10 of the participant’s interviews. When these participants pointed out that learning to read and write poetry wasn’t always easy,

they usually paired this idea with the idea that poetry was fun. It was as if the hard work led to a sense of satisfaction.

Ruby said,

Well, it felt like sometimes difficult, and yeah like difficult and sometimes it like depends on which ones you're writing. And some of them are easy and fun. It was all interesting though, like to learn different ways of writing poetry."

Eliza shared,

I worked hard, um, but I remember just writing ... an example [she reads part of a line from one of her poems], "I would give you a frisbee of light" ... just writing that, instead of writing why and what it might do. So, I remember writing that, but then rewriting it and then fixing it. And I worked hard and it was fun.

Having too many things they wanted to write about made it difficult for two of the participants. According to Ariel, "It was always hard for me to pick like one thing to write about that made sense to other people. But, it was fun to have to think about it and figure out stuff." Similarly, Shao Yeng found thinking of too many poems at once to be a difficult part of poetry writing. "It was kinda hard when I write about [poems] because I think a lot of them."

When asked to describe poetry activities, Cherry Lee responded, "I would describe it that, mmm, it will be hard if like if you don't really know how to speak English. ... So, it was hard for me too and yeah, it was fun sometimes.

Maya used to think poetry writing was hard; however, through practice she found poetry writing to become easier.

I remember when I was in fourth grade ... I would be sitting at my desk, and I'd get really mad because I didn't know what to write. And what I think now is that I just didn't try, and if you try, you get really far. And when I stepped up to the plate and tried, I mean I wrote it. I did it. I typed it up and everything. And it worked. And here I am 2 years from that time talking about it. And I look at it now and I'm like, "That's a lot. Whoa. Oh my gosh." And then back then, that time it was nothing, it was just some little jacked up handwriting, some little marks everywhere, and now it's like art and there's writing. There's literature. I mean I could show that to somebody and actually teach them something from it.

Pride in Accomplishment

Participants seemed to have a sense of pride when looking at their poems. During the interview some of the participants were given a poem they wrote in third or fourth grade and asked, "What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?" Eleven of the participants expressed a sense of pride in their accomplishments. Some participants were surprised at the maturity and quality of the poetry that they wrote as third and fourth grade students.

Looking at her poetry, with pride in her voice, Ariel reflected,

They sound a lot more like, when people think about fourth grade they don't think about poems like this. So, I think it's kind of cool that we did do stuff that, like, wouldn't be regular poems to hear. And, it was about, like, lots of different feelings and stuff that happened.

When I shared a locally published poetry anthology containing one of Leilani's poems from fourth grade, she had a hard time putting the book down. Not only did she read her work, she looked for the poems that her friends had published as well. When asked what memories or feelings her poem brought back, she enthused, "I remember writing ... one like this, about a friend. And, I remember another one that was about a tornado. And, it just doesn't even look like I wrote it, I can't believe it!" I asked her why she couldn't believe she wrote it, and she responded,

'Cause usually they say that kids are immature, and when you are fourth grade you are still considered as a little kid. And, when you look at like their writings [referring to the poetry anthology], it just like blows up!

She felt that the poetry she and her classmates wrote in fourth grade was mature and of high quality.

Sabastian read one of his poems and had a reaction similar to Leilani's. He couldn't believe he wrote it. I asked him what he thought of the poem, "It was a good one, because they're talking about life and experiences." I then asked him, "What does that make you think about that fourth grade you? You were able to write this." He responded, "That I was smart."

After reading poems she wrote as a fourth grade student, Ruby shared, I think it's good for a fourth grader I guess. I think it was my first time writing about a serious poem I guess. Yeah. Then, like I remember that other time I wrote like that maze poem. That was creepy. Yeah. But I like that poem. It's nice and cheerful and stuff.

Although this may sound self-deprecating, she was smiling and there was obvious pride and pleasure in her voice as she spoke.

Cherry Lee didn't need to read one of her poems in order to share her pride over her poetry writing. When she was talking about what she remembered about poetry writing, she recalled a poem she wrote for a writing club she was in fourth grade. "I [wrote] 'The Sun Shining On My Face.' Ms. Librum, she corrected a lot, and it made the poetry just like amazing for me, and that was my favorite page in the whole book." Cherry Lee felt her poem was better than any other child's work in the book.

Later in the interview Cherry Lee shared,

You know, my poems got better. So, my sister Yang said, "Oh, I like everything that you wrote on your poem book." So, I said, "You can have my book," and she said, "Oh, really!" and she was happy ... yeah, but she just keep it, and she said, "When I read your poems, it just makes me in love with it," ... and it just makes me feel so happy.

Tyler also experienced family members cherishing his work. When I showed him a poem he wrote and asked him if he remembered it, he replied, "Yeah. In fact, my mom put a picture of me and that poem in like a picture holder and she put it right by the T.V." When I asked him how he felt about that, Tyler emoted, "Love. Goodness. Because, it made me happy that my mom was happy." For both Cherry Lee and Tyler, there was pride in the fact that their family members enjoyed their poetry.

Maya looked at her poem, and after reading it boasted,

I mean, I think wow! I was in fourth grade and I wrote this. And, people that are in sixth grade now think that it is so hard to get a piece of paper and a pencil and write a rhyme, a rap, any writing. But, I was in fourth grade and I wrote that. And that shows a lot.

Participants felt a sense of pride about the poetry they wrote. For some of the participants, their sense of pride seemed to increase when they reflected on the admiration that their family members had for their poetry.

Reflection on Themes

Fun was a recurring theme woven throughout the interviews. If I had to pick one theme that captured the essence of what children experienced during poetry activities, I would say fun was that theme. Tyler used the word fun 9 times in his interview, and at the end of the interview when I asked him if there was anything else he wanted to say, he imparted, “Poetry is fun,” for his 10th repetition. Not only did the word fun find its way into all but one of the interviews, the interviews had an overall light and cheerful tone.

Additional Data

Poetry can be a record of the past. Through reading poetry written by their third or fourth grade class or written by themselves, 18 of the participants shared memories that the poems brought to life. Although this was not a theme that students experienced during poetry activities, the responses from participants were significant and I decided they should be included. Examples of class poems are shared in this section. Concerns expressed by the school district that approved this research about publishing poems

written prior to receiving approval for the study kept me from publishing original student work.

After reading a fish poem she wrote, Willow exclaimed,
 OHHH! I can hear Mr. Mah's voice saying 'rub head to tail, head to tail' [reading a line from her fish poem out loud]. That is forever ago! I remember that. Like I didn't even remember anything, and now I read the poem and I'm like, man I remember that like it was yesterday. How we had the fish after we did the ... the thing at the creek and then we like had to put the red paint on [the fish] and the, the, paper on it with the newspaper.

As Willow shared her memories, she pantomimed the process of fish printing and her voice bubbled with excitement. It was as if she was reliving the experience.

Class-constructed poems also provided a catalyst for evoking memories. If poems written by the participant's class were available, the participant was asked to read the poem and share their memories.

Maya's class wrote the poem "Ukulele."

Ukulele

Jumping fleas
 fill the air with melodic twangs
 sending children's imagination across oceans
 where sunshine and waves wait to welcome
 dream voyagers

After reading the class poem "Ukulele," Maya remembered the field trip that inspired the poem. "Yeah! When we went to the performance like how the guy was

playing, what it looked like, and how it sounded and stuff.” Like Willow, Maya’s description of her memory was animated.

During their interviews, Isabel, Eliz, Shao Yang, and Jakia’it read a class-constructed poem about a moose that rested on the school playground for many days.

Moose
On the loose
Strutting around
Like they own the world

Moose
Laying down
On campus
Destroying our recess

Moose
Munching the trees
Scratching bark
Distracting our learning

Those moose!
Fifteen hundred pound bullies
Walling us up
In our classroom

Moose
Find your own hang out
Leave
Our peaceful playground

Isabel recalled, “I remember when the moose was on our playground and the assistant helper from our playground said no more recess because the moose was out there eating up the trees.” Eliza recollected, “I remember that one. A lot of people would tell moose stories. I think we wrote that one because we had been seeing a lot of moose on the playground.” After reading the poem, Shao Yang vented, “When the moose came we can’t go outside and play. Then we’re mad. Then we just wrote that.” Jakia’it shared

that after reading the poem about the moose, she remembered a classmate suggested the moose move to the playground to the school up the road. Interestingly, each of these girls seemed to have slightly agitated tones to their voices when sharing their memories about the moose poem.

Sometimes the poems didn't just evoke memories about the event, but about the process of writing poems. Eliza and Cherry Lee's class wrote the poem "Valentine's Verse."

Valentines Verse

Hopeful hearts thump the rhythm
 love love love
 Feelings dancing an ocean of emotion
 Flitting
 Leaping
 Writing words of kindness
 Friends at the forefront of our thoughts
 Can't wait, can't wait
 Sweet, sweet Valentine
 Please be mine!

After reading the poem, Eliza related, "I remember that one. Yeah I remember a lot of people had a request about that one because it was around Valentine's Day and a lot of people wanted to put what they wanted to say into the newsletter poems. And then, we got to write our own and share it with Mr. Mah's class." Cherry Lee recalled, "It makes me think of the old time I was in fourth grade, and I very [really] liked writing."

For Kitty, reading the poems her class wrote brought back the excitement involved in class-constructed poetry. "Yeah. It made me remember how we would all have good times and sometimes I would be like, 'Oh, I can't wait for the poem.'"

Discrepant Cases

There was only one discrepant case in this study. Joachim stated that he did not remember poetry activities. Therefore, his responses did not touch on any of the themes identified in this study. Although there was only one discrepant interview, the responses of some participants indicated that they were not sure that their peers enjoyed Poetry Break and poetry writing as much as they did. Further research could yield more discrepant cases.

Evidence of Quality

Trustworthiness

In order to receive feedback and identify possible bias, peer review and debriefing happened on a weekly basis during the research process. The peer reviewer was a teacher who had been teaching at a Title I school for 17 years. The reviewer holds degrees in both education and journalism. As a practitioner researcher, the reviewer kept abreast of current research in the field of education, especially in the area of literacy.

Once interviews were transcribed and the names of the participants removed, transcripts of interviews along with my interpretation of the interview were shared with my peer reviewer. When the reviewer had questions about my interpretation, my peer reviewer would ask me what the participants said that brought me to my conclusions. I would reread the transcripts or listen to the interviews in order to find the evidence that shaped my thinking. This process helped me focus on what the participants were saying and encouraged me to reexamine my interpretation of the interviews. Written accounts and audio recordings of these sessions were kept on a password protected computer.

Member Check

During the interviews, participants were asked to clarify any responses that I found unclear. When I wanted make sure that I accurately heard what the participant was saying, I used reflective listening and repeated what I heard back to the participant. This gave the participants another chance to restate their meaning and clarify my understanding.

Conclusion

In this chapter I described the process I used to generate data, investigate experience, and reflect on essential themes. I presented findings as data poems and descriptions of essential themes, shared additional data on poetry and memories, and offered a discussion of quality.

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore what elementary students experienced during literacy activities focused on poetry. Literacy activities such as Poetry Break were observed to be an eagerly anticipated part of daily classroom rituals and I wanted to find out what children thought about their experiences with poetry. Through interviews with 22 participants, I was able to distill 10 themes that gleaned the essence of what children experience during poetry activities. The theme that resounded throughout the interviews was that poetry is fun.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

In the present educational-reform movement in the United States, the experience of the child in the social context of learning and literacy is not being considered. Culturally and personally relevant literacy practices, such as the exploration of poetry, are not being promoted. NCLB, which is based on a skills-focused view of reading and a narrow range of quantitative reading research, has shaped educational practices across the United States. In many schools, funding and time allocated for literacy is limited to programs supported by NCLB.

Recognizing the lack of research focused on children's experiences with literacy activities, from their perspective, I designed this research to explore what children experience during poetry activities such as Poetry Break. The research question asked, How do children describe their experiences of poetry activities when they look back to their poetry experiences as third or fourth grade students? For this phenomenological study, interviews were conducted for children to reflect on and share what they experienced during poetry activities.

The questions asked during the interview were:

1. What do you remember about poetry activities?
2. What do you remember about Poetry Break?
3. How would you describe Poetry Break?
4. What were your feelings about Poetry Break?
5. What do you remember about poetry writing?

6. How would you describe your experience of writing poetry as a third or fourth grader?
7. Why did you volunteer to perform poetry in a public setting?
8. What else would you like to share about your experiences with poetry?
9. How does the experience of poetry activities affect your ability to express yourself now?
10. What have you done with poetry since third or fourth grade?
11. (If copies of class constructed poems from the class the student was in are available, share the poetry with the participant.) What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?
12. (If copies of the participant's original poetry are available, share the poetry with the participant.) What memories or feelings does this poem bring back?

Each participant's interview was analyzed to find the essence of poetry for that participant. Then, employing the methods of Glesne (1999) and Carr (2003), I poetically rendered each participant's interview in order to further clarify the child's experiences with poetry. During and after the process of rendering individual interviews into poetry, thematic statements were isolated through the selective highlighting approach described by van Manen (1990).

Through the interview process, data generation, and data analysis, 10 themes related to children's experiences with poetry were developed. The experiences of fun, being center stage, working with friends, an emotional outlet, expressing oneself, choice, creating community, improved reading and writing, hard work, and pride in

accomplishment were all themes that emerged from interviewing children about their experiences with poetry.

In this chapter, I interpret the findings of this study in relation to the conceptual framework and literature. Next, I share implications for social change and, based on the findings, I recommend actions to be taken. Then, I indicate areas for future research. Finally, I share my reflections on the research process and offer a concluding statement.

Interpretation of Findings

Positive poetry experiences were prevalent in participants' interviews. For 21 of the 22 participants, poetry activities were an enjoyable part of the school day. These 21 interviews were light and joyous with each of the participants talking about the fun they had during Poetry Break. Although there was not a question asking if poetry activities should happen in schools, 13 participants suggested that poetry activities should be a part of the educational process. When I asked one of the participants, Tyler, what he had done with poetry since fourth grade, he responded, "I have talked about it, and well, we don't really do much poetry in fifth grade. ... Yeah. It kinda sucks." John, a twelfth grade student, also shared his desire for more poetry,

I think we should have more stuff like about poetry and like creative writing in school 'cause after fourth grade, there really wasn't that much emphasis on poetry. And in high school, then we like read one and two poems. Yeah, and I would like to hear a lot more of that, especially since I'm into music so.

Responses like these showed the value that children placed on poetry activities. Because values influence the perception of human experience, values were considered in

this phenomenological research. As discussed in chapter 2, Bertalanffy (1975) noted most views of human behavior do not include value; however, value systems are part of human identity and experience. The interpretation of the findings section presents what children experienced and valued in poetry activities.

Interpretation of Findings in Relation to the Conceptual Framework

Bruner's psychocultural theory and the belief that an individual's experiences are pertinent and paramount in any endeavor were the philosophical and theoretical frameworks on which this research was shaped. In this section, I interpret the findings in relation to the psychocultural theory of education. I also introduce Glasser's choice theory and explain how poetry activities contribute to meeting the five basic human needs proposed in choice theory.

Psychocultural Theory and Experience

The psychocultural theory of education, discussed in Chapter 2, reflects the belief that education involves more than the subjects taught. Bruner (1996) asserted that culturally, school is really about the experience of school and the meaning that children make of their experiences at school (p. 28). Experiences in school impact an individual's life and emotions, and feelings are always present in the educational process.

The poetry activities discussed in Chapter 4 provided an opportunity for 21 of the 22 participants to have positive feelings while actively reading and writing. Each of these participants talked about the fun they had with poetry activities. Kitty, Maya, and Ariel each offered that Poetry Break was something they looked forward to and they didn't want it to end. Xia and Jakia'it each talked about Poetry Break literally being a break

from their otherwise academic school day. When I asked Jakia if she had read or written any poetry at school since fourth grade, she replied, “No, because at school, we have like math because the only break we have is bathroom breaks.” Students reported that they enjoyed poetry activities, and this is probably the reason they looked forward to doing them. People tend to be drawn to experiences they find pleasurable, and children are no exception (Feldman et al., 1994; Levine, 2002; Noddings, 2003).

A tenet of the psychocultural theory of education is that passing on knowledge and skill involves a subcommunity of mutual learners in interaction (Bruner, 1996). The teacher orchestrates the educational activities while encouraging others to share in the responsibility of the learning process. One of the themes that emerged from this study was that poetry activities, such as Poetry Break, provided students with an opportunity to work with friends. Students encouraged other students to volunteer for Poetry Break. Ruby claimed that one of the reasons she volunteered to read at Poetry Break was that she thought other students might volunteer if she volunteered. In contrast, Cherry Lee said she started volunteering to read poems at Poetry Break because her friends wanted her to read with them. Kitty shared that she liked to find groups that needed help in creating props to enhance their poetry performance. What the girls were describing was being a part of a community of learners where the students have some responsibility for the learning process.

Another benefit of students working together is, according to Bruner (1996), that in the educational process, externalizing “rescues cognitive activity from implicitness, making it more public and negotiable,” creating solidarity in a group (p. 24). Participants’

experiences of working with friends and improving reading and writing skills happened simultaneously during poetry activities. The experience of creating community through Poetry Break that 10 participants described also fits with Bruner's idea of creating solidarity in a group by externalizing the learning process. Through interacting, learning is made external, and explicit "learning is at once deeply personal and inherently social; it connects us not just to knowledge in the abstract, but to each other" (Senge et al., 2000, p. 4).

Although poetry activities were public, they were also personal and colored by emotion. Bruner (1996) suggested that when people construct their reality, feelings and emotions are embedded in the process (p. 12). For 21 of the 22 participants, fun and enjoyment was a theme that resonated throughout the interviews. These positive emotions shaped the participants' memories of poetry activities.

Glasser's Choice Theory

Initially, I hadn't considered the work of Glasser (1993) as part of my theoretical framework for this study. However, elements of choice theory are evident in the participants' experiences with poetry activities. In his book, *The Quality School Teacher*, Glasser proposed that there are five basic human needs: love, power, freedom, fun, and survival (p. 19). According to Glasser, the needs "are built in to our genetic structure, and from birth we *must* devote all our behavior to attempt to satisfy them. *Quality, therefore, is anything we experience that is consistently satisfying to one or more of these basic needs*" (emphasis in original, p. 19).

Through poetry activities, 21 of the 22 participants expressed experiencing fun, which is one of Glasser's five basic needs. The desire for fun could be the reason that children are excited and volunteer to perform poetry almost every day.

Being on stage and the center of attention could be considered a form of power. Twenty of the participants in the study shared that they volunteered to read poetry to the class because they wanted to go "on the stage." Perhaps this desire to be the center of attention has something to do with the power that can be felt through entertaining an audience.

When poetry participants were on the stage, as Xia mentioned, they believed that they were being listened to. Another part of poetry that speaks to the need for power is the ability to use language. "When I write I attach myself to the language, to the fact that a word has real power in the world" (Heard, 1989, p. 71). Language has power. It is the medium through which thought can be transformed into action. It has long been recognized that "Human beings are unique in the ability to realize that they have the power to make the world into a difference [sic] place than it is" (Feldman et al., 1994, p. 35). Action can be taken through poetic expression. This idea that language has power is not a new one. "Indeed, the ability to use language creatively and effectively was among the key characteristics sought by many tribes in their leaders, and often such ability was at least as important as one's skills as a warrior or hunter" (Reagan, 1996, p. 65).

Students also mentioned that they remembered the class snapping at the end of the poetry performances during Poetry Break. Tyler enthused, "Oh, yeah! They snapped! ...

Yeah! Give us some poetry love!” Students may feel a sense of love when their classmates appreciate them. According to Glasser (1993), love is a basic need.

Choice, which could be considered a form of freedom, which is one of Glasser’s basic needs, was experienced by 13 of the participants during poetry activities. The students appreciated the opportunity to make decisions about whether they would perform poems, how they would perform poems, who they would perform with, what poem they would read, and what topic they would write their poem about. As Jillian stated, “I felt I could just be free and write like things that are on my mind.”

Survival is the last of Glasser’s basic needs, and according to Glasser, “All survival behaviors feel good” (1993, p. 16). The emotional outlet provided through poetry writing could be considered a survival mechanism. As reported in Chapter 4, 17 participants shared that poetry activities provided an emotional outlet. Kitty, one of the participants with anger management difficulties, pointed out writing poetry was a way to soothe her frustrations. Leilani also shared that poetry writing can be a way for teenagers to work through their emotional turmoil. Dealing with emotional issues may help students survive. In a 2005 press release, the State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services reported, “Alaska’s suicide rate is consistently one of the highest in the nation. In 2002, Alaska had 131 suicides for a rate of 20.9 for every 100,000 residents, almost twice the national average of 10.6 for every 100,000” (¶ 3). Young people, especially those in Alaska, need an outlet for exploring and dealing with their emotions. Teaching children healthy ways of dealing with their emotions may prevent self-

destructive or risky behavior; however, further research is needed. A healthy emotional existence is crucial to survival.

In summary, experiences with poetry activities provided an avenue to partially fulfill the need for love, power, freedom, fun and survival. According to Glasser, these are the five basic human needs.

Interpreting the Findings in Relation to the Themes

Humans thrive on positive experiences. Poetry activities provided positive experiences to most of the students who participated in them. Noddings (2003) asserted that many children will fail in school because they will be asked to spend their time doing things they do not enjoy and they will not be provided the opportunity to do tasks that bring them pleasure (p. 81). Passion is a motivational key in education. Positive experiences may improve students' attitude and motivation in school (Guthrie et al., 2004, p. 302).

The positive experiences of fun, being center stage, working with friends, an emotional outlet, expressing oneself, choice, creating community, improved reading and writing, hard work, and pride in accomplishment were the themes that emerged when children described their experiences in poetry activities. These themes lent themselves to Rosenblatt's (1978) transactional theory of reading, which emphasized the social nature of language, literacy, and reading. As discussed in Chapter 2, poetry tends toward what Rosenblatt called the aesthetic stance in reading. "In aesthetic reading, the reader's attention is centered directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text" (p. 25). In the transactional theory of reading, experience matters.

Fun

According to Glasser (1993), fun is one of the five basic human needs. People are attracted to fun, and all but one of the poetry participants described their experiences with poetry as fun. They were taking the aesthetic stance to reading as they were interacting with and enjoying the text.

Ciardi and Williams (1975) proposed that there is a play impulse involved with poetry. Adults may overlook the joy of poetry by overanalyzing the work,

But the child is wiser: he is busy having a good time with the poem. The poem pleases and involves him. He responds to it in an immediate muscular way. He

recognizes its performance at once and wants *to act with it*. (emphasis added, p. 5)

In her interview, as if expressing the sentiments of Ciardi and Williams, Cherry Lee's voice and body language changed as she tried to fully express her point about the rhythm and fun of poetry. "Poetry can be fun if you like reading, or, like, if you like reading rhythms. Sound like that, 'ya and yah.'" Enjoyment of language is frequently not taken into consideration as individuals use language as a tool to function in day-to-day life. When it comes to words, "We don't think enough about how they feel in our mouths as we read or how they make our bodies feel" (Heard, 1999, p. 74). Emotions and sensations, as mentioned earlier, are involved in everything humans experience and language is no exception. However, it is no wonder that the joy of language may not be apparent to individuals, since educational institutions, as Martin (2003) expressed, focus more on testable language and literacy elements than literacy experiences that are about enjoyment. Poetry was a time for participants to focus on the joy of language.

Students enjoyed poetry activities and, as Capra (1996) pointed out, “human intelligence, human memory, and human decisions are always colored by emotions” (p. 68). The positive emotions that students experienced could be the reason that they continued to participate in poetry activities on a regular basis. The elation experienced by children during poetry activities was evident in the interviews.

If the goal of teaching poetry, as Noddings (2003) suggested, is delight and wisdom evidenced by “joy, deep thought, and eagerness to read more and hear more” (p. 252), then Poetry Break has helped obtain that goal.

Being Center Stage

“Above all else, poetry is performance” (Ciardi & Williams, 1975, p. 4). Language can be used as a way to exercise power, and being center stage during poetry activities gives students a chance to exercise the power of language. In order for the crafted word to have an impact, it must be read or heard.

Human predicaments are woven into the very fabric of comprehension and production of language in active, not passive, ways. Who gets to do the telling and who is listened to is every bit as important as the code that appears on a page or in a conversation. (Payne-Bourcy, 2001, p. 14)

The way teachers use and talk about language, and how often students are given the opportunity to speak can set up power dynamics of discourse in a classroom (Hall et al., 2003; Smith, & Connolly, 2005). By providing a space for students to have the center stage, students may feel that their voices are heard and valued. As previously discussed,

some of the students shared that they enjoyed receiving snaps of appreciation from their peers at the end of their poetry performances, readings, and recitations.

Shy

Although they volunteered to perform poetry on a regular basis, 4 of the participants mentioned that they felt shy when they were first performing poems. “Every student needs to know that the classroom is a safe place where every voice is respected. Writing poetry is about learning to express our deepest feelings and experiences through words, and that can be very frightening” (Heard, 1999, p. 3). Eventually, these students felt comfortable reading in front of the class. As Cherry Lee shared, at first she was shy about reading, and then her friends encouraged her and she discovered that it was fun.

Working With Friends

Language and literacy exist for social purposes and learning language should be a social activity (Bruner, 1996; Dewey, 1976; Gardner, 1983; Vygotsky, 1978). Bongartz and Schneider (2003) found social interaction to be a key part of language development. Freeman and Freeman (2000) pointed out that we learn language when we are involved in real communication. Chia Shi described how she and her friends negotiated who would perform together and what they would perform. Working with friends can take some social navigation, as Chia Shi pointed out, however we are social beings and children enjoy working with their friends. Outside of reading poems, the chance to work together gave the students a chance to talk with their friends. People learn languages in order to be able to communicate. Poetry activities provided communication opportunities for the participants.

Emotional Outlet

Perhaps more so than prose, poetry has the potential to transmit intense images and emotional content. “The three pillars of poetry are emotion, image and music” (Fletcher, 2002, p. 10). When individuals write poems, they turn their attention to knowing themselves as they truly are. In poetry truth and honesty come to the forefront.

How we see ourselves inside determines how and why we write, and what poems we chose to read and cherish. It’s the work of knowing ourselves from the inside—rather than from the outside—sharpening our inner vision that lies at the heart of writing poetry. (Heard, 1999, p. 116)

Through poetry the participants were able to explore their emotional existence.

Poets, from professionals to novices, expose their inner lives through their work. There is more to each person than can be observed from the outside. “It has been known for centuries that human beings have images and experiences that seem to come not from the outside but from the inside world” (Feldman et al., 1994, p. 33). In order for individuals to be truly known by others, they must share their inner worlds. Poetry was an avenue through which participants could present their inner selves. “All of us are hungry to express our true selves, to be reunited with our hearts, and this is the real work of teaching and exploring poetry” (Heard, 1999, p. 118). Giving students an opportunity to explore poetry gave them the opportunity to explore themselves and develop their identity.

For some individuals, the process of letting the inner visions flow can be an incredibly personal process. “It has been said that writing a poem for someone else is like

giving blood because it comes from the heart of the writer and goes to the heart of the receiver. Poems are filled with words from the heart” (Fletcher, 2002, p. 7). Chia Shi did not say that poetry was an emotional outlet for her, and I did not consider her as a participant who used poetry as an emotional outlet; however, she did find poetry writing to be a very personal experience. She would write many poems; however, she was hesitant to share them.

Using poetry with children gave them an opportunity to explore their inner thoughts and feelings. Demetrio, Shao Yeng, Kitty, and Willow each described using poetry to express feelings of sadness. Jakia’it also explained that she used poetry to express her feelings of sadness and she wrote poems to her friends to work out the emotional turbulence that sometimes occurred in her friendships.

Language is a window into human nature exposing thoughts and feelings, however these thoughts and feelings cannot be equated to the mere words that are aimed at their expression (Pinker, 2007). Although thoughts and feelings have a complexity that words cannot fully express, language is part of the voice through which individuals share experience. In her interview, Leilani asserted, “I think poetry has more value than just writing, it’s like your life. Some people put their life and heart into all their writing.” She was speaking of the power of language to paint an individual’s inner world.

Poetry is a powerful entry point for individuals to explore their inner selves and emotional lives. “It’s a poet’s job to know the interior of his or her heart” (Heard, 1999, p. 109). Maya shared that poetry made her “want to get my emotions and my heart out there.”

Gardner (1983) claimed that personal intelligences, although not well understood, are of the utmost importance to humans (p. 236). Each person has an inner universe unknown to others and through language may give a glimpse of it to others. Though others may never view the whole of the inner panoramas, there is a human need to be known and recognized by others. Thus, each person must have the tools available to paint those inner landscapes for others. According to Vygotsky (1978), language is the medium through which an individual constructs a self-image and shares it with others. As participants described, poetry was a mechanism for sorting and sharing their true selves. Jillian asserted, "When we do poetry writing ... I could like be myself and write what I feel inside of me."

Sometimes the inner landscapes are too primal for prose. Poetry unlocks an individual's voice in a unique way. According to Heard (1999),

We all have poetry inside us, and I believe that poetry is for everyone, but can we recognize it when we hear it, in our students and in ourselves? Sometimes it disguises itself, it doesn't rhyme, it doesn't sound like a limerick, so we have to look for it in unlikely places. (p. xv)

For some people the most unlikely place to look for poetry may be within themselves; yet each individual has a world of inner images waiting to flow free. Through poetry experiences, 17 of the participants expressed that they were able to reveal the poetry within. For Kitty, poetry writing released inner images and engendered mental imagery at the same time. "Writing poetry, it just made me also have pictures in my

mind.” When Kitty wrote poetry, she also had a strong impulse to illustrate. Poetry encouraged her to explore other artistic avenues of expression.

Once students have heard the voice of poetry, they are more apt to find their own unique poetic voice. In doing so, they are also accessing their emotions and developing their intrapersonal intelligence. Supporting Barron (1974) and Clary and Coulehan’s (2005) assertion that poetry could be used as a therapeutic tool, participants shared that poetry experiences could be used as a means of altering their emotional states. Cherry Lee, Isabel, Ruby, and Leilani described poetry as having a calming effect. Cherry Lee described her feelings about her experiences with poetry, “I’m peace already, but like I’m more in peace. And like, I’m just joining the world. For me, I feel like that.” Ruby shared that she wrote poetry when she was frustrated, and she explained that poetry was good for “your mind and relaxing.” Similarly, Leilani noted, “It’s another way to get like really ‘dressed’ or relaxed.”

Poetry is a therapeutic instrument. It clarifies inner worlds through the communicative process and, as Barron (1974) noted, “Poetry ... has a therapeutic legitimacy. Broadly speaking, the poetry of the therapeutic scene is found in human contact” (p. 90). Kitty shared how she used writing poetry to deal with anger: “I’d write like a mean poem to take my anger out and then I’d look at it and I cheer myself up.” Along a similar vein, Xia explained, “When I get mad, I write about why did I get mad and um what, who made me mad. And, I feel happy.”

Participants seemed to echo Fletcher's (2002) sentiments when he wrote, "Poetry saved my life. Well, maybe that's a bit of an exaggeration, but poetry saved my emotional life. And without emotions, what's life worth anyway?" (p. 12).

Expressing Oneself

Expressing themselves through poetry was a sentiment voiced by 13 of the participants. Dewey (1976) suggested, "Language is primarily a social thing, a means by which we give our experiences to others and get theirs in return" (p. 34). Jakia'it talked about comparing thoughts and feelings with her classmates through poetry. Through language individuals are able to express the abstractions of both their inner and outer worlds (Bruner, 1996; Vygotsky, 1978). For John, poetry was his preferred method of written communication. "I think it was easier to get your thoughts on paper through poetry." Language is a mediator and ambassador of human experience (Levine, 2002). Xia shared that he wrote poems about, "what I see and think."

Individuals who are given the opportunity to explore language are also given the opportunity to explore their own identity. Like the preservice teachers in Rosaen's (2003) study, Jakia'it was able to employ poetry to explore her cultural identity and experience through writing poetry in her mother tongue, Hmong.

Poetry is Personal, There is No Right or Wrong

During poetry activities, according to Cherry Lee, Maya, Sabastian, and Ariel, there was no right or wrong answer or thing to do. They were free to express themselves. Cherry Lee and Maya each felt, in particular, that there was no right or wrong answer to their writing. It was personal. They both used the phrase "It's your mind," to refer to the

contents of their poems. Maya went on to explain that it wasn't like a test that could be scored. Maya also felt that performing poetry was a chance to show who she was. "It expresses yourself, and it tells other people that it's okay to just get on stage and do anything." Similarly, Ariel reflected that Poetry Break was "an open space where there wasn't really a lot of judgment." During poetry experiences, students were given the space to express themselves.

Choice

According to 13 of the participants in this study, choice was a memorable aspect of poetry activities. Students learn better and are more engaged when they have choices (Eva-Wood, 2004a, 2008; Koukis, 2010). Kitty was so enthusiastic about having a choice in what she read, that she would pick out two poems at a time. "I would um, look at two poems and choose one for today and one for tomorrow." She would hide her favorite poetry books so they would be available when she was ready to read them.

It is a commonly held belief that interest is a motivating factor in what students choose to read (Flowerday et al., 2004; Guthrie et al., 2004; Levine, 2002; Marinak, 2006; Noddings, 2003). Krashen (2004) advocated for free voluntary reading in which students have a choice about what they read and asserted that children enjoy reading. Koukis (2010) suggested, rather than assigning particular poems, "Allowing students to choose their own poem seems a better method to engender positive attitudes towards poetry" (p. 170). Kitty, Shao Yeng, Alice, Jillian, Ruby, and Ariel each mentioned having an opportunity to pick out the poems they read as something they remembered about Poetry Break. What interests an individual is a matter of personal preference, and these

participants remembered having choices, which meant they had an opportunity to satisfy their own taste.

Interest is a key ingredient in learning, and it is notable that understanding may be a key ingredient in interest. Silvia (2005) found that understanding is a predictor of interest. If individuals are given information that is too difficult to digest, they will not learn nor will they be interested in learning. Martin (2003) suggested that if reading is always difficult, students will not have a positive attitude toward reading, nor will they be motivated to read. Perhaps part of the draw of Poetry Break was that students had a choice about what they read, and this gave them an opportunity to choose poems that were at a comfortable reading level.

Eliza, Kitty, Demetrio, Maya, Jillian, Sabastian, and Ariel talked about the choices they had in writing poetry. Demetrio and Sabastian both felt that their writing topics were limitless. Ariel expressed her pleasure at being able to write about her “own stuff” without the constraints of a worksheet. Similarly, Jillian shared, “Um, when I was in fourth grade and I did poetry, I felt I could just be free and write like things that are on my mind.” Kitty also enjoyed the choices she had in writing and claimed, while demonstrating her knowledge of literal versus metaphoric phrases, “I could poetry write out of thin air, and I mean that literally. I will talk about thin air.” Eliza appreciated the freedom to change her mind about what she was writing. As mentioned earlier, choice is a motivational factor in student learning and engagement. By providing choices about what students may write, they may be more motivated to write.

Choice of working alone or working with friends was another facet of poetry experiences participants recalled. Whether students read in front of the group or not was also a choice, as Jillian pointed out. Poetry Break was based on student choice.

Creating Community

Creating community is a worthwhile pursuit. Ten of the 22 individuals interviewed described community creation through shared poetry experiences. Poetry has the power to invoke emotional responses from the audience (Jobling & Moni, 2000; Perfect, 1999; Pike, 2000). Poetry connects us to each other through ideas, images, and emotions. Jakia'it and Kitty each shared that poetry was a means to connect with others. Jakia'it talked about meeting new people through poetry and described using poetry to find out what she had in common with others. Kitty believed that the poetry she wrote could teach people things about her. Through getting to know each other, community bonds are formed.

Poetry Break provided an opportunity for students to “come together,” as Willow pointed out, and listen to each other. Tyler recalled that Poetry Break was a social time during which students listened to each other. Ariel and John also believed that Poetry Break provided an opportunity for everyone to be heard. John remembered that everybody was involved in Poetry Break and he believed,

That helps the class as a whole, because I don't think that there were any kids who were too afraid to talk to each other or anything ... so like after poetry and everything everybody was cool with each other.”

Poetry helped the students be comfortable with each other.

A classroom environment can send out messages: that all of our students' lives matter; that every voice is worth listening to; and that students can take risks in writing poems about whatever their hearts urge them to write. I focus on creating the emotional environment first, and then I trust that the poems will follow. (Heard, 1999, p. 3)

Leilani recalled laughing and having fun with poetry and she felt that this experience, "It just like brings us a close bond. ... It's like a family." According to Barron (1974), "The song, the chant, the ritual and the poetic seem to strike the chord of communality evoking a sense of togetherness" (p. 89). Poetry provided participants with an opportunity to develop a sense of community.

Improved Reading and Writing

Literacy practices are best developed and retained when, from the perspective of the learner, the literacy learning is meaningful, interesting, and necessary (Levine, 2002; Vygotsky, 1978). Attitude is a key motivational factor in an individual's literacy development. Although there was not a question that asked if poetry experiences helped the participants' academic performance, 11 of the participants, at some point in the interview, reported that poetry helped them improve their reading or writing.

Before individuals can become writers of poetry, they must first learn to listen to language. Heard (1989) claimed, "Every writer of poetry is first a reader of poetry" (p. 1). Individuals need to be introduced to and become familiar with poetic forms in order to construct these forms or develop new ones. The differences between prose and poetry need to be experienced in order to be recognized.

Reading poems helps students keep open house. After hearing poems, students begin to know what different kinds of poetry sound like, and they come to their own understanding of what makes a poem a poem. . . . They become familiar with the voice of poetry, which is crucial preparation for writing their own. (Heard, 1989, p. 3)

Through writing poetry, Leilani began to notice the language of poetry. She felt that the more she learned about poetry, the more she noticed poetry in the world around her. “It’s like everything I look at, every writing that I see is like poetry.”

From an academic perspective, there are benefits to noticing language. “Readers who actively engage poetic language can be sensitized to the textures and flavors of life experiences that might have otherwise remained inexplicable” (Eva-Wood, 2004a, p. 173). Tuning into the emotional responses elicited from a text helps a reader understand the intended message from the writer. Noticing the nuances of language actually helps individuals to have a deeper understanding of the text they are reading.

Through reading poems, some participants boasted increased vocabulary. Jillian asserted, “I’ve become a better reader and know how to speak better English and all those things.” She believed through poetry experiences she improved her word knowledge and vocabulary. Sabastian shared, “It helped us a lot with our reading skills. And we got to learn some new words while we were reading some of the poetry.” Maya claimed that poetry, “actually helps with a lot of things like learning words.” Ruby believed that writing poetry helped with writing because, “You have to think of words that go with your poem other than just like throwing words on the paper and just turning it in.” Word

choice is essential in poetry. “The power of poetry comes at least partly from its brevity. Poems are short, and they pack punch—often they say a lot with a few well-chosen words” (Fletcher, 2002, p. 9).

Enjoyment and meaning making can happen simultaneously when reading poetry. Whether poetry or prose, the purpose of a piece of writing is to convey some sort of message. “Readers get pleasure from hearing the music of language, the words chiming with one another, but they also ask poems to reveal meaning” (Heard, 1989, p. 35). Without an intended message, a poem would just be a collection of words. Participants worked at understanding the poems that they were reading. Eliza noticed that during Poetry Break her classmates read with expression in order to convey the meanings of the poems.

Fluency, which includes prosody and rate, is a reading skill that can be improved through poetry reading. Willow claimed, “It’s helped me a lot, especially like reading out loud in my fluency.” Lilly also shared that reading poetry helped her read faster. This supports the findings of Wilfong (2008) where a Poetry Academy approach to reading intervention increased the number of words participants were able to read per minute. According to Dennis-Shaw (2011), “Poetry can be a fun and unthreatening way for ESL students to develop their oral fluency” (p. 556).

If writing is relevant, according to Vygotsky (1978), students will be more likely to engage in the writing activity without losing interest. Poetry is a form of writing, if presented in a learner-centered fashion, which is both relevant and interesting to the student doing the writing. Willow believed that her writing improved through poetry. “I’d

be making my own stuff and it would it would like flow and everything and I'd like it. ... It was fun."

Walker (2003) suggested, "When students think of themselves as readers and writers, they actively engage in learning" (p. 186). With the improvement that Shao Yeng saw in her writing, she believed that she sounded like a "real" poet: "We write our own, then after that, you could make it sound like it's in a real poetry [book]." During poetry activities, students saw themselves as readers and writers and they believed they improved their academic skills.

Hard Work

Hard work was a theme present in 10 of the participant's interviews. These participants pointed out that learning to read and write poetry wasn't always easy, yet at the same time they claimed that poetry was fun. According to Ciardi and Williams (1975), "The equation is simple: no difficulty, no fun" (p. 5).

Hard work was enjoyable for the students. Glasser (1993) asserted that quality work always feels good for those involved.

It never feels as good as when it is personally achieved through hard work. In fact there is no better human feeling than that which comes from the satisfaction of doing something useful that you believe is the very best you can do and finding that others agree. (p. 25)

Eliza shared, "I remember writing that, but then rewriting it and then fixing it. And I worked hard and it was fun." She completed a task that many adults find difficult, yet she had a sense of accomplishment, so she enjoyed the experience. "Often, especially

in the beginning, students won't revise one poem: instead, they'll acquire the tools of revision and apply them to each new poem they write. Even many accomplished poets find revision demanding" (Heard, 1989, p. 14). Eliza recognized that demanding work doesn't have to be unpleasant.

Initially, children may not recognize the pleasure that comes from hard work. Maya described how she used to get mad because she had such a difficult time writing poetry. Now she looks at her poetry and thinks that "it's like art." She found value in the hard work she had put in. According to Ariel, "It was always hard for me to pick like one thing to write about that made sense to other people. But, it was fun to have to think about it and figure out stuff." As Glasser (1993) asserted, it feels good to do hard work.

Pride in Accomplishments

Poetry experiences provided an opportunity for students to experience a sense of pride in accomplishment. Eleven of the participants shared that they were proud of the poetry writing they did when they were in third or fourth grade. Looking back on the poems they wrote, some of the participants were surprised at the maturity of their work.

Learning to experience poetry is not a radically different process from that of learning any other kind of play. The way to develop a poetic sense is by using it. And one of the real joys of the play impulse is in the sudden discovery that one is getting better at it than he had thought he would be. (Ciardi & Williams, 1975, p. 6)

For the older students, the sense of pride came from looking back on work they had done as third and fourth grade students. The quality of the poems they wrote was evident, and as Glasser (1993) pointed out, quality work feels good.

Summary of Interpretation of Findings

Positive experiences of fun, being center stage, working with friends, an emotional outlet, expressing oneself, choice, creating community, improved reading and writing, hard work, and pride in accomplishment were the themes that emerged when children described their experiences in poetry activities. Poetry activities were a source of positive experiences for 21 of the 22 participants in this study. Fun was a theme that permeated all but one of the interviews. Participants were open and excited to share their thoughts and feelings on poetry and the interviews had an overall joyous tone, which reflected the children's attitudes about poetry.

Literacy forms and practices must have a purpose for individuals and cultures, and UNESCO (2008) suggested that more studies are needed to look at literacy purposes. Participants in this study revealed that fun, being center stage, working with friends, an emotional outlet, expressing oneself, and creating community were literacy purposes that could be fulfilled when participating in poetry activities. For the participants, poetry had a purpose.

People write poetry for many reasons. Some write to record their pasts, to validate and to share their memories with family, friends, and classmates. Others write poetry to express feelings and support their own healing. For some, writing poems

provides a deepening of their spirituality and their connection with others.

(Tucker, 1992, p. iv)

Poetry as an emotional outlet was a prominent theme as described by 17 of the participants. Recognizing the poetry within oneself requires an individual to be in touch with one's emotions. Intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences are at the heart of poetry. Each individual has the potential to write poetry and in doing so she may strengthen her personal intelligences. Poetry is personal and relevant to the writer and therefore the emotion-releasing process of creating poetry may be motivational in and of itself. Tucker (1992) asserted,

I believe that everyone can compose good poetry and benefit from writing it.

Poetry is not dependent upon age or academic accomplishment, so adults with little education and children with low test scores are as successful writing poems as people with stronger academic skills. Poetry writing instead relies on a writer's feelings, history, and perceptions, so every person has the background needed to write poems. Because poetry draws on the senses and the senses give deep access to memories and feelings, poetry writing is relevant and interesting. (p. iii)

Complex emotions can be viewed "as occupying a central place in the most basic motivational structure of human beings" (Ellis, 2005, p. 221). Poetry activities may be motivational due their ability to release and evoke emotion. For the participants in this study, who were children, anger, frustration and sadness were the emotions they reported releasing through poetry, whereas fun was the emotion that they most often experienced through poetry.

Implications for Social Change

Exploring educational experiences from a child's perspective was essential in revealing the positive experiences that have significant beneficial impact on the lives of children. Children in this study reported that poetry activities provided opportunities for fun, being center stage, working with friends, having an emotional outlet, expressing oneself, choice, creating community, improved reading and writing, hard work, and having pride in accomplishment, which are all positive educational experiences. Listening to what children had to say about their experiences with poetry may enable educators to provide motivating and meaningful literacy experiences.

Although data were not collected to determine if students improved their literacy and language skills through poetry activities, students' basic literacy skills may have improved. Wilfong (2008) found that poetry reading increased student's reading fluency, and therefore it is possible that students involved in Poetry Break may have increased their reading fluency. If voluntary poetry reading has benefits similar to Krashen's (2004) FVR, then poetry reading may improve students' reading comprehension, writing style, vocabulary, spelling, and grammatical development.

Perhaps the greatest implication for social change derived from this research is that providing poetry activities for children may give them a broad range of opportunities to fulfill specific needs that are beneficial to both the individual and society. As discussed in Chapter 4, experiences with poetry activities may help students fulfill the basic needs of love, power, freedom, fun, and survival, as Glasser (1993) proposed.

If, as Noddings (2003) suggested, individuals and society value happiness as an educational goal, then poetry is something that can be used to strive for obtaining this goal. Through poetry activities, students are given an opportunity to have fun while learning, which is beneficial to both the individual and society. Poetry activities can also be employed to help children develop their intrapersonal skills. Poetry provides a space for them to express themselves and an emotional outlet to deal with their anger, frustration, and sorrow. Poetry can be used to promote emotional well-being in children and this is not only good for the children, but may help create a healthier society. Community can be created through poetry activities that are beneficial to both the individual and society.

Poetry activities can be implemented with minimal expenditure of time and money. With 20 minutes a day, paper, pencils, and a collection of poetry books, educators can provide beneficial literacy activities. This is a small cost considering the potential benefits for individuals and society from poetry activities.

If self-awareness and development of self are valued, then literacy should be modeled as a tool in reaching these ends, and poetry activities do just that.

At a time when technology is increasingly calling our very humanity into question, we would do well to remember that being human is bound up inextricably with language, as it enables us to transcend time and space; and that poetry, as the highest form of language, is the medium that makes us the most human of all. (Strate & Winslow, 2010, p. 437)

UNESCO (2008) proposed that literacy education should be accompanied with education for citizenship and self-awareness in order for literacy to be meaningful for individuals and to serve as a medium for transforming societies. Through meaningful poetry experiences, these goals may be met.

Implications for Action

Educators who are interested in providing positive educational experiences that promote the social and emotional well being of children may wish to employ student-centered poetry activities with their students. “That poetry can have something to do with their lives and their interests could perhaps be one of the foundational insights into the long-term benefits of poetry ‘planted’ in early childhood” (Prarling, 2009, p. 389). Poetry should be accessible to all members of society (Jobling & Moni, 2000) and poetry-centered activities are appropriate for all students (Tucker, 1992). Educators at all types of schools, including those at culturally diverse low-income schools, who want to motivate students to engage in literacy activities focused on poetry may wish to pay attention to this research.

Workshops, articles, books, and websites are possible avenues to disseminate the findings of this study. Teachers interested in implementing child-centered poetry activities focused on writing may benefit from classes or workshops on writing poetry. Educators who wish to implement Poetry Break need to provide a rich collection of poetry books from which students can choose. Lastly, 20 minutes each day will need to be provided for students to enjoy the power of poetry.

Implications for Future Research

Many ideas were generated through the course of this study and 10 themes were developed to describe the essence of what children experience during poetry activities. Further exploration of these themes may yield useful results.

Fun was a theme that resonated throughout 21 of the 22 interviews I conducted. I did not ask probing questions to find out what, exactly, made Poetry Break fun for the students. A study exploring the essence of fun in poetry could be conducted. Perhaps this would give insight into how to bring the fun children experienced in poetry activities into other learning activities.

In this study, 4 of the 14 English-language learners indicated that their speaking, reading, and writing was improving through poetry. A study could be conducted to determine if reading and writing poetry helps English-language learners improve their overall reading and writing abilities.

Students explained that they used poetry as an emotional outlet. Studies could be developed to further examine the benefits of poetry writing as a therapeutic tool for children. A longitudinal case study could be created to see if children who used poetry as a therapeutic tool continued to do so as they aged. There is a need for mechanisms to help individuals deal with emotional turmoil in positive ways.

Reflection on the Research Process

Before embarking on this research endeavor, I had a passionate belief in the power of poetry. For years I had observed students who were eager to engage in poetry activities and they particularly appeared to enjoy Poetry Break. The pleasure poetry

seemed to bring my students kept me providing poetry opportunities for 15 years. I believe that experience matters, and I wanted to know what students thought about poetry activities because I want my students to have positive experiences at school. The convergence of these ideas was why this study was designed and conducted. This may have influenced my decisions and thinking during this inquiry.

Participants in this study were children who had participated in poetry activities when they were students in my teammate's or my third or fourth grade class. Because of this, I knew all of the participants. As a teacher, the relationships I developed with the students over the years may have influenced their responses. I let the participants know that I really wanted to know what they were thinking and that they were not answering the questions for me. I explained that the interviews were an opportunity for their voices to be heard and my job was to share their thoughts with a wider audience.

Many of the participants were very enthusiastic about the chance to have their voices heard. Several of the students I interviewed wanted their own name to be used in the study. When I explained that for their protection, I needed to maintain their confidentiality, the middle school and high school students, in particular, didn't understand why that was necessary. They had opinions and beliefs about poetry, and they wanted people to know that those opinions and beliefs were theirs. The enthusiasm for this research was evident when participants offered to find other former students to participate in the study. However, once again I explained that I wanted to keep their identities confidential. Although I tried to keep participants' identities anonymous, I know that the children told their friends that they were involved with this study because

students that I had not invited to participate in the study offered to be interviewed. Keeping with the protocol that I had developed for the research, I had to decline these offers; however, I let the children know I appreciated their willingness to share their thoughts with me.

Although I had witnessed students enjoying poetry activities, I was surprised to find that all but one of the participants described poetry activities as fun. The fact that a few of the participants considered Poetry Break an actual “break” from the academic school day struck me as amusing, because they were still engaged in reading and writing during these poetry activities. Kitty’s statement about Poetry Break made me laugh out loud during the interview. “During the performances though, it’s like one time chance, one time chance only!” I asked her, “One time chance everyday?” and she laughed and said, “Yeah!” I tried to stay neutral; however, the enjoyment of the interviews was contagious. I found myself looking forward to talking with the participants.

What impressed me the most during the interview process was the way the participants were able to communicate their thinking. Occasionally, the phrases they used were poetic in nature. Also, I hadn’t realized how many students use poetry writing as an emotional outlet, and I was surprised that some of the students have continued writing poetry as a way to deal with their emotions. I now feel even more compelled to continue teaching and researching the benefits of student-centered poetry activities.

Closing Statement

Enacting positive social change was the catalyst for crafting this study. Experience is at the heart of being human and experiences matter. Educational

experiences, as Bruner (1996) asserted, impact the lives of individuals who undergo them. With this in mind, I wanted to find out what children experienced during literacy activities involving poetry.

Currently, in the educational reform movement in the United States, children are being treated as commodities (Barrier-Ferreira, 2008; Greene & Hill, 2005) and the idea is that children need to learn in order to contribute to society and the global economy (Noddings, 2003; Tett, 2003). However, Bruner (1996) asserted,

What we need is a school reform movement with a better sense of where we are going, with deeper conviction about what kind of people we want to be. ... All the standards in the world will not, like a helping hand, achieve the goal of making our multicultural and threatened society come alive again, not just alive as a competitor in the world's markets, but as a nation worth living in and living for.
(p. 118)

Believing that happy people are the kind of people we should strive to be, Glasser (1998) suggested, "We need a national effort to run schools in which teachers and students are happy. But we have to go far beyond the schools and build a society in which ... [people] are much happier than they are now" (p. 22). Perhaps what we want to engender in individuals is the capacity to positively influence their social and emotional worlds. In order to create a nation where people can pursue happiness, we may want to provide positive and humane experiences for our children.

Poetry activities, according to the participants in this study, provided enjoyable experiences that positively impacted their academic, social, and emotional lives.

Positively influencing children's lives is a social change that may be achieved by providing children with the opportunity to engage in meaningful child-centered poetry activities.

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Appendix A: Phone Script

“Hello, my name is Celeste Long and I am doing a project to learn about what children experience during poetry activities. I am inviting your (insert child’s name) to join my project. I picked (insert child’s name) for this project because he/she participated in poetry activities when he/she was in third and/or fourth grade. If you agree that (insert child’s name) may join this project, he/she will be asked to participate in an interview that will last 30 to 60 minutes. Participating in the interview is completely voluntary. Interviews will be held at your child’s school or Muldoon Elementary, which ever is more convenient for you. All interviews will be held outside school hours so that your child will not miss any school.”

“You may ask any questions you have before you decide if you want your child to participate in this project.”

If the parent/guardian does not want their child to participate, I will thank them for their time.

If the parent/guardian agrees to have the child participate in the study, I will tell the parent that I will mail them a copy of the consent form. Next, I will ask to speak with the potential participant.

Finally, I will set up a time and location for the interview that is convenient for the parent or guardian and participant.

Appendix B: Interview Transcript with Maya

R: What do you remember about poetry activities back when you were in fourth grade?

Maya: It teaches you literature and it's fun. And it expresses yourself and it tells other people that it's okay to just get on stage and do anything. And poetry is a chance that you can like get your friends together and just do a random skit I guess. And yeah...

R: And that was mostly about Poetry Break. Is there anything else you remember about Poetry Break?

Maya: (Shakes her head no.)

R: That was a headshake for no. How would you describe Poetry Break?

Maya: Fun and entertaining and (whistles) I don't know.

R: How about what were your feelings about Poetry Break?

Maya: Excitement. Joyful. Umm, I had that feeling where I didn't want it to end. And like if like I was having a bad day, I would always think Poetry Break is coming so don't worry about it. And just like really happy and that's all.

R: What do you remember about poetry writing?

Maya: That it's easy and all you do is, I mean I used to think it was hard, but all you do is just think about your similarities to other people's writing and then just throw it on paper.

R: How would you describe your experience writing poetry when you were a fourth grader?

Maya: Cool, because that was just like the time that I didn't have a specific thing to write about. I kinda just wrote about anything I wanted. And I kinda made up my own characters in the poetry. And then I could of just like showed other people my writing without getting like an oh that sucks because it's my writing. And like that's about everything.

R: Why do you think you volunteered to perform poetry in front of people in a public setting? Between our class, sometimes both classes?

Maya: Just to show people my moves and like how I'm cool like that and I can just go on stage and just be like, (Starts reciting the poem "School Dayz Rap" by Shields with a rap rhythm.) and stuff like that, yeah.

R: So your moves but also that rhythm. You like to put it into rap.

Maya: Yeah, and like it's not just like poetry isn't just like oh the leaves outside fell on the ground. It doesn't have to be slow. And it taught me how it doesn't have to be all slow and smooth. You know, it could have some rhythm and beats to it and stuff. And how you could actually just have like a certain tone to it. You don't have to read it just like you're reading a book. And I wasn't really shy or anything to do it in between classes. You know that but, because there were all sorts of people doing it. Everybody was doing it so there was nothing to be shy about. And me, I don't care what other people think. 'Cause I mean I wasn't the only weird person in the room at that time. There was all sorts of people. Can I use names like Mr. Mah? That guy is weird. That guy is crazy. (She is laughing while she says this.)

R: Alright, um, what else would you like to share about your experiences with poetry?

Maya: Is this going to all sorts of people or just you?

R: No one will know it's you. I'll change your name in the paper, so no one will know it's you. But, I'm putting this out to other adults about poetry.

Maya: Okay. Um, poetry is a, um, it's not a place where you can read like your reading a book; it's a place to show your feelings and your emotions. And what I've learned is I didn't think poetry did anything in life, but it actually helps with a lot of things like learning words and remembering things about poetry and what I've learned is in language arts is it gives you hints to words and things that you wouldn't think you'd know. But, you do. And, poetry doesn't have to be something boring where you have to sit at your desk all day and just like read it on a piece of paper. It can be something where you can get up and just show everybody what you can do. And, yeah.

R: Alright, how has, or how does the experience of poetry activities affect your ability to express yourself?

Maya: What does that mean?

R: Your ability to, you were talking about feelings, has poetry helped you get your feelings out?

Maya: It tells me not to be afraid of anything don't be afraid to just go up on stage in front of somebody and just talk. Because, I mean that helped a lot. In life, from fourth grade all the way up to fifth grade and sixth grade and seventh grade...

R: You're in sixth grade now, not seventh right?

Maya: Yeah. And it like just made me not shy of anything; it like made me like want to get my emotions and my heart out there to other people and just tell them hey, this is some cool stuff. This is the cool beans right here. You gotta get a spoon and eat it. It's not nothing nasty it's good. And I mean that's what you got to get your point across to people because if you're shy it's not going to get to anything. You have to keep trying. If you want something you have to go for it. And it's not like... poetry's not something that anybody can make fun of because it's somebody else's writing. It's not a test. It's not something on the SBAs. It's your mind. Your thoughts. Things that I thought about. What I've also learned is in poetry you can get another person's poetry and like what I learned is in other poet books how they grabbed songs and made it into poetry but kept the beat. And it's not really, how can I say that... it's not exactly, it's not wrong or right if you do poetry. There's not a wrong or a right answer to your writing. It matters if you did it and how you felt about it. And that's about it.

R: Alright, what have you done with poetry since you were in fourth grade? Like fifth, sixth grade or at home?

Maya: I've told people a lot about my writing and in fourth grade. I've thought about joining other groups and stuff and Clown Club and talent shows and stuff like that because Poetry Break just helps you out with you can do this on stage. You can do anything. Not just a little piece of paper. You can just go up there and completely do anything. And I technically thought about it through out that time and it works. And I mean when I got up there I did a lot of things with myself. And I still am in sixth grade. I'm involved with a lot of things and its funny because I just started out with a piece of paper on stage in front of my class and it got me far.

R: More?

Maya: Mmmm.

R: I have some poems we wrote as a class. That I am going to read and see if you remember anything about them. (Read poems)

Maya: Yeah. (looks ahead at the poems and gets really excited) Yeah the Ukulele one.

R: Do you remember what we did with this one?

Maya: Yeah, when we went to the performance like how they guy was playing what it looked like and how it sounded and stuff.

R: So you do remember it? And "Weasels Measels/Measles"??

Maya: Mmhm

R: So what kinds of thoughts do these bring back?

Maya: Um, it brings me a lot of memories from like old friends and teachers and the classroom. And the Smartboard.

R: Let me grab the poem you wrote.

Maya: (Continues to read class poems) Oh! I remember that one, "Recess Problems". That's when everybody was having problems and it all started with recess.

R: Yeah, and so we wrote about it. (I show her one of her poems) Do you remember this one? You wrote it.

Maya: Oh.

R: Do you want me to read it or did you get it?

Maya: You can read it.

R: (Read the poem.) What do you think about that writing? You wrote that in fourth grade.

Maya: I... it's creative because I remember writing it. And when I wrote, it wasn't rainy, it was snowy. And when you would come in, people would have boots and snow would get everywhere and melt on the ground and there would be puddles of water. And you would slip left and right and just fall into walls and stuff and lunch carts everywhere. And so I mean it was irritating. I mean because everyone in the class, they were wet or they had to go to the nurse, wanted their pants called or their parents and uh...

R: So, it brought back the memories of that.

Maya: Yeah.

R: And you did think that this was creative?

Maya: (Shakes head yes)

R: When you look at this what do you think of the quality of the writing for a fourth grader?

Maya: I mean I think wow I was in fourth grade and I wrote this and people that are in sixth grade now think that it is so hard to get a piece of paper and a pencil and write a rhyme, a rap, any writing. But, I was in fourth grade and I wrote that. And that shows a lot.

R: I agree. Is there anything else you would want to add?

Maya: Um, like I'd want to say that if um you're really tempted to do something, don't give up keep trying because when I did that, I remember when I was in fourth grade you'd be sitting there in that chair over there and I would be sitting at my desk and I'd get really mad because I didn't know what to write. And what I think now is that I just didn't try, and if you try, you get really far. And when I stepped up to the plate and tried, I mean I wrote it. I did it. I typed it up and everything. And it worked. And here I am two years from that time talking about it. And I look at it now and I'm like that's a lot. Whoa. Oh my gosh. And then back then, that time, it was nothing. It was just some little jacked up handwriting. Some little marks everywhere and now it's like art and there's writing. There's literature. I mean I could show that to somebody and actually teach them something from it.

R: I agree.

Maya: And yeah.

R: Is that all?

Maya: Mmhm.

R: Are you sure?

Maya: Yeah.

R: If you think of anything, you can contact me and I can include it in my paper. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today!

Curriculum Vitae

Celeste D. Long

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Education

Ph. D. Walden University. Anticipated graduation August 2011

M. Ed. Cambridge College. Graduated January 2000

B. Ed. University of Alaska, Anchorage. Graduated, Cum Laude, December 1993

Major: Elementary Education, Minor: Psychology

Teaching Experience

- Elementary Classroom Teacher, August 1995 to present
- Substitute Teacher, December 1993 to June 1995

Professional Activities

- Presenter for Cross District Inservice on Social Studies Curriculum, Fall 2010
- Site Based Language Arts Specialist, Fall 2009 to present
- Presenter for Cross District Inservices on Standards Based Assessment and Reporting, Fall 2007 to Spring 2009
- Social Studies Standards Based Report Card Committee, Spring 2007 to Spring 2010
- Science Standards Based Report Card Committee, Fall 2006 to Spring 2010
- Language Arts Standards Based Report Card Committee, Fall 2005 to Spring 2010
- Lab Classroom Participant, Fall 2004
- Facilitator for Every Day Math class for Title I teachers, Fall 2002 to Spring 2003
- Science Curriculum Review Committee, Fall 2001
- Language Arts Curriculum Review Committee, Fall 2001 to present
- Learning Through Performance Tasks Trainer, Fall 2001 to Spring 2003
- Social Studies Curriculum Review Committee, Fall 2001 to Spring 2010
- Pencils Full of Stars Poetry Anthology Editor, Fall 2000 to Spring 2008
- Science Frameworks Committee, Fall 2000 to Spring 2006
- Science Leadership Cadre Learning Through Performance tasks and Curriculum Integration, Fall 2000 to Spring 2006
- Curriculum Development for School District Social Studies Department Concept Based Units, Fall 2000 to Fall 2003

- First Use Kit Trainer for the School District Science Department, Fall 2000 to present
- Reader for Analytical Writing Assessment for School District, December 1991 to 2005
- Alaska Health Online, Fall 1999
- Presenter for Cross District Inservice on Health for School District, Fall 1998

Professional Development

- Mickelson ExxonMobil Teachers Academy
- Trainer for Six-Trait Writing
- Learning Through Performance Tasks
- Kagan Cooperative Learning
- Concept Based Units
- First Steps Writing
- Resolving Conflicts Creatively Program/ Connected and Respected

Organizations

- Delta Kappa Gamma Society International December 2000 to December 2003

Honors

- Charter Member and Vice President of Golden Key National Honor Society, UAA Chapter
- Alaska's Representative at Phi Delta Kappa's Camp for Prospective Teachers, held at Arizona State University in 1989