At the Intersection of Poetry and a High School English Class: 9th Graders’ Participation in Poetry Reading Writing Workshop and the Relation to Social and Academic Identities’ Development

DISSERTATION

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By
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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to determine whether “marginalized” (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore 2000) 9th grade students in a low-level, tracked English class perceived themselves as more successful students in English class after participating in a 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. A second purpose was to determine whether their knowledge of poetry terms and concepts such as metaphor, and subsequent performance on the poetry sections of standardized tests improved.

My nested case study focused on 19 students in a low-level 9th grade English class. As the practitioner researcher, I conducted in-depth research with six focus students chosen through purposeful sampling. I collected data over the course of three months, using the types of instruments most common to case study research.

Data analysis for my nested case study was ongoing and recursive between field work and reflection. Data were coded for patterns that represented categories pertaining to my research questions and coding was refined as I gathered and re-read additional data sources.

The findings revealed that students learn better, and are more engaged when they have choices (Atwell, 1998; Lauscher, 2007). When students were forced to read poems that I chose for them, their journal and discussion comments were consistently negative. Students stated that they could not relate to the content or the format of these poems, and thus often summarily dismissed them as unimportant, boring or confusing.
The findings suggest that students had a better knowledge of poetry after the workshop. Students improved their scores on a literary terms quiz and on practice Ohio Graduation Test poetry selections, but these improved scores did not affect their own definition of themselves as successful English students, which remained closely tied to overall grades, attendance, and behavior. A clear understanding of metaphor and other poetry terms were indicated in focus student interviews and also through their applications in their poetry exercises and responses.

Within a tracked system, marginalized students have limited choices to feel successful (Oakes, 1985; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). When students are given a “third space” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Soja, 1996), such as a classroom’s Poetry Reading Writing Workshop where they can transact with poems, then they can practice and play with aspects of their identities through multiple literacies. The students in this study came into my classroom angry or uninterested. While they needed to adjust to the unfamiliarity of no worksheets, no drills, and more choice during the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, by the end of the workshop more students were engaged in their poetry class reading and writing and in sharing their writing with their peers. The data I collected and analyzed can give insight into the larger considerations of what could and might occur if teachers were to untrack their marginalized students at least in the space of a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop where students are given the possibility to work through poetry to discover different aspects of themselves.
This document is dedicated to my family who listened patiently to years of whining and sent me to my room when I procrastinated too long. It is also dedicated to my father, Dr. Ed Robinson, who willed me his stubbornness, and who would have said,

“Congratulations! It’s about time.”
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Through Student Book Club Discussions. In Soter, A., Faust, M. & Rogers, T.
(Eds.), *Interpretive Play: Using Critical Perspectives to Teach Young Adult

Writing across the Curriculum Program in a Secondary School. In Graham, S.
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Fields of Study

Adolescent Literature

Poetry

Writing Across the Curriculum

Major Field: Education
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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background

This study is situated at the intersection of disillusioned readers and a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. This intersection is probably in a remote area of highway, one of only a few intersections in the country, since poetry and low-level tracked students rarely meet (Oakes, 1985; Kozol, 1991; Gamoran & Carbonaro, 2002; Lee, 2007). Let us build a room in the school building at that intersection, and see if the students can move into this room and out of that familiar one they have been living in for their years of schooling. In that room they had come to consider themselves losers, school haters, in particular English haters; it was a room of low test scores, and forced exercises and test practice, and often inexperienced, discouraged, disengaged or equally disillusioned teachers (Page, 1990; Lee, 2007).

As a teacher I have spent the last 18 years trying to bring poetry into the classrooms for these types of students, with varying success. Students seem to enjoy the workshops, and over the years as I reflect upon their sessions, workshops, and encounters with poetry, I have consistently noticed differences from the traditional lessons. Participation in classroom events is more frequent; homework completion is often more regular, and there is often a tangible difference in the mood of the class as a whole. This is anecdotal evidence of a modicum of success to be sure, but the question is whether any positive outcomes are documentable, or even measurable. Students certainly seem to be
enjoying themselves more, and offhand remarks may bring up a poem or two, or a comment on someone’s writing among the students. This positive atmosphere during Poetry Reading Writing Workshop occurs often enough to convince me to continue my methods of teaching, which emphasize poetry at every turn. While I must adhere to a set curriculum, poems start many days of my teaching, one often appearing on the overhead for them to read as I take attendance. Poems are part of each thematic or genre unit as accompaniments to the focused reading. Poetic exercises are often used as responses to other reading, and we have a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop at some point during the year. As a practitioner researcher, my intent was to add research to my anecdotal evidence through a case study of one of my own 9th grade English classes.

**Search for Studies of Teaching and Learning Poetry**

My focus on disillusioned readers in average classes and their negative experiences with poetry reading and writing led me to a search for studies that examined teaching and learning poetry. In my search I found only a few studies that examined teacher attitudes towards poetry (Wade & Sidaway, 1990; Fleming, 1992; Benton, M. 1992; Benton, P. 1999; Dymoke, 2002), a few that examined student attitude toward response to poetry (Fleming, 1992; Pike, 2000), a few that concerned the teaching of poetry writing and identity development (McCormick, 2000, 2003; Jocson, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008; Lauscher, 2007), but only one that specifically dealt with low-level classes and some poetry reading and writing in high school English classes (Lee, 2007).

While extensive studies of teacher attitudes towards teaching poetry are scarce in the U.S, there are several studies from England. The general consensus of these studies is that the majority of teachers do not like to teach poetry, even though they think it should
be taught. Many began with a love of poetry, but grew to hate it in secondary school and perhaps in college, primarily because they hated the way it was taught and the feelings of inadequacy that were instilled in them (Wade & Sidaway, 1990; Fleming, 1992; Benton, M. 1992; Benton, P. 1999; Dymoke, 2002).

Worsmer (2004), in his introduction to *Teaching with Poetry*, states that few teachers in their college careers ever took an entire course that focused on the teaching of poetry. My examination of the major public universities in Ohio supports this statement. I searched the course offerings at 10 public universities in Ohio and five liberal arts universities in Central Ohio, examining the requirements for their undergraduate and graduate licensure programs, to determine what poetry classes were offered, and if any were required before completion of the programs. Of the ten public universities, only Cleveland State has an introductory poetry class which is required for secondary language arts education majors. This class is housed in the English Department and is one of two required freshman English courses for the Undergraduate English major, in which Integrated Language Arts M.Ed students must first receive their bachelor’s degree. The syllabus states that the content of this course requires analysis of literary texts and a persuasive essay. It contains poetry from several different historical periods in which English verse has been composed, male and female poets and poets from diverse national/ethnic groups who write in English, as well as a few translated poems. Of the six Central Ohio private colleges and universities, none had a course specific to poetry that was required for education majors.

None of the schools had specific poetry classes that were required in their English departments and none of the education classes even offered a poetry teaching methods
class. Miami University did offer an M.A.T (Masters of Arts in Teaching) program that is overseen by the Ohio Writing Project. Because I have attended two summer sessions of the CAWP (Columbus Area Writing Project) I know that at least here the education students and teachers will get ample experience writing, teaching, and learning how to teach poetry. While poetry classes are offered in all of the universities, most of them are electives, and if students have had negative experiences in secondary school with poetry, it is doubtful they will elect to continue taking poetry classes in post-secondary institutions. My own experience at The Ohio State University seems to corroborate this assumption. While I did take several poetry classes as an undergraduate at Ohio Wesleyan, this was because I was a Humanities Classics major, and because I was already an avid reader and writer of poetry, not because they were required. As an M.A. and a doctoral student, the only course specific to poetry teaching that was offered was taught as a repeatable 900 level Seminar on Poetry, and each time the class included less than 10 students. It was in this class, however, that I learned how to teach poetry to high school students successfully. If such classes are not required at the undergraduate level, it is not surprising that teachers are reluctant to teach poetry. While there are some specific poetry classes offered (but not required), even those tend to focus on reading and analyzing poetry, not on methods of teaching poetry. Without methods classes, it is natural that students will teach as they learned (Bujega, 1992), and as most English Education students learned to read poetry in high school or colleges “where New Criticism reigned,” (p. 36), that is how they will teach.

Studies that examined student attitude toward poetry were even scarcer. Student attitude was the focus of one such study in England. Fleming (1992) concluded that
students’ constructs of poetry as an aesthetic genre are clearer when they are younger, and when they still “take delight … in the sounds and rhythms of language” (p. 12), but that as they get older, and as there is more emphasis on the functional uses of language in schools, they need more explicit instruction on “the range of poetic uses, of language in cultural contexts, and notions of plurality of meaning” (p. 12), and a more extensive and varied exposure to poetry. Fleming’s study revealed that students between the ages of 13 and 14 had unclear conceptions of what poetry actually is, which he sees as one cause of their negative attitudes towards poetry. In a small, but in depth study which examined both student attitude toward poetry and academic improvement from learning poetry, Pike (2000) in a three-year longitudinal action research case, examined six adolescent readers’ responses to 57 pre-twentieth century poems. Pike examined whether teaching poetry using reader response journals would improve both attitude and test scores, with the result that all but one student expressed enthusiasm for some poems, and all improved on their standardized tests. He attributes their success to the teaching methodology, which was based on Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) Reader Response Theory. Providing students with too much background material makes students believe they are incapable of understanding a poem themselves, so he instead focused on encouraging the readers to first find a personal application to the poem. In addition Pike claimed students were successful because the teacher provided explicit teaching about Reader Response Theory, which helps the reader to understand her role in finding meaning in the poem. According to Pike (2000),

…it is important that teachers and pupils explore some notion of aesthetics together, of the active part played by the reader in the creation of meaning and of
the value of adopting a reading stance which fosters the love of ambiguity rather than seeing this as a source of confusion and frustration. Such explicit discussion may be a crucial factor in tackling the negativity that has been so widely associated with adolescents reading poetry in school (p. 49).

Several recent studies and dissertations have examined the interactions between poetry teaching and learning (McCormick, 2000, 2003; Hermsen, 2003; Jocson, 2004; Lauscher, 2007; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008). Listening to students’ voices about the possibility of poetry to influence identity formation was the focus of several of these studies. McCormick, (2000) a teacher and researcher at a large urban school, investigated how poetry became an “aesthetic safety zone”... and a “sanctuary within, a place to play out conflict, and imagine multiple possibilities for identity” (p. 194). McCormick worked with poet Hermine Meinhard to conduct classes and workshops where students could write poetry. The young women she studied used poetry as a safe place for self-affirming expression and development of imagination. Their poetry writing served as a way to reconstruct their identities from the negative ones attributed to them by the school, to “try on new ways of being” (p. 183). For McCormick (2003) “the flexibility of poetry, attained through metaphor and persona, allowed young women to see themselves and their environment in unprecedented ways... to escape the constraints of time and place” (p. 127).

Jocson’s (2006) study examined seven urban African-American youths and their participation in a poetry writing and speaking workshop called Poetry for the People (P4P), developed by late poet June Jordan, at The University of California at Berkeley. Her study examined the literacy practices, and consequent identity formations of these
students as well as the nature of the learning processes they engaged in as they created and performed poetry. Through a qualitative examination of the students’ writing, Jocson saw patterns that showed students were beginning to see themselves as empowered to affect change in their society and to learn to adapt socially to different environments. Interviews with participants revealed that the participants felt P4P had had an effect on the students’ writing in school as well. Jocson does not claim that she found evidence of influence on academic outcomes, but anecdotal evidence from one student’s English teacher indicated that his prose writing improved after his participation. Jocson suggests that participation in poetry literacy practices can increase student interest in poetry writing, enhance their academic and critical skills, and provide artistic and political empowerment for high school students (Jocson, 2004, 2006).

In her dissertation, Lauscher (2007) examined the perspective of 10 post-high school young adult writers’ engagement with poetry writing and song writing. Her qualitative study focused on identity construction through poetry writing. Similar to the findings of McCormick and Jocson, Lauscher found that for the six young women and four young men who participated in her study, poetry writing was a “context for identity construction, self-reflection, and documentation of identity; an emotional outlet and a ‘safe place;’ a way to ‘be heard’ and recognized; a means of connecting with and understanding others; and a context for exploring ideas, expressing beliefs, and making an impact through social action/activism” (p. ii). Through analysis of the participants’ discussions of their poetry and song writing experiences outside of school with their previous school experiences, Lauscher determined that those who experienced supportive encouragement and flexibility in choice of reading and writing from their teachers, felt
poetry writing was a vehicle to learn about self as well as to learn about school subjects. Attending to the perspectives of young people who write outside of, and often despite school, convinced Lauscher of the value of examinations of out-of-school poetry writing experiences as a way to improve school poetry writing. Those participants who did not enjoy nor write during school, but were prolific writers after they graduated, spoke of writing as a way to be heard, to teach others, and to explore ideas.

Using a case study of himself as an artist-in-residence at a small Midwestern middle school and students in two 10th grade Advanced Placement English classes, Hermsen (2003) traced how students may adopt a more engaged world view through playful engagement with metaphor, a more “physicalized seeing” (p. 196), and less stereotypical thinking, through learning about metaphor and its relationship to poetry and the arts. Hermsen also examined how his own teaching would influence the results of his study. Through an analysis of their written poems and responses to interview questions, Hermsen examined how learning about metaphor is linked to education. Through lessons he calls festivals, which were 18, 80-minute block classes, the students in Hermsen’s study were able to grow in their engaged world view, which Hermsen redefines summarily as “a metaphorical re-engagement with the world” (p.612), where students through writing poems “gained greater abilities to apply metaphorical, physical, playful, thinking to take charge of their own perception” (p. 643). As far as his role as a teacher, Hermsen’s findings suggest that when the teachers and students work with poetry and the arts, the identities of teacher and students mix together, “leveling out the playing field for at least part of our educational time, offering students ways to see themselves (and each
other) which they might not otherwise find, opening up a dialogue (or multi-logue) of many voices within and between each other” (p. 666).

Pike’s (2000) found that explicitly teaching Reader Response Theory to students helps them respond to poetry affectively, and aids in comprehension of poetry. This idea is examined in another study by Eva-Wood (2004).

In two studies of teacher modeling of affective and emotional response to poetry reading as a strategy for comprehension of poetry, Eva-Wood (2004, 2008) incorporated emotional response in a think- and feel aloud process featuring teacher modeling to make explicit to readers that emotive responses to reading can assist cognitive understanding of poetry. In a four-week study (2008) with 11th graders using these strategies, Eva-Wood found that students actually used “strategies that appear to be driven by sensory and emotional responses rather than cognitive responses alone” (p. 569), and thus improved their understanding of the poems. Specific to this study, Eva-Wood’s findings indicate that students who used the think- and feel-aloud process as opposed to more traditional poetry reading strategies, participated in more class discussions about poetry by asking more sophisticated questions, held more favorable attitudes towards poetry, and wrote longer responses.

Studies that have examined poetry and its relationship to academic and social identities, the relationships between how poetry is taught and learned, as well as anecdotal evidence from teachers and poets-in-residence suggest positive possibilities. However, studies I reviewed also show that students who struggle the most are the least likely to receive instruction in reading and writing poetry because curriculum choices
tend to be worksheet and skills and drills based rather than literature based (Oakes, 1985, 1992; Page, 1990; Lee, 2007).

**Poets’ and Teachers’ Claims**

That poetry is valued in young adults’ lives is evidenced by the burgeoning poetry industry outside the schools’ walls, and attempts to connect it to classrooms. Many major cities have poetry slams, where oral poetry contests take place from local to state to national. Since 1997, *Poetry Out Loud* (www.poetryoutloud.org/), a poetry recitation contest for high school students has gained in popularity. This contest also starts at the classroom level, proceeds to the school level, the state, and then the national. In 2007, over 3900 students from one Midwest state participated in the state contest (Reynolds, 2008). Websites devoted to poetry flood the Internet, from professional websites like *Poetry 180* (http://www.loc.gov/poetry/180/), to *Poets.org* (http://poets.org), to websites such as *Poetry.com* (http://poetry.com/) where anyone who wishes can “publish” his or her poem.

Several studies report success with poetry outside of school to connect with students in classrooms. Teachers who are adherents of Cultural Literacy (Morrell, 2004; Lee, 2007) turn to rap and hip hop to build bridges to poetry in schools, as students see those popular culture forms as poetry they can identify with. And yet poetry in classrooms still isn’t given a prominent place either in the curriculum or in the hearts of many teachers and students (Andrews, 1994; Benton, 1999; Bugeja, 1992; Dymoke, 2002; Heard, 1989; Wormser & Capella, 2004).
Poetry proponents often list their justifications for teaching poetry. Some of them are idealistic; some are practical. Poet Adrienne Rich (1997) in her essay *Arts of the Possible* speaks with urgency of the need for poetry in a society “in such extreme pain” where the writer’s concerns are “the unnamed harm to human relationships, the blockage of inquiry, the oblique contempt with which we are depicted to ourselves and to others… a malnourishment that extends from the body to the imagination itself” (p. 149). Our society is full of the “dead sound of senseless noise, of verbal displacement, …a bluster of false transgression, crudely offensive yet finally impotent” (p. 151). In a school world of standardized tests and prescribed curriculum and students who are so deadened to wonder that they don’t even know to wonder why they are there, poetry can be a rejuvenating force. Poetry can inspire awe, can create a frame of mind that according to poet and essayist Hirsch (1999), is “playful work and working playfulness, [a] form of consciousness- [a] dreamy attentiveness that come[s] with the reading of poetry” (p. 2). To a poet and a reader of poetry that is justification enough for the inclusion of poetry.

To those not yet convinced, both poets and educators offer more reasons to read and write poetry. Poetry can be studied to learn to read and to think. It is condensed language, and thus requires a concentrated attention, while its brevity relative to prose may make it seem manageable to students (Bell, 1992). Both reading and writing poetry can be accessible to students who cannot handle a large body of text. Students who struggle with language are often frustrated when presented with novels to read, large essays to write, or vast research projects to produce.

According to Benton (1992) poetry holds our cultural identity, allowing us to feel as if we belong in the world, but also allowing us to experience change. Benton (1999)
states that poetry can give to its readers and writers the ability to play with language, which leads to linguistic mastery. What better genre than poetry to learn from - one which can capture the imagination, one which can allow students to play as they learn about cultures and language?

Poets and teachers who make poetry a vital part of their teaching often combine their reasons for teaching poetry in their English classes into long lists that encompass personal, academic, and sociocultural justifications. For example, authors and educators Wormser and Capella (2004) claim poetry can improve reading, verbal, and writing skills, make students better performers on standardized tests, provide daily inspiration, help with “the nuts and bolts of literacy… and connect them with the multi-ethnic nature of democracy” (p. xxii). Poetry can teach students to discover profound truths, awaken the senses, teach empathy, and discover the self’s capacity to dream (Michaels, 1999). Encompassing statements such as these abound, followed by “fool-proof” lesson plans and activities, or victorious accounts of poetry programs, but studies are needed that explain how and why poetry can accomplish so much if poetry is to become more than just a fringe activity which gets lost or shoved aside when perceived “real” education needs to get done.

My own perspective on the teaching of poetry is certainly influenced by my experience as a writer of poetry. I am the chorus, the adoring audience, and the enthusiastic proponent of all that the aforementioned poets and educators claim about poetry’s value. When I teach poetry, I show the process of writing poetry and revising poetry through examples of my own poem writing process. When I ask students to play with poetry exercises, I play with them, and we all share the work that evolves.
Statement of the Problem

Poetry is invisible in many average and low-level high school classrooms, where students are designated as at risk, underachieving, average learners, low-level learners, struggling learners or, disillusioned and in the term I choose to use, marginalized readers (Moje et al., 2000). These are the students who are often placed in the lowest levels of tracked English classes. The term “marginalized” recognizes that readers are socially constructed in the English classroom, and that developing as a reader is tied to identity construction as well (Moje et al., 2000). Negative terms such as at-risk, underachieving, and remedial focus on the individual student, whereas marginalized is a more useful term for understanding these students. “Marginalized” (Moje et al., 2000) students are:

- those who are not connected to literacy in classrooms and schools.
- Specifically, we identify as marginalized adolescents those who are not engaged in the reading and writing done in school; who have language or cultural practices different than those valued in school; or who are outsiders to the dominant group because of their race, class, gender, or sexual orientation. (p. 405)

Studies that examine course content of low-level, tracked classrooms do not cite the inclusion of poetry reading and writing. Oakes’ (1985, 1992) comprehensive studies of tracking found that low-level, tracked students were exposed to less rigorous literature study, less college level curriculum, and more memorization drill and practice. Lee (2007), whose Cultural Modeling Project is designed to develop learning environments that use students’ own cultural resources to support their subject matter learning, describes the content of many low-level classes as “lower level questioning, use of
worksheets that ask for factual information, inauthentic tasks, direct instruction, and basic skills orientation” (p. 32). Content of such classes is often used to control the students rather than provide opportunities for reading and writing (Oakes, 1985; Page, 1990).

Poetry does not seem to be present or accounted for in such classes.

**Impetus for the Study**

Where does the teaching of poetry and writing “fit” in my own average level 9th grade English classes? When the reading level of some students is 5th grade and the aversion to reading is almost palpable and definitely audible, what tangible effects can poetry have on the lowest level student readers in this type of class? That is the question that haunted me as I read the theoretical and practical articles about the teaching of poetry in secondary classrooms. I teach upper level English classes, AP and college prep, and average 9th grade English classes. Poetry in all the classes I teach is not an add-on, nor is it a separate unit, but instead it is present in every classroom and every unit.

The inclusion of poetry in my teaching of students in average English classes has been a positive experience, though by no means a victory narrative. I cannot claim that all of my students have acquired a love of poetry. Reading and writing poetry has not immediately made them view life in a different way. They have not all experienced a vast emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth because they have been reading and writing poetry. Some days I still have to put on the “teacher as prison guard” face as I tell one student to quit punching another so we can get on with the business of reading a poem, or get out the “crazy cheerful teacher” voice as I wake up ten heads from the desks they have sunk onto. There is not rapt universal attention to my reading and sharing. But as an
every day observer I can see change. Anecdotally, it is clear to me that poetry is a necessary part of my classroom teaching.

One day, a student walked into the room and told me she was in a bad mood and asked if I had a poem that would make her feel better. I gave her Mary Oliver’s (1986) poem “Wild Geese.” She accepted it and quietly left the room reading it. It seemed she had learned that poetry could offer comfort. Another day a student who was usually absent at least two to three days a week expressed an interest in what kind of poems we had written while she was gone so she could write them too. And she wrote them and brought them the next day. For a student who has failed the first semester, this is as monumentally exciting to me as an AP student who scores a perfect 5 on the AP test. Another student was furious one day, when in a fit of uncharacteristic selfish unprofessionalism, I refused to give him a pencil after providing him with one for the previous 50 days, and he couldn’t play with the poem exercise we were doing. Fortunately a generous student “found” one in someone else’s backpack and he was able to participate. His anger subsided and he wrote the poem. Anecdotal evidence for the inclusion of poetry teaching from my perspective as a poet/practitioner/researcher was the impetus for this study.

Focus of the Study

This study examined students in my own classroom, students in a tracked system, in which they are designated as “average” by the course of study and low-level by the teachers who teach them and guidance counselors who place them there. While designated in the course of study as an average level English in my high school, in the hierarchy of courses of study in my school this class is the lowest level, the other two
being designated as college prep and Honors English. The students refer to themselves in even more negative terms. I studied what happened when the lowest level (based on previous reading scores, English grades, and guidance department placement) 9th grade readers in this average English class experienced the reading of poetry and the responding to poetry through poetry exercises in a curriculum-imbedded Reader Response-based Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. My intent was to discover whether students perceived themselves as more successful students in English class than they did in previous ones after participating in such a workshop and whether their performance on the poetry sections of standardized tests improved. My belief is that poetry reading and writing is the most neglected and at the same time most needed area of study for students in the lowest track of English classes. My task was to provide more than anecdotal evidence to affirm or disrupt my belief.

**Research Questions**

In my study I examined whether the reading and writing of poetry in a workshop format improves social and academic skills for disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) readers. I focused specifically on the genre of poetry, paying attention to voices of the students to determine their relationship with poetry before and after a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and examining standardized test scores to determine whether comprehension of poetry improved. I conducted this study to pursue four related questions:

1. How do disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) readers in a 9th grade English class feel about poetry through experiencing reading and writing poetry in a Poetry
Reading Writing Workshop in contrast to their prior experiences with poetry learning in their previous language arts classrooms?

2. Do students develop identities as successful readers and writers in English class through participation in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

3. Do students’ knowledge and use of literary terms improve and do their performances on high stakes standardized reading test questions improve through participating in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

4. Do students’ understandings of metaphoric language change from before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

To address these questions, I employed a case study approach. According to Creswell (1998), a case study explores a “bounded system,” bound by time and place, and it is the actual event, program or classroom that is being studied (p. 61). For my case study, I chose my own 9th grade average level English class and selected six students from the class of 19 as my focus students for the nested case study. The data sources I chose are those most common to case study research: surveys, observations, interviews, both formal and informal, recorded group discussions, video-taped class sessions, and collection of documents (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Another source of data collection was my research diary in which I documented observations daily as I observed talk about poetry from the focus students. A final source of data collection was my teacher journal, which as a practitioner I am accustomed to keeping as a means of classroom management and using to improve my teaching.

This study examined the possibilities for learning that are engendered when studying metaphor and learning to read and write poetry intersects with academic and
social identities of marginalized students in average English classes. It added
information about the relationships between what poets and educators claim poetry can
do for students and the resulting outcomes.

**Significance of the Study**

It is well-documented that students in low-level, tracked English classes often receive a low-level curriculum, devoid of activities that foster high level thinking (Oakes, 1986; Lee, 2007). In particular, these students rarely receive instruction on poetry or much literature at all, and instead are subjected to worksheets and drills ((Oakes, 1985; Kozol, 1991; Gamoran & Carbonaro, 2002; Lee, 2007). In addition, many students in low-level classes are disenchanted with school and see themselves as unsuccessful students.

Engagement with poetry and in particular, metaphor, through a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop that is based on Reader Response Theory (Rosenblatt 1938/1995), where students are allowed to discover their feelings about poetry that they choose (Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008), is, in my estimation, a way to change students’ perceptions of themselves as successful students. It also gives students a doorway into the poems, allowing them to connect with the text of the poem, improving both comprehension and understanding of the poem’s literary elements.

This study documents the attitudes of “marginalized” (Moje, Young, Readence, & Moore, 2000) students in low-level classes towards poetry reading and writing, and their attitudes about themselves as students with successful school identities before and after a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. This study also documents any changes in students’
scores on standardized poetry sections of a high stakes graduation test and on an in-class literary terms quiz after the workshop.

The focus of this study contributes to our understanding of student attitude towards poetry and performance on poetry tests as it is related to a particular type of teaching and learning. This study expands what we know about the relationship between student attitude and performance on poetry tests after learning about and then conducting an aesthetic reading as opposed to an efferent reading of poetry. It also adds to the research about marginalized readers and ways to improve their performance in tracked classroom situations in which they have been placed.

This study has pedagogical implications for other teachers as well. As a practitioner researcher, I add data related to teaching in the actual classroom, in a real life scenario. It adds to the body of practitioner research, providing both information that teachers can access and contributing to the bridging of the gap between the research community and teachers in the classroom (Wilson & Davis, 1994). This study also provides data that can support change in teachers’ attitudes towards choice in curriculum and methods of teaching poetry to marginalized students in low-level classes.

Assumptions Framing the Study

Several assumptions about learning to read and write poetry, identities, tracking of marginalized students, and practitioner research framed this study.

1. Learning to read and write poetry through a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop where students have some choice in what they read and write can affect their attitudes towards poetry.
2. Poetry is best taught and learned through teaching students to pay attention to their feelings about poems first, and then teaching them how to “trace them to textual sources” (Eva-Wood, 2004).

3. My use of the term “identities” includes having agency and being dynamic, with the possibility of change through the use of language and discourse.

4. Marginalized readers in low-level classes have not been consistently well-taught by schools that support tracking.

5. The perspective of the practitioner researcher makes it possible as well as imperative to experience and share decision-making processes, beliefs, values, and dialogue with the members of the circle of university researchers and teacher educators, administrators, teachers and community members.

Summary

In Chapter One I addressed the reasons for my interest in adding to the body of research on the significance of poetry to low-level English class curricula. I briefly discussed the lack of poetry teaching and learning in low-level English classes. I included my own perspective on that importance of including poetry in all English classes, as well as statements from poets and teachers of poetry as to its significance. I followed these statements with my research questions, the significance of the study, the assumptions framing the study, and the research methods I employed in my study. Chapter Two will provide a review of the literature, examining the theories framing my research and my philosophy of teaching. Chapter Three will describe my research design, including my role as a practitioner researcher. Chapter Three also will describe the research site, and the participants in the study followed by my methods of data collection and analysis.
process. In Chapter Four I will present a detailed description and analysis of the data collected from the whole class and a more in depth analysis of the data collected from the focus students when engaged in the workshop. In Chapter Five I will discuss my findings as specifically related to my research questions, implications for future research and limitations of my study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

Overview

I begin this chapter with additional literature from poets and poetry researchers concerning the value of teaching poetry. I continue with several theories that both inform my research and also frame the way that I teach. Rosenblatt’s Reader Response Theory, Vygotskian and Bakhtinian theories of discourse, and various conceptions of the power of metaphor (Lakoff & Johnson, 1980/2003; Bartel, 1983; Greene, 1995; Rich, 1997; Eva-Wood, 2004, and Soter, have influenced my curricular and methodological decisions as a teacher. Theories of identities as multiple and dynamic (Egan-Robertson, 1998; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Moje & Lewis, 2003; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005), shape my belief in the ability of students to change how they perceive themselves as young adults in school. An understanding of the practice of tracking in schools (Oakes, 1985; Gamoran, Nystrand, Brends, & Lepore, 1995; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002) underlies my assumptions that students in low-level tracks are often deprived of the study of poetry and other literature. Small group discussions and Poetry Reading Writing Workshop (Graves, 1983; Langer, 1995; Atwell, 1998) are an integral part of my classes. I conclude this chapter with a review of practitioner (teacher) research. Understanding the value of practitioner (teacher) research (Lytle, Belzer & Reumann, 1993; Cochran-Smith and Lytle 1993, 1999; Wilson & Davis, 1994; Fecho 2001; Zeichner and Noffke, 2001; Fecho, Allen, Mazaros, & Inyega, 2006), has also guided both my teaching and researching methods as I study my classroom.
The Case for Teaching Poetry: Poets and Poetry Researchers

Significant studies of poetry teaching and learning were discussed in Chapter One. How poetry is taught to students affects how students feel about poetry, and how they learn about poetry. Poetry reading and writing influences how students feel about themselves both academically and socially. In this chapter I add to the discussion of the value of teaching poetry in English classes.

Official Documents

Teaching poetry in secondary schools necessitates a discussion of the documents most touted by administrators when examining teacher lesson objectives, therefore a discussion of the case for teaching poetry as related to those sanctioned documents is appropriate. I examined *The Academic Content Standards K-12 English Language Arts*, (2007) the document prepared by the Ohio Education Department and to be adhered to in all lesson planning, for 9th grade standards pertaining to poetry reading and writing to back up my position. While poetry was not mentioned specifically, the following reading standards mentioned aspects that could be identified in poetry as well as prose. Under the *Acquisition of Vocabulary* #3 was “Infer the literal and figurative meanings of words and phrases and discuss the function of figurative language, including metaphors, similes, idioms, and puns” (p. 235). Under *Reading Applications: Literary texts* #9 I found, “Analyze ways in which the author conveys mood and tone through word choice, figurative language, and syntax,” and #11 “Identify sound devices, including alliteration, assonance, consonance, and onomatopoeia, used in literary texts” (p. 237). Under *Writing Processes* there is no mention of poetry or poetry writing processes. Under *Writing Applications* poetry it is only mentioned in #6 as “Produce informal writings
(e.g., journals, notes and poems) for various purposes” (p. 240). Despite the dearth of standards pertaining to poetry, The Ohio Graduation Test consistently includes one or two poems for analysis.

With the Ohio Department of Education’s official adoption of the Common Core Standards (ODE Website, 2010) in June, 2010, for the first time the reading and analyzing of poetry now has an official place in the standards, giving teachers who value the teaching and learning of poetry more impetus to stress its importance. Under the “Range of Text Types for 6-12” (p.57), grouped with drama and stories under literature are listed narrative, lyrical, free verse, sonnets, odes, ballads, and epics. The Reading Standards for grades 11 and 12 require students to be able to “analyze multiple interpretations of poems” (p. 38). The last section of the Common Core Standards lists specific works that they call illustrative but not limiting. Included in the list of poems are poems by Shelly, Poe, Frost, Keats, Dickinson, and Araya. However, with official sanction also comes the worry that without instruction in how to teach poetry, teachers will feed the dislike that many students have for poetry.

An examination of the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) reveal at least one, and usually two poems that must be read and analyzed through responses to multiple-choice questions and through three to five sentence short answers. The Common Core Standards do give poetry reading an official place. Despite the brevity of the articulated goals for poetry, students must at least be able to identify some of the literary elements found in poems, and choose a meaning from several choices given to them on the OGT tests. However, the issue of lack of teacher preparation in methods of teaching poetry remains.

Telling teachers and administrators that poetry must be taught because it is in the
state standards and is tested in the graduation test may be enough (superficial though that is) for some who need convincing. Poets, writers and teachers can list many more organic reasons to justify the inclusion of poetry in the teaching of English. There are many goals that poetry can help students achieve, goals which address the whole person, not just the statistics on the district grade card as they relate to the passage percentage of the state reading test.

**Poetry as a Vehicle for Language**

Many educators see one purpose of poetry as being a vehicle for learning about language. An advantage of using poetry to achieve this goal is that, if chosen carefully, both reading and writing poetry are very accessible to students who cannot handle a large body of text. Students who struggle with language are often frustrated when presented with novels to read, large essays to write, or vast research projects to produce. Because of the perception of its small size, students can manage looking carefully at a given set of words, and may be stimulated to write their own poems (Wormser & Capella, 2004).

Reading a poem gives students immediate experiences, in a way a novel, or even a short story cannot. According to Koch (1998), poetry “gives them quickly, suddenly, just about whenever we want. [For example,] John Donne is with his mistress and talking when the morning sun comes in the window. The whole situation is there the moment I open the book” (p. 109).

Studies (Harrison & Gordon, 1983, as cited in Wade & Sidaway, 1990; Kelly, 1999; Wormser & Capella, 2004) have revealed that many teachers see poetry as a bridge to other kinds of privileged language use as part of a sequence. Poetry can also be used to
understand other texts. For example, Sullivan (2005), a teacher educator, uses found poetry exercises to pique her students’ interest or to understand the concepts in a difficult text. Poetry can be used to help students understand literary concepts which students may find more difficult in longer prose, such as judging narrator reliability (Wormser & Capella, 2004), or irony (Smith, 1989). Other researcher/teachers have used poetry to encourage other types of writing, as a planning or rough draft tool for an essay (Christensen, 1991), or to encourage revision in other forms or genres (Jocson, 2006).

Poetry allows its readers and writers to play with language, which leads to linguistic mastery. Approaching the reading and writing of poetry in this manner, as play, rather than as a high stakes product to be tested, provides opportunities for students to examine and to manipulate language (Smith, 1989; Lipsett, 2001; Hess, 2003; Wormser & Capella, 2004).

**The Power of Ambiguity**

The ambiguity of poetry is powerful for students with limited motivation and skills to use and understand language. Students who have been exposed to curricula which focus on drills and dry practical writing bits need to be able to see that language is not unconnected words that fill in blanks. Our lives are ambiguous, and students begin to explore that ambiguity when they play with poetry. Benton (1992) describes the back and forth dance that poetry causes a reader to experience as operating both “centrifugally and centripetally” (p. 71). Benton (1992) shows how a plethora of often paradoxical experiences must occur at the same time for a reader to read a poem: feeling and thinking, seeing and hearing, reading both efferently and aesthetically, understanding that
poetic language is true and false, being puzzled and understanding at the same time, reading the parts and the whole.

Humans need both variety and sameness, and the ambiguous nature of needing both of these can be seen concretely though poetry. Arp and Johnson (2002), explain that “we like the familiar, we like variety, but we like them combined. If we get too much sameness, the result is monotonous; if we get too much variety, the result is bewilderment and confusion” (p. 899). Peck (2004) sees poetry as “rote patterns that are essential to the abstraction of ourselves” (p. 47). “We want our days to be filled with novelty. But we also want them to be the same, the many in one” (p. 48). Poetry can physically show students this need through pattern and variety in meter and rhyme.

Teaching students that language and life are ambiguous in nature certainly contributes to emotional, intellectual, and spiritual growth. Through poetry, students can see ambiguity in the varied interpretations of lines and words that readers bring to reading the text. Teaching ambiguity frustrates students’ views of their world. However, according to Tucker (2003), poetry does much more. “It means to nudge them across a threshold of moral life. When all goes well, the encounter with poetic ambiguity ushers students into a place where they can vicariously…. experiment with inhabiting a conscious ambivalence… beholding the play of double meaning” (p. 443).

**Poetry as a Way to Express Emotions**

Poetry allows students to express emotions, contributing to the affective growth of the individual. Poetry as therapy is a subject by itself, but certainly in schools poetry can be used to allow students to express their emotions, to figure out who they are through reading and writing. Providing students with a poem gives them a safe, silent
way to express the emotion of grief, when verbal expressions are too hard. Lipsett (2001) sees poetry acting as a “preserver of felt experiences (p.3). Poetry also teaches students empathy (Christensen, 1991; Heard, 1999; Sullivan, 2004). For Christensen (1991), poetry allows us to “probe our wounds, and try to discover our roots, share our joy and learn that we don’t have to suffer alone” (p.31). Poetry, according to Jocson (2004), can give young people a method “to express hard-to-draw-out emotions such as love, confusion, and anger and make better sense of life experiences such as death, social acceptance, and types of profiling” (p. 4).

**Poetry as a Way to Teach Cultural Literacy**

Benton (1992) describes poetry is a powerful method to achieve the goals of making sense of the world, as “poems matter because they are a prime source of stories, and stories in verse…hold listeners in the double spell of both the fiction and the form” (p. 75). Poems also are holders of cultural identity, expanding our world by providing a continuous “experience of belonging to a changing yet permanent culture” (p. 76).

In a program called P4P, developed by African American poet June Jordan at The University of California, Berkeley in 1995, undergraduate and graduate students take a series of three courses on teaching poetry, they may continue on as student-teacher-poets to become involved in the program itself. The program works to bridge out-of-school and in-school communities, to reach marginalized community members. Jocson (2004), working in an inner city school poetry workshop, found that poetry can be a transformative act, that it can provide a way for young people to gain confidence and become citizens who are empowered beyond the boundaries of school, to become active
participants described by Christensen (1999) as “strands in the weaving of the resistance to the inequities of society (p. 33).

**Poetry as Art**

First and last, poetry is art, and the aesthetic understanding of this art can bring together emotions and physical experience, and can allow our students to dance instead of just to sit in their desks. For Tremmel (1992), poetry “enables human beings to return to their roots, to maintain contact with and to extend personal knowledge of mental and physical processes, knowledge of the rhythms of living and feeling in the world” (p .28). Poetry is not just words written on the page; it is written to be heard as well. John Gordon (2004), of the School of Lifelong Learning at East Anglia, calls this verbal energy and poetic knowledge. In a discussion of a comment by poet Seamus Heany about rapper Eminem’s verbal energy, Gordon explains, “verbal energy is a conflation of the linguistic, semantic power of poetry and the less tangible energies of sound…. This appears to suggest that some part of the ‘knowledge’ afforded by poetry is physiological and affective, sometimes a self-knowledge realized beyond conscious verbal thought” (pp. 2-3).

Not knowing poetry is an impoverishment, and our language collapses into Rich’s (2001) devalued, “flattening of images, [which] results in massive inarticulation, even among the educated” (p. 149-50). We see this happening in our schools with the focus on standardized tests, and it is more than ever imperative that educators and researchers figure out why poetry is hidden in the margins, or pushed right off the page of schools. According to Koch (1998), not knowing poetry is “an impoverishment of life such as not knowing music or painting would be, or not traveling” (p. 111).
Reader Response Theory: Transacting Change

Readers all respond to a specific piece of literature differently, based on both their personal and their literary backgrounds. Reader Response Theory is based on the understanding that readers come to a particular piece of literature with a personal background that has developed over time based on their unique knowledge and experiences (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995).

Both my research and my teaching are guided by Rosenblatt’s (1938/1995) Reader Response Theory. Rosenblatt (1938/1995) states that the reader comes to a piece of text with a background, personal insights, and experience and “transacts”, with the text or poem to create meaning. According to Rosenblatt (1938/1995), this transaction is “a dynamic to-and-fro relationship… [that]. …places stress on each reading as a particular event involving a particular reader and a particular text recursively influencing each other under particular circumstances (p. 292). Reading is thus perceived as an organic process, leading to a deeper experience with the text and allowing for discussion that can lead to new responses and meanings.

Rosenblatt (1938/1995) argued that since literature is a “lived through” (p. 228) experience, the interchange of ideas brought about through the literary experience can lead the student to question his present knowledge about human relations. It is this questioning, that can often lead the reader to formulate new ideas and personal value systems regarding his relationship with others. For Rosenblatt, therefore, this “literature provides an educational medium through which the students’ habits of thought may be influenced” (p. 227). Frequently literature is the means by which readers discover that their inner lives reflect a common experience of others in their society. In most cases
these transactions, both personal and literary, will elicit a definite response, leading to some kind of reflection. New situations, attitudes, personalities, and conflicts in values can be rejected, revised, or assimilated into the resources with which the reader engages his world through the transactional response to literature. Transacting with a text gives rise to the possibility for change in the reader, leading to growth in the reader’s ability to develop the imagination, to “escape from the imitations of time and place and environment, the capacity to envisage alternatives in ways of life and in moral and social choices, the sensitivity to thought and feeling and needs of other personalities” (p. 276).

Rosenblatt (1978) describes two types of reading response, which she calls “efferent” and “aesthetic.” Efferent reading is the kind of reading one does when the primary motive is to take information away from the reading. For students in schools, efferent reading takes place when they are reading a science text, or history textbook, for example. For Rosenblatt (1978), “In aesthetic reading the reader’s attention center[s] directly on what he is living through during his relationship with that particular text” (p. 25). The reader can live through and reflect upon much that in abstract terms would be meaningless individually. Aesthetic reading should occur when students are reading literature and poetry.

Several scholars believe that students may have lost or forgotten the ability to read a poem aesthetically because this type of reading is so under-emphasized in schooling (Rosenblatt, 1978; Miall, 1996; Hermsen, 2003). Rosenblatt (1978) describes how the focus of reading workbooks on efferent reading of poems as early as the third grade may teach a child how not to read a poem aesthetically. When the workbook questions ask the student to relate the facts he learned from reading the poem about a
bird, the child is led to “focus attention on the efferent handling of language and to push the richly fused cognitive-affective matrix into the fringes of consciousness” (p. 40).

Reader Response Theory may need to be made explicit to students entrenched in the efferent world of schools before they can begin to read poetry in an aesthetic manner (Pike, 2000).

Eva-Wood (2004), in an experiential think-aloud study with college freshmen, examined the role attention to feelings played in the understanding of poetry. One group of students verbalized their thoughts only as they read two poems, while the other group verbalized their feelings and thoughts. Eva-Wood’s results showed that the students who paid attention to their feelings actually reported more interest in the reading, identified more poetic devices, and made more elaborate comments than the students who only recorded their thoughts. Even though literature textbooks have emphasized reader response for over thirty years, according to Eva-Wood (2004), students still seem to approach it analytically. In my experience with teachers and textbooks in high school, despite the focus on emotional reader response questions included in newer textbooks, teachers often discount the textbook questions as less than rigorous, and create identification and analytical questions of their own. The lack of experience with, or perhaps willingness by teachers to admit to the value of emotional response may be a primary factor in the frustration and confusion often felt by students who have not been taught how read a poem.

Theories of Vygotsky and Bakhtin

Students’ self-perceptions are shaped by the language they hear and the language they assimilate. Vygotsky’s (1962) understanding of the relationship of thought and
language is crucial for the understanding this concept. In his explanation of how speech is internalized as inner speech we find the definition of thought. Thought develops from a process of internalizing the sense of words. This internalization of words cements into beliefs that we hold to be true.

Through an examination of studies with apes and children Vygotsky (1962) concluded that thought and speech have distinctly different genetic roots. He found that despite their different origins there is a prelinguistic phase in the development of thought as well as a preintellectual phase in the development speech. While thought and speech develop along two separate, independent lines, by the age of two those lines meet and join together to form a new form of behavior, the intellectual stage. “The knot is tied for the problem of thought and language” by the age of two (p. 43). Thought becomes verbal and speech becomes rational at this time.

The next area examined by Vygotsky is the relationship of thought and word. While inner speech develops through a slow process of functional and structural stages, thought is developed by linguistic tools, and most importantly, by the sociocultural experiences of the child. The discovery that word meanings evolve, led to a clearer understanding of the relationship of thought and word as a back and forth movement. Once this belief was established, Vygotsky began to look at the phenomenon called inner speech. Again through an examination and critique of existing experiments he concluded that there three levels of speech: inner speech, characterized by a whole meaningful complex of elliptical economic speech, egocentric speech characterized by the lack of subject, and the external phonetic aspect characterized by a process of using one or two words, then sentences, then connected sentences. A child begins with external speech,
then learns egocentric speech, and finally develops the ability to think in pure meanings, or with inner speech. His ability to communicate through language is directly related to being able to differentiate word meanings in his speech and word sense in his consciousness.

Through a study of egocentric speech, Vygotsky was able to analyze inner speech. Egocentric speech involves the transition from social, collective activity to the individualized activity. It helps a child to become mentally oriented, to develop conscious understanding and serves as a method to overcome understanding difficulties. Eventually the child ceases to vocalize egocentric speech, and this is the plane of inner speech or the child’s ability to think in words.

Inner speech, working with semantics, not phonetics, was found to have the following traits: predication, decrease of vocalization, the use of sense over meaning, and agglutination. The sense of a word is the word in all of its social contexts, and is thus fluctuating, while the meaning of a word is stable. Agglutination is the forming of compound words characterized by inner speech. Inner speech is the ability to think in pure meaning, and is a process of movement between thought and word. Thought is the innermost plane of inner speech. Vygotsky compares thought to “a cloud shedding a shower of words” (p. 150). Communication is achieved in the opposite direction from the explanation of how a child learns inner speech. First there must be a motive, or desire to communicate. Next thought is shaped into inner speech, then into meanings of word, then into words themselves, and external speech is communicated. Vygotsky saw the development of development of speech and intellect as moving from biological to socio-historical in its later stage of development.
After reading Vygotsky I am even more convinced of the power of others to influence how we think. If our inner speech develops out of egocentric speech, which is so influenced by the social context in which it develops then clearly we think as a culture. I have observed in my own English classes labeled average how such particular thinking occurs in students. Over time, other teachers, counselors, parents, or peers verbalize that the student is not capable of passing a regular class, both to each other and sometimes even to the students. They call the student stupid, slow, loser. The student begins to call himself these names, and to compare himself to other similar characters in stories and other situations. Over time, the external speech, which is the cultural norm in all aspects of this student’s experience in school, becomes internalized, and the student believes he is stupid, lazy, and incapable of learning in a school context. Over a period of years the high school student’s appropriation of the language used by others to identify him, while starting externally, eventually becomes appropriated into thought. According to Vygotsky (1978), “The transformation of an interpersonal process is not an intrapersonal one, but it is the result of a long series of developmental events” (p. 57).

My understanding of identity as dynamic and language dependent is explained through the theories of both Vygotsky and Bakhtin. Vygotsky’s (1962) theory of development explains that individuals develop into themselves through others, through the social relations converted into mental functions. It is that internalization of words which we learn through interaction with others into thoughts that cements beliefs about ourselves, and constructs our identities.

In addition to Vygotskian theory of the development of inner speech through social interaction, many current literacy researchers use Bakhtin’s (1975) theory of the
dialogic imagination (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Hull & Schultz, 2002; Vadeboncouer & Stevens, 2005) in their understanding of identity. Holquist (2002) explains that for Bakhtin, “self” is dialogic, a relation…” (p. 19). Community and others are part of the dialogue that is the self. Through the voices of others, present and past, the individual’s identity is constructed and reconstructed. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner and Cain (1998) call Bakhtin’s dialogic of inner speech, where active identities form and reform, the “space of authoring” (p. 169). They “conceive the space of authoring, then as a broad venue, where social languages meet, generically and accentually, semantically and indexically, freighted with the valences of power, position, and privilege” (p. 191).

For Vadeboncouer (2005) Vygotskian theory explains how we perceive our world through socially mediated speech and through the appropriation of Bakhtinian speech genres and social languages. Discussing Bakhtin’s theory of language, Vadeboncoeur states, “Bakhtin notes that the construction of self is a social process, a reflection of self and other relationships, and as such is fraught with both tensions and comfort. Our identity is captured, like a snapshot, and “refracted” back to us through the visual lens or filter of the other” (p. 128).

In a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop which focuses on language through poetry reading and writing, the disillusioned, marginalized reader (Moje et al., 2000) who identifies herself negatively may begin to imagine other identities through interactions with the language of poetry, in particular the understanding of metaphor. Discovering oneself through the language of poetry is possible through understanding that, according to Vygotsky (1962), “a word is not just a word but a “microcosm of human consciousness” (p. 153).
The Transformative Power of Metaphor

Understanding metaphors is a skill that allows us to both comprehend our own culture and to develop an awareness of our language and its power. Reading and writing poetry brings the world of metaphor into students’ lives in a culture where language has lost its value (Rich, 1997). According to Rich (1997), education has two contradictory goals: development of informed, articulate citizens as well as perpetuation of a class system which divides the elite few from the rest of society, the underclass, written off as “alienated from language and science, from poetry and politics, from history and hope, an underclass to be funneled- whatever its dreams and hopes- toward low-wage temporary jobs” (p. 162). For Rich, the direction our education system has taken is betraying our youth, and will result in an outcome that is devastating to our society.

My years of teaching with many of these “underclass” youth bear witness to the alienation she describes. I have heard and read their feelings of displacement and silence, their powerlessness and feelings of inadequacy in their speech and in their writing, eerily echoing Rich’s (1997) “dead sound of senseless noise, of verbal displacement, when a rich and active idiom is displaced by banal and offensive speech, or words of active courage by the bluster of false transgression, cruelly offensive, and finally impotent” (p. 151).

When metaphor is taught in schools, it is my observation that teachers rarely address any issues other than the superficial recognition of metaphor in prose or poetry. An examination of high school English textbooks, and standardized tests reveals a similar focus on mere identification, rather than an in depth study.
Poetry can allow students to experience how metaphors work both in literature and in the world. Reading and writing poetry necessitates attention to language, and provides a space to “unsilence” the silent through self-reflection. Metaphor requires the awareness of personal responses (Rosenblatt, 1978; Eva-Wood, 2004). According to Rosenblatt (1978) when a reader looks carefully at a text to understand the metaphor she is forced to make the connections between her lived experience, “selecting out, from the reverberations of both members of the metaphor, attitudes, feelings, images, associations, that can be synthesized within the context of the total lived-through experience” (p. 94). Hirsch (1999) describes metaphor as a “collision, a collusion, a compression of two unlike things” (p. 13). It jostles the reader to take an active role in the activity of reading. Teaching students to develop the skills to understand and create metaphor forces revitalization of language. Once the reader is jostled into paying attention, then metaphor requires the reader to slow down and reflect. According to Eva-Wood (2004), the reader must be taught to pay attention to feeling, not just thought, for these connections to take place.

Metaphors can cause listeners to slow down and pay attention to their learning. Bartel (1983) divides metaphors into four categories. His third category, “resonant metaphors,” “inspires thought as well as feeling” (p. 60) His fourth category, what he calls “complex and subtle metaphors” requires us to reflect to get even a fraction of their multiple meanings (p. 60). In the reading of poetic metaphors, our students can learn to give pause, to think, and to recognize ways to express emotion. Reading metaphor may help students see how language shapes our world. Winner (1997) states that a novel metaphor “surprises the listener and challenges him to solve a puzzle by mapping
attributes and relations between the stated or implied elements being linked in the sense that metaphors force us to understand one thing in terms of another, metaphors must elicit cognitive processes not ordinarily called upon by literal language (p. 17). Ortony (1975) explained that metaphor can assist learning in various ways. It can impress a concept or idea through the powerful image or vivid expression. The intellectual process involved in forming and discovering metaphors allows students to explore ideas and to develop succinct insights into themselves and the world around them.

Students rarely attend to metaphor on their own, perhaps because through their experience in schools they have come to identify metaphor with a school exercise, having no relevance to their lives. According to Soter (2010), it is essential to teach students that “metaphor is not some isolated item in a string of language- a metaphor is essentially the undertow, the substance that affects all else present in the poem- this is not the way it is typically presented to students nor dealt with in standardized tests” (personal communication, August 11, 2010). Learning to attend to metaphor can be both revelatory and change producing. Miall (1979) sees metaphor as a “process of transformation in thought, rather than as a static and isolated linguistic entity… as integrated into the view of thought as an “ongoing, dynamic process, able to reformulate itself and originate new concepts beyond the awareness of the thinker (p. 28). Greene (1995) connects this transformative power to language. For Greene (1995), meaning is an event that generates choice on the part of the participant, reader, or listener. Metaphor is manifested through language, whose center:

may well be the metaphor; and it is language that has the capability of provoking changes in our ways of thinking, knowing, seeing. One of the things that makes
metaphor so important to the discourse about education is that it can make visible and palpable particular phenomena, those so often submerged in categories. It may well be that attention paid to literature and the several arts, not simply as component parts of new curricula, but as occasions for experience on the part of those engaged in observing and reform, can release ways of seeing that go beyond the language of report (p. 20).

Central to metaphor theory and critical to the understanding of our world are the ideas of Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003). Lakoff and Johnson reveal how metaphor is not just a literary embellishment, but also an integral part of language and action, underlying the way we conceptually understand our world. Often these metaphors are so pervasive and systematic that we don’t even recognize them as metaphors. Lakoff and Johnson divide metaphors into three experiential categories. Many of our conceptual metaphors in his first category are structural; “time is money,” or “communication is sending.” The second category is that of orientational metaphors, based on our physical and cultural experiences such as the up-down spatialization in “happy is up, sad is down.” The third kind of metaphor is the ontological metaphor, where we use our experience with physical objects to understand ideas, emotions, and events. “The mind is a machine,” and love is a journey,” are two examples.

Awareness of the pervasiveness of and all-embracing nature of many of our metaphors, and how difficult it is to change them is an eye-opening experience for students who have never before thought about how their world is structured. While it is difficult to change the metaphors we live by, Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) state that a new metaphor has the possibility to change how we think about things, to create new
meaning for us. They give the example of an Iranian student who attended one of their lectures and understood the metaphor “The solution of my problems” to be a chemical metaphor, envisioning a “large volume of liquid, bubbling, and smoking, containing all of [his] problems’ (p. 143). This view of solving problems is entirely different than our metaphor for solving problems, which is that of the puzzle metaphor. Living by the chemical metaphor would make problems part of our everyday life, whereas living life by the puzzle metaphor, as our culture does, makes us focus on getting rid of problems that often reoccur. Lakoff and Johnson (1980/2003) attest that new metaphors do enter a culture, albeit with difficulty, and when they do they have the power to create a new reality. This can begin to happen when we start to comprehend our experience in terms of metaphor, and it becomes a deeper reality when we begin to act in terms of it… Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us (p. 146).

In a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, students can be introduced to the concept of metaphor, and can practice through their own writing, trying on new positive metaphors to understand how pervasive and controlling the old ones are. In a simple exercise I used in a previous Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, I asked students to give me a metaphor for school, eliciting the timeworn, “School is a jail,” and “School is a playground,” as answers. The next step was to look at all the ways enactments of these metaphors were true, then to examine which parts of the metaphors did not fit and were thus hidden. Finally, we tried on new metaphors for school, attempting to use metaphor
as a tool to employ Lakoff and Johnson’s (1980/2003) “imaginative rationality” (p. 193). “School is an onion” provided a humorous, insight into what school is and could be, and in the confines of an English classroom, became a world that, albeit odorous, had layers to peel off in order to discover its crunchy substance. Eva-Wood’s (2008) study of think and feel-aloud procedures with 11th graders and reading poetry verifies that explicitly instructing students that they can “feel” when they read poetry as well as explicit instruction on other comprehension strategies, such as attending to figurative language as they read consistently increases the use of such strategies.

**Identity Studies**

In a discussion of identity and young people, I am very interested in several aspects of current researchers’ definitions, namely Egan Robertson (1998), Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998), Moje and Lewis (2003), and Vadeboncoeur and Stevens (2005). In agreement with Bruner, (1986), Rymes (2001), and Sfard and Prusak (2005), I hear the voices of young people and the stories they tell themselves and are told about themselves as crucial in developing their identity. Vadeboncoeur and Stevens (2005) state that attention to words that give restrictive identities to young people may have further implications in their marginalization in schools words such as Unruly. Hormone-crazed. Awkward. Out of control. Risk seekers. This familiar vernacular, invoked from the hegemonic position of the adult or the researcher, carries the same panic, fear, and the need to control as do such institutionally sanctioned versions labeling youth, ‘at risk,’ ‘challenging,’ and ‘troublesome’” (p. 5).
I may be less optimistic than some researchers who see identities as constantly changing. While I see the dialogic imagination of Bakhtin’s “seeds of hope” (as cited in Holquist, 2002, p. 38) in that aspect, I think, in my understanding of Vygotsky’s (1962) theory of words and thoughts, that some aspects of identity are very hard to change once they become cemented in our thoughts. I believe the best shot we have at affecting entrenched identities, in particular the negative ones that students who are marginalized in schools have acquired, is to look carefully at the “spaces” they occupy, and to focus on creating new, or re-creating those spaces as places, whether “third spaces” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Soja, 1996), “figured worlds” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998), or literal places in schools, where young people can practice and play with aspects of their identities through multiple literacies. The term identities, while fraught with many disparate definitions according to the perspectives and fields that are using it, still seems to be the best term to use, as long as it is accompanied by a theoretically positioned definition. Therefore, my use of the term “identities” includes having agency and being dynamic, with the possibility of change through the use of language and discourse.

The Concept of Identities as Dynamic

While not specifically addressing the identities of disillusioned, marginalized readers (Moje et al., 2000), several studies I found do claim that reading and responding to poetry play an important role in the development of a young adult’s identities (McCormick, 2000, 2003; Hermsen, 2003; Jocson, 2004; Lauscher, 2007; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008). The idea that identities are dynamic, and that reading and writing poetry can work to help change, or form identities, is crucial to my study of the relationship of
poetry reading and writing to students in low-level English classes. The dynamic, changeable quality of identities is shared by various researchers in the late 20th and early 21st century. Studying theories of identity (ies) and how they are constructed in adolescents both in and out of school is crucial to address the inequities that abound in the institution of school and classroom; inequities related to gender, age, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status- in short any category that may result in marginalization of students within the space of schooling (Proweller, 1998; Yon, 2000; Long, Peck, & Baskins, 2002). According to Proweller (1998) “Identity production pivots on exclusions and borders where relations between Self and Other are elaborated across multiple and intersecting dimensions of power and privilege. Identities are constituted along borders that separate who one is from who one is not” (p. 62).

While several terms are used to describe identities by different researchers, their ideas have in common the concept of the possibility of change. Egan-Roberston (1998) uses the term “personhood” in her definition to describe the construct of being a person, calling forth words like identity, self, and individual related discourses. “Personhood” is a “dynamic, cultural construct about who and what is considered to be a person; what attributes and rights are constructed as inherent to being a person; and what social positions are available within the construct of being a person” (p. 5). “Personhood’ is dynamic in the sense that it is reformed as people interact in and across contexts. Through the discourse analysis lens, “personhood” is also fixed within certain historical and constructed discourse practices that function as systems for organizing people. Egan-Roberston (1998) also places her definition of “personhood” as constructed through the construct of intertextuality, which focuses analytically on “the ways sets of texts are
brought together and made use of [her] readers and writers” (p. 9), and posits that “personhood” is constructed through language and can be reconstituted through examination of discourse practices, in particular in writing practices in schools.

Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998) derive their concept of identity from the anthropological and cultural studies concepts of “personhood” as historical and cultural, combined with the theories of Bakhtin (1975) and Vygotsky (1962) as both dialogic and developmental, and thus they see identities as always forming, or dynamic, specifically lived in and through social practices and activities. The “figured world” of Holland et al., (1998), is the way one understands the world in one’s own particular way. They define the “figured world” as a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain cultural acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others (p. 52). A person also understands the “figured world” and her position relative to the “figured world”, and can write oneself into the world because she has agency, so that new “figured worlds” can be created. Individuals and groups are always forming, and “however dependent upon social support and however vulnerable to change make at least a modicum of self-direction possible (p. 4).

Other researchers also speak of identities as having agency, that is, the ability to reconstruct the self or selves. Lewis and Moje (2003) call identity “an enactment of self made with particular activities and relationships that occur within particular spaces… at particular points in time… people take self and subjectivities with them, but enact a particular version of self that is appropriate to a time, space relationship, or activity” (p. 198). Yon (2000), through a study of high school students in Canada, similarly sees
identities as being shaped by context and history, but also sees that “identity experimentation and imagined possibilities are free-floating and a matter of choice for some” while exclusionary for others (p. 2). In a similar study of a girls’ high school, Proweller (1998), found that identity work was constantly in play. The prevailing white, privileged culture created a site of absence where girls are positioned and at the same time reposition themselves through the contradictions of exclusions and privilege.

**Dynamic identities and language.** Current definitions of identity, self and “personhood” (Egan-Robertson, 1998), always involve language. “Identity as narrative” is a concept held by many researchers (Bruner, 1986; Rymes, 1995; McCallister, 2004). “Identities as stories” is a concept developed by Sfard and Prusak (2005) in response to the proliferation of the term “identity” in education research as well as other social sciences. Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, and Cain (1995) frame identity discussion in narrative as well. “People tell who they are, but even more importantly, they tell themselves and they try to act as though they are who they say they are” (p. 3). Sfard and Prusak define “identity as narrative” to avoid connotations of identity as “being” rather than identity as “fluid” (pp. 15-19). They define identity as “collections of stories about persons, or more specifically, as those narratives that are reifying, endorsable, and significant” (p. 16). Identities are reifying because they are repeated in the “identity narrative.” They are endorsable because they reflect the world, and significant because they affect the storyteller’s feelings about the person being identified. Individuals tell stories about their actual identity and their designated identity, and both are visions of their own, other people’s, or institutionalized narratives. Gee and Crawford (1998) explain that the many identities that young people take on are parts of a recognizable self
they call the “master story.” “Master stories are very often fragmentary, shifting, at points inconsistent, and ever open to revision and even destruction” (p. 225).

**Dynamic identity and discourse.** According to Gee (1996), discourse is defined as “ways of behaving, interacting, valuing, thinking, believing, speaking, and often reading and writing that are accepted as instantiations of particular roles (or ‘types of people’) by specific groups of people…[and are therefore] always and everywhere social products of histories” (cited in Diamondstone, 2005, p. viii). Gee’s “identity kits,” or specialized ways that a person acts, talks, and thinks are ways to look at the possible limiting effects of discourse, which have implications for the examination of marginalized groups of students in schools. Finders (2005), in a study of an alternative school for students who had been removed from the regular school setting because of discipline issues, described how discourses “enable and constrain particular subject positions and relationships available with them. They shape how people come to understand the world in which they live, how they judge the worth and actions of self and others” (p. 100). These ideas further emphasize my beliefs that students in average or lower level classes become the identities that the discourse around them defines for them. Through an examination of self through the reading and writing of poetry and in particular metaphor, students may be able to re-define their identities.

**Identity and “Space”**

Outside of the education world, but still attached to the beliefs that change is imperative, where a world can exist that does not oppress, is the ontological development of the concept of “third space.” Soja’s (1996) major work, *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and other Real-and-Imagined Places*, has as its purpose the encouragement of
the development of a different way of thinking about human geography. The world has traditionally been studied in the realms of historicality and sociality, the making of histories and the constitution of societies. A third critical perspective, that of spatiality, arose at the end of this century. Reclus describes spatiality as “history in space…not an immutable thing. It is made, it is remade every day; at each instant, it is modified by men’s [and women’s] actions” ((cited in Soja, 1996, p.186). Soja’s “thirdspace” perspective became one that would recognize social reality as a “lived space” of development and change, of conflict and resistance. The introduction of a third term is necessary because two terms are never enough to deal with the real and imagined world. Like Freire (1970/2003), Soja sees knowledge as ever changing, as nomadic. Third space is further explained in five major points, but two of those points are most clearly related to later uses of the term by researchers such as Gutierrez and Rymes (1995). Soja says that third space is a strategic meeting place that fosters collective political action against all forms of human oppression, and that third space is a starting point for new and different explorations that can move beyond the third term in a constant search for other spaces.

Rymes (2001), in an examination of a charter school for underserved minority students in south Los Angeles incorporates her understanding of “third space” as a place where ignored and uneducated children can be heard and can receive an education. Much of her research was done with conversations with students outside of the classroom, at Friday sessions, where students talked more freely and unscripted. Rymes makes recommendations for teaching and reform, learned from listening to the many voices in the school and from her familiarity with the important community issues. One of her
recommendations is to listen to the students’ narratives, and to do this she says teachers must create a classroom space in which narratives can be told. The fact that the school failed does not negate the change that truly occurred, and that is a change in the interactions that occurred between teachers and students.

It is that very interaction that is part of the definitions of space of the many disciplines that are searching for a place for change to occur, a place where dominant and oppressed discourse can come to understandings, and a better world can be created. The danger seems to be in the desire for educators to try and turn this heuristic into a practice, or method. “Third space” must be understood as a guiding philosophical view of human interaction and used to find a starting place for the center of true identity change.

The concept of place, or space, is one in which construction and reconstruction of identity can also be viewed. For Vadeboncoeur (2005), considering time and space in schools provides a lens through which to examine issues of oppressive and marginalizing ways of positioning of students in order to design a more effective environment. She makes use of Bakhtin’s (1981) chronotype, where “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully though-out, concrete whole” (cited in Vadeboncoeur, 2005, p. 124) to examine how young people construct their identity in and out of school. Blackburn (2005) clarifies the difference between place and space in a study of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) youth. She studied a group of LGBTQ in an after school literacy group called Story Time in a youth center called The Attic. She sees schools as places and spaces for some, but not spaces for LGBTQ youth because they do not allow for “articulation of the self or performance of identities” (p. 19). In the after school context, these youth were able to explore identities and literacy in writing
and discussions. Places are physical places, but space is “a living, breathing context characterized by complexities and often conflicts…a dialogic between place and people” (p. 19). Through the Story Time space, students were able to feel safe enough to take risks.

The concept of “third space” is another way to look at how identities are constructed and reconstructed, one that connects with the issue of power. An understanding of the heuristic of “third space” is integral to the restructuring of the educational classroom to include the voices of all students, who in the context of the traditional Western monologic “banking method” (Freire, 1970/2003) of education are part of the oppressed. The concept of “third space” is not method or practice, though there are those educators who have tried to create an actual physical third space, but it is an ontological understanding of the world that provides a way for dominant and oppressed cultures to meet, and for real dialogue to occur. The belief that changes in educational practices need to take place is inherent in all of the interpretations of “third space”, as “third space” is a place where the oppressed, the marginalized, and the silenced voices, can be heard and take part in knowledge creating. Implied in the desire for a “third space” is the understanding that the first and second spaces are both oppressive and marginalizing to some groups.

The Poetry Reading Writing Workshop can become a third space where students can feel safe enough to take risks within a system that oppresses and marginalizes students. The reality of public school systems is that tracking exists, and students who feel marginalized and who are considered to be by some of their peers, the staff, and
sometimes even their parents may be able to be heard and create more successful identities.

**Identity and Literacy in School and in Classrooms**

Several studies examine identity in terms of literacy in classrooms and the implications for change. In some of the studies, researchers look at existing systems and classrooms and in others they are participants who enact curricular changes and then study them to see if those relationships change.

Hinchman (1998) in a review of five studies of secondary school literacy practices concludes that students’ points of view were considered last in their contribution to insights in improving literacy practices. She concludes that the studies did not explore the literacies the students brought with them to school, and posits that lack of attention to teenagers’ more idiosyncratic sensibilities may be related to our field’s continued promotion of practices that seem appropriate for teenage students in the aggregate, but that may be uninviting or even hurtful to specific individuals and their multiple discourse (p. 188).

As will be discussed next, more recent studies of classrooms and literacy practices have given more attention to student voices and how their identities relate to their literacy practices.

O’Brien, Springs, and Stith (2001) examine an innovative curriculum for students called “at-risk” by their school system and placed into a program called the Literacy Lab. They found that redefining descriptions of school-based texts to include electronic media, and allowing students to choose media that was relevant to their own lives, motivated them to express themselves in creative, innovative, and competent ways that
more traditional literacy did not. Students were able to redefine their identities from failures to successful visual artists. One part of my students’ activities in the Poetry reading Writing Workshop was the Poetry Collection, a section of which was devoted to representing the self-selected poems through visual media. I observed that students were focused and enthusiastic when creating these representations and their written comments to each other supported this view. A suggestion for future poetry workshops may be to include more media to allow the students to make their poetry study more relevant to their lives.

More specific than creating a place for students to succeed, Lee (2007) has created a method of teaching literature that addresses the literacies that they bring with them to school. Lee’s work with students who are often marginalized and written off by other educators, schools, school systems, and often the public provides a theoretical and empirical body of knowledge that moves out of the classroom instance, and is not only a vision but a practical path for educators in all language arts classes to reach and teach those very marginalized students. Lee’s (2007) Cultural Modeling Project was based on a three-year study and participation in the teaching of one class at an urban high school in Chicago, a high school which was on academic probation, comprised of majority African-American, low income, and over all low-achieving students. “Cultural Modeling” (2007) reaches beyond the direct instruction and basic skills that are the content of most remedial English classes, to explicit instruction using literacy examples from the students’ culture as a bridge to school literacy. The explicit teaching methods of “Cultural Modeling” are what help to challenge the identities that many of her students
have developed over the years which as a result of repeated failure have caused them to not have well-developed identities as competent learners.

In summation, to discuss the relation of identity and literacy I use the understanding of literacy as multiple and situated within cultural and social discourses and practices, the theoretical view of literacy held by New Literacy Studies (Street, 2003). I understand that literacies vary according to time and space, but are also contested in relations of power. New Literacy Studies takes nothing for granted and with respect to literacy and the social practices with which it has become associated, problematizing what counts as literacy at any time and place and asking “whose literacies” are dominant and whose are marginalized or resistant (p. 77).

Identities and literacies intersect, clash, and sometimes crash and burn in schools. Being successful in school sometimes means that students must construct an identity that talks, walks, dresses, and feels in ways that the school sanctions. Yet often identities that students come to school with are different, unsanctioned, and resistant to what they encounter. In the view of many current researchers in the field of identity and literacy studies, it is the responsibility of the educators to hear the voices of students, to understand and work with the many literacies that they bring with them to school.

The Negative Effects of Tracking

Literacy scholars have also examined characteristics of school structure, curriculum, and characteristics of relationships between teachers and students to determine the cause of adolescents’ academic struggles. One theory is that academic struggles begin and are perpetuated by the process of tracking or ability grouping. Tracking can be defined as placing student in groups based on presumed ability or
achievement into a series of courses, all of which have a differentiated curriculum (1985). While studies of tracking are numerous, for the purposes of this literature review I have selected those that focus on the effects on students placed in the lower tracks. There is much research which is critical of tracking, and accordingly, many schools have changed theoretical placements to ability grouping, which is defined by Yonezawa, Wells, and Serna (2002) as “course-by-course placement of students as determined by perceived ability and prerequisites” (p. 40). However, because courses are structured in ways that continue the stratification of high and low-level classes, they contend that de facto tracking still exists.

**General Effects of Tracking and Ability Grouping**

Oakes (1985), in a comprehensive study of tracking, determined several categories of deleterious practices within the pervasive structure of tracking in a national study of junior and senior high schools that were tracked. She found that low-level tracked students were exposed to less rigorous literature study, little expository writing or critical thinking, more memorization drill and practice, and less time on task.

In a subsequent study of tracking research, Oakes (1992) revealed that not only has tracking been shown to have few or no achievement benefits, its effects are much more far-reaching, leading to continuing struggles throughout life. Tracking leads to race and class separation, as throughout the grades, low track placement is consistently correlated with low-income students and non-Asian minority students. Students in lower tracks have fewer opportunities for access to college level curriculum, and while they earn equivalent credits towards graduation, and as such may make the grades to graduate,
they are unable to score high enough on in-school achievement and graduation tests, or
college entrance exams to further their education beyond high school.

**Teacher and Student Relationships as Causes of Academic Struggle.**

The lack of curricular opportunities is compounded in the tracking system by the
typical placement of teachers in low tracks. More often than not, teachers with the least
experience and sometimes even without the appropriate certification are assigned to low
track classes. In a large scale study of tracking in 8th and 9th grade language arts class in
25 Midwestern schools (Gamoran, Nystrand, Brends, & Lepore, 1995), teacher
instructional methods and teacher student relationships were found to have negative
effects on students in lower tracks. Instruction for the purposes of this study was defined
as “how teachers and students interact, focusing on the quality of their discourse” (p.
691). Results revealed high student participation and coherence of discourse across
lessons and activities in the high tracks, and more off track behavior, more attention to
control than instruction in the low tracks. Written discourse differed as well. While
comments on papers of students in higher tracks tended to focus more on content, in the
lower tracks, the attention was to spelling, grammar and punctuation. Students in the
lower tracks received less quality instruction.

Page (1990) focused on an investigation of lower track classes during a study of
curriculum differentiation in two high schools. One such high school offered a lower
track for those students who failed regular track classes but did not qualify for special
education placement. This school differed in teacher placement from many, as teachers
who taught in the lower track were highly qualified teachers, and also taught regular and
honors classes as well. The lower track classes in this prestigious high school were a
“strangely ambiguous netherworld … [where] purposive scholars ‘baby-sat’ with controlling inconsistency. Reasonably skilled, committed students behave ‘immaturely’ as the ‘basic bottom’ of the academic hierarchy. Mindless ‘circuses’ parody the intellectual pyrotechnics of regular track lessons” (p. 255). In what Page calls a “caricature” (p. 255) of academic purpose, knowledge was used to control rather than educate. In this study the teachers played a pivotal role in the success or failure of struggling students through their relationships with and beliefs about the students they purported to teach.

**Specific Curricular Concerns as a Cause of Academic Struggle**

The teachers who offer a substandard curriculum to low-level groups or tracks are often the culprits in the continuing cause of student failure. This curriculum is often devoid of coherence and students internalize attitudes of failure through classes full of isolated skills and memorization work that has no meaning in their lives (Lee, 2007). Teachers who teach these low-level groups are often the least prepared to do so (Page, 1990). It becomes difficult after years of this pattern for students to make a leap to problem solving and analysis that is required in higher ability groupings, or by teachers who are committed to higher standards of achievement regardless of the placement of the students. Lee (2007) determined that another factor in the achievement gap between white, and ethnic groups, particularly African Americans, can be attributed to what Lee and other scholars call “cultural repertoires of practice” (p. 10), which contend that all students bring with them to school many cultural resources and that the teacher’s job is to discover, understand and use those resources in their teaching methods. Lee’s “Cultural Modeling” (2007), which is “a framework for the design of learning environments that
examines what youth know from everyday settings to support specific subject matter learning” (p. 14), is rarely used in low track and low ability language arts classes, and as a result, many students are set up for failure, feeling they are not respected and do not understand the subject matter.

One practice that Lee (2007) uses in her teaching is bringing in to school the literature of music and poetry that students listen to outside of school. In one of her most successful lessons, she uses the poetry of rap music to interweave the study of Toni Morrison’s novel, *Beloved*, using what the students are already familiar with to support what they have yet to learn. In the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, the reading and discussing of poems that students self-select can provide a bridge to relate to the study of other literature or concepts that are required in the already established curriculum.

**Small Group Discussion**

Once students conceive of reading as an aesthetic experience, they can learn to share these insights with other readers too, and afterward reflect on their insights in combination with those of others. In a study of the discourse patterns and subsequent meta analysis of nine small group discussion processes, Soter, Wilkinson, Murphy, Rudge, Reninger, and Edwards (2008) concluded that productive group discussions are both structured and focused, but are not completely dominated by the teacher. According to Soter et al. (2008) productive discussions occur when open-ended or authentic questions are used as guides, and when students conduct the discussion for an extended period of time. As in Eva-Wood’s (2004) study, their findings suggest that affective connections also play a role in generating more elaboration of responses. However, the critical- analytic approaches elicited both elaborative explanations and exploratory talk
when control of the discussion was shared by both teacher and students. Their findings also suggested that some teacher modeling and scaffolding is necessary to prompt student high-level thinking.

My intentional inclusion of small group discussions in the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop was designed to encourage higher level thinking about poems. I did not anticipate, though I should have, given my research on curricula and content of many low-level classes, the students’ lack of experience with working in small groups. I did not have the time within the workshop days to model and scaffold the discussions as much as was needed. In addition, the students were so unfamiliar with being allowed to work in groups, that I spent sometimes half of the discussions times dealing with discipline issues that arose because of their unfamiliarity.

**Atwell’s Reading Writing Workshop**

Reading Writing Workshop (1998) is a place where authentic discussion about literature can take place between teacher and students, and among students, a place where knowledge and meaning are co-constructed. While Atwell (1998) does not describe small group discussions as part of her workshop approach, incorporating small group discussions as an integral part of the whole process of workshop should afford the readers one more opportunity for comprehension improvement.

The Reading Writing Workshop has been shown to be a valuable method for teaching and learning for decades (Graves, 1978; Atwell, 1998). Atwell believes that students become better readers and writers if they are given ownership of what they read and write. Atwell’s Reading Writing Workshop (1998) is guided by the following principles: Writers need to read, readers and writers need chunks of time within which to
read and write, and they need to choose what they read and write to own their topics. Mechanics are learned in context, and through teachers who read and write with them, responding to their writing as they write. The workshop allows students more time, freedom to discuss and work together, and more choice in selecting what they want to read and write.

I have found that teaching and learning poetry through a workshop goes far to counter the effects of the type of isolated skills-based teaching that is often typical of low-level tracked classes (Oakes, 1985; Lee, 2007). As a teacher who reads and writes with students, the format of the workshop allows for that sharing and interaction that is impossible in a teacher-centered classroom. In a workshop format, student discussion of their reading and writing is encouraged, and students can learn that they all have academic potential. Atwell (1998), in a description of the successful writing habits of a special education student in one of her workshop, states, “When students aren’t measured against each other, they’ll feel free to take risks and give and accept help” (p. 81).

Another aspect of Reading Writing Workshop is the continuity that is afforded. No longer are reading and writing single activities that get assigned, are completed, and then filed away. Workshop acknowledges the reality that reading and writing is not a linear process, but a recursive one which Atwell (1998) sees as playing a role in “helping them grow up, making it possible for them to capture who they are, then come back and measure themselves against their earlier selves…[giving them] control over the distance between their pasts and presents” (p. 93).

I searched for research studies on effectiveness of Reading Writing Workshop on student comprehension and attitude towards reading and writing. I did not find any
published studies that involved high school students and effectiveness of Reading Writing Workshop approaches with poetry; however, I chose this approach because I have had success with it in the past in my own 9th grade classes.

**Practitioner (Teacher) Researcher**

I base my understanding of practitioner researcher on the definitions of several scholars of this type of research (Cochran-Smith and Lytle, 1993; Wong, 1994; Lampert, 2000; Fecho, 2001; Zeichner and Noffke, 2001). In the past 20 years, there has been much written about practitioner and teacher research, but for the purposes of my literature review, I have chosen those scholars whose works seem most applicable to my own experiences as a practitioner researcher. According to Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1993),“The concept of teacher as researcher can interrupt traditional views about the relationships of knowledge and practice and the roles of teachers in educational change, blurring the boundaries between teachers and researchers, knowers and doers, and experts and novices” (p.22). As a teacher and a researcher I welcome that interruption, but rather than a blurring of boundaries, I prefer to conceptualize the practitioner researcher role as an expanding of boundaries, one which includes and envelops both the researchers and the teachers, as well as the practitioner researcher in the quest for productive changes. My role as a practitioner researcher has allowed me to view practices from a perspective that my research elucidates. For example, a teacher often ‘knows” when a practice works, but without the deliberation of reflection and study, that knowing cannot transfer beyond the one time experience. One reason practitioner researchers embark upon research in their own classrooms is because of a dissatisfaction with their current situation, whether it
be their own teaching methods, the curriculum, or the wider issues related to the school and its hierarchies.

My own dissatisfaction with the tracking system in my English department is one reason for my research studies. The departmental attitude seemed to be that students in the low-level tracks cannot learn as much, and have less motivation to learn, and as a consequence, less is taught. Often the least experienced teachers are given the low-tracked classes, and from my discussions with those teachers, much of the material is often shortened or omitted entirely. Through research I hoped to move beyond the complaining that often takes place among teachers, and towards a more productive examination of such dissatisfaction and its causes. Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1999) see teacher research as creating some form of inevitable, healthy and necessary dissonance. Fecho (2001) says this dissonance often calls “attention to the constraints of the hierarchical arrangements of schools and universities as well as to the contradictions of imperatives for both excellence and equity” (p. 22).

Practitioner research is a term that I adopted unwillingly to describe myself as a teacher who was conducting research as she continued her masters and doctoral studies. There are many terms used to describe the teacher who does research, and I struggled between calling myself a teacher researcher, a practitioner researcher and a teacher who conducts action research. The terms seemed interchangeable, but each one had different foci, accompanying stigmas attached to them, and/or political innuendoes, as if any mention of teacher in the label or definition was a degrading adjective. Did this come from my own feelings of inadequacy as I tried to complete academic studies while being somewhat of an outsider? As a full time teacher, the camaraderie of other doctoral
students was missing from my circle of acquaintances. I was still in the school, and they
were in the “tower.” I struggled through many classes and the accompanying readings and
research with the divide I felt between the writing styles of researchers and the writing
styles I found in teacher-read journals. As I neared the end of my doctoral process, I was
able to find where I belong, and the boundary that once seemed to separate the teacher
from the researcher has now surrounded the two. I agree with Cochran-Smith and Lytle
(1993) that the teaching community will greatly benefit from more insider knowledge,
narrative accounts, and conversations written from the unique perspective of teachers.
But in choosing the term practitioner researcher I am acknowledging the fact that
research has become central to the way that I teach. The boundary of practitioner research
encircles university, administration, school, classrooms, and community. The perspective
of the practitioner researcher makes it possible and I would add imperative to experience
and share decision-making processes, beliefs, values, and dialogue with the members of
that circle.

Cochran-Smith and Lytle (1993) define teacher research as “systematic,
intentional inquiry by teachers about their own school and classroom work” (pp. 22-23).
Two major categories of teacher research are outlined by Cochran-Smith and Lytle
(1993): conceptual (theoretical and philosophical) and empirical, which involves
collection and analysis of data gathered from teachers, schools and classrooms.

According to Lytle, Belzer and Reumann (1993), “The concept of teacher as
researcher can interrupt traditional views about the relationships of knowledge and
practice and the roles of teachers in educational change, blurring the boundaries between
teachers and researchers, knowers and doers, and experts and novices” (p. 94). One
reason practitioners begin research in their own classrooms is because of a dissatisfaction with their current situation, whether it be their own teaching methods, the curriculum, or the wider issues related to the school and its hierarchies.

According to Zeichner and Noffke (2001), the sharing of practitioner research serves a different function from academic research writing. It directly supports classroom practice, whereas academic reports often support the process of research and not necessarily teaching. Academic reports can be seen to support practice, but in different ways. “Although the intention is often to influence classroom practice, the practitioner is not the primary audience. In contrast, the sense of fellow practitioners as audience is carried through much of the practitioner research literature” (p.36).

**Advantages and Limitations of Practitioner Research**

In teacher or practitioner research according to Fecho (2001), the teacher is present in the research, has the advantage of being able to focus on questions over long periods of time, and can conduct rigorous ongoing and systematic inquiry, with the “unique opportunity to focus on large questions across time, continuing to add data in both systematic and serendipitous ways” (p. 17). Fecho, Allen, Mazaros, and Inyega (2006) argue that teacher research contributes significantly and uniquely to studies of writing in school and posit that it can actually address issues that large-scale studies are unable to address. They state, for example, that in order to counter policy and programs instituted as a result of such large-scale studies that “seek to make teaching a scripted act,” it is necessary
“in a world of children who are reduced to statistical means, for teachers to share their understandings of the learner as a complex cultural being, in a dynamic classroom full of equally complex learners in interaction with one another, and in an increasingly diverse social context” (p. 132).

Fecho et al. (2006) state that while teacher research often arises from an individual teacher’s desire to improve practice within the classroom, those findings can be shared by a larger teacher community, and can contribute as well as spur further academic research into educational fields when the research is undertaken systematically and carefully, and subsequently published. Careful qualitative studies are needed to bring teacher research out of the individual classroom and into the body of published research so that the gaps between teachers and researchers can be shortened (Wilson & Davis, 1994). It is only when these gaps between are bridged, when the research is read both by other researchers and teachers, that the reciprocal learning between researchers and teachers can best be utilized to improve education.

As with any research, practitioner or teacher research has issues and limitations that must be addressed. According to Lampert (2000) while teacher research may uncover invisible, and relational aspects of work that outside researchers cannot, it also cannot be separated from the personal task of doing something about the problem being researched and living with the consequences over time. Wong (1994) discusses teacher researchers’ potential conflicts of purpose when conducting research in their own classrooms. There are times when the teacher may feel that helping the student may interfere with the outcomes of the research. And yet the teacher has a moral responsibility to assure that classroom time spent is valuable for all students. “Because this type of
research consumes a considerable amount of in-school time and because that time is
designated for instruction, the issue of whether the students are learning anything of
worth becomes critical” (p. 25).

At times the actions of the research may compromise the responsibilities of the
teacher and vice versa. According to Wong (1994), trying new ideas is often disruptive,
and while the teacher may have the option of discarding new ideas that are not successful,
the researcher must continue them during the time frame of the research study. The
environment of classrooms and schools is also unpredictable. The fundamental element
of control, so crucial to traditional design of research, is often infringed upon by events
such as student absences, testing, field trips, and assemblies.

**Trustworthiness of Practitioner Research**

Working alone in the field as a practitioner researcher allows the potential for
greater observer bias than some other qualitative research. As a practitioner researcher,
one way I was able to derive validity was from what Fecho (2002) describes as the
“immediacy, contextuality, and historical framework” (p. 18) of my research. As the
practitioner I was always present, with a close connection to my research. To guard
against observer bias, I had at my side not only the member checks of my students, but
also the multiple perspectives of the research community. As far as criticism that
practitioner research has such a small sample size, the insights and meaningfulness
gained from the rich information gathered and the careful analytical steps taken provide
trustworthiness (Patton 1990). As a practitioner I had the opportunity to gather rich
information; as a researcher I had the ability to be analytically capable; as a writer, I was
able to present my findings so that both practitioners and researchers can find them valuable.

Merriam (2002) lists important strategies to ensure that a qualitative study is trustworthy and ethical. These include triangulation of data sources and data collection methods, member checks with data and interpretations, critical self-reflection by the researcher, adequate time spent collecting data (including seeking negative or disconfirming data), keeping a detailed account of methods and procedures, and providing enough description to contextualize the study for the reader. As the teacher of these students for the whole year, not only did I have the benefit of being with them for the study, but was also able to contact them as I began analysis when I needed clarification or confirmation of my findings since they were with me until school was over in June.

It is important for me as a practitioner researcher in accordance with the advice of Piper and Simins (2005) to know my “own ethics, plan what position [I] will adopt on informed consent, confidentiality, and anonymity, control over data, access to publication” (p. 59), while at the same time knowing that an inflexibly prepared plan can be a hindrance. The welfare of my students was always at the forefront, and I knew that should an issue develop where I needed to alter my plan to protect a student, I would be willing to do so. Fortunately, no such issue arose during the course of my study. Piper and Simins (2005) refer to Gilligan’s (1982) “ethics of care” which is a concept that I see as crucial to my research. Because I was primarily working with my students in my own school, I constantly had to keep their welfare at the forefront. Using the concept of rolling informed consent, getting consent from parents, students, and administrators at all points
of progress, as well as if new issues arose, was not only a legal, but also a moral imperative.

Negotiated issues of anonymity are also fore-fronted in action research. Protecting student identity, while at the same time knowing that I needed to return to them at many points for research for member checking to ensure that I was representing their thoughts was an important issue. Making sure that they had the option of remaining anonymous or “naming” them as participants was another point of negotiation that I carefully considered. Case study students had self-chosen pseudonyms that they used on their written work, and that I used when collecting and analyzing data. To ensure that they were not singled out for their pseudonyms, all members of the class were allowed to choose names for themselves, and thus whenever they were writing for the poetry workshop, all students remained as anonymous as they chose to be. Many of the students, however, chose to use their pseudonyms in class, and wanted other students to know who they were. I was however, careful to make sure that they always labeled their written work with their pseudonyms. In addition, several students did not choose pseudonyms, so I used initials instead of their names on the data I collected from them.

Zeichner and Noffke (2001) provide an extensive discussion of the history of practitioner research in their chapter included in the *Handbook of Research on Teaching* (2001). Their last section discusses the issues of trustworthiness in practitioner research, detailing several academics’ discussions. They include the criteria set forth by Stevenson (1996), which are helpful to me in evaluating the trustworthiness of my own work.
As I conducted and wrote about my research, I used these ten criteria as guideposts.

Stevenson (1996) sets forth 10 criteria, which I summarize as follows:

1. **Worthwhileness**: The practitioner researcher must articulate the rationale and educational significance of her study to show the connection to her educational commitments and to experiential and or theoretical knowledge.

2. **Justification of beliefs**: The practitioner researcher must be able to articulate and justify her own beliefs and intentions.

3. **Genuine collaboration**: The research must be collaborative between and respectful of all parties affected by the research.

4. **Aborted research**: If the research is aborted before any action to change the situation is taken, the trustworthiness of the research must take that into consideration.

5. **Triangulation**: Multiple perspective data sources must be represented in the research.

6. **Constant dialectical interplay**: The researchers’ values must inform her actions and vice versa in a constant interplay.

7. **Systematically yet responsive conduction of research**: The research must be systematically conducted but at the same time responsive to the evolution of understandings and circumstances in the research, sensitive to the possibility of changing research questions or focus.

8. **Transformative research**: The research should lead to a change in the researcher’s outlook, understandings or actions.
9. Publication: The researcher should make the research public and allow for and engage in dialogue about it.

10. Sufficiently rich descriptions: The researcher should provide adequately detailed description in her contexts to allow others to draw analogies to their own classroom contexts. (pp. 53-54)

Many practitioner researchers see their research as bridging the gap between academic and teacher writing and research. Wilson and Davis (1994) state that careful qualitative studies are needed to bring teacher research out of the individual classroom and into the body of published research so that the gaps between teachers and researchers can be shortened. It is only when these gaps between are bridged, when the research is read both by other researchers and teachers, the reciprocal learning between researchers and teachers can best be utilized to improve that education.

**Summary**

My literature review focused on theories, studies, and concepts that are integral to my study. The first section of my literature review returned to the poets and poetry research studies that advocate the inclusion of poetry reading and writing in school classrooms, not as enrichment but as necessity. The next section examined the importance of Reader Response Theory and its relationship to teaching and learning poetry that I use. Knowing that readers bring their own lives to what they read, and that marginalized readers may need to be taught how to read aesthetically, helped to shape my lessons, ensuring that I was explicit in my explanations. Vygotsky and Bakhtinian theories provided me with the knowledge that students’ identities may change, and that the change comes through their examination (through reading and writing) of the words
they use to describe themselves and their perceptions of themselves as students. Central to being able to describe themselves is also understanding the power of metaphors to help students imagine change. Explicit instruction of the pervasiveness of metaphors as well as playful poetry exercises using metaphor may facilitate such change in students’ perceptions of themselves as successful or unsuccessful in the English classroom. Theories of identity, and identity change helped to examine whether students could see change in attitude towards poetry, and perhaps in their perceptions of themselves as more successful students. Understanding the perceptions that students have of themselves is made clearer through the study of the history of tracking. Tracking studies that show both that students in low-level tracks believe they are often bad readers, and incapable of learning, and that teachers of those classes share that belief, many times watering down their instruction to simple rote exercises, and eliminating any poetry instruction.

My examination of the power of small group instruction to aid in comprehension encouraged me to include this type of instruction in the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, as the research suggests that when given an opportunity to discuss, students will, with scaffolded instruction and modeling, may exhibit comprehension of texts. Reviewing the literature on Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop allowed me to carefully examine a method that I had become comfortable using with some success, and at the same time attempt to modify some of the freedom by including more structure through small group discussion. In addition, I was forced to modify some of the freedom of choosing their own reading and writing materials that is so important in the Reading Writing Workshop (Atwell, 1998). In the public school setting, where there is a required
content curriculum, my goal was to imbed the workshop in the already existing content curriculum, necessitating the restriction of choice for some of the reading.

The final section of this literature review enabled me to comfortably place myself in the role of teacher (practitioner) researcher in the poetry reading and writing classroom. Examining the various scholars’ writings of the history of teacher and practitioner research reveals what I have always felt intuitively, that there is great value in this method both for researchers and for teachers. However, reading critiques of practitioner research helps me to appreciate the careful, methodical steps necessary to maintain quality research and understand the ethical considerations inherent in practitioner research situations.

In Chapter Three I will first describe my research site, and further examine my role as practitioner researcher in my own classroom. I will then describe my data collection and analysis methodology.
Chapter 3: Methodology

When one is a practitioner researcher, theory and practice are inseparable, and the boundary between the two dissolves. When a teacher becomes a practitioner researcher, doing research also becomes central to how she teaches; theories are studied, adapted, and new ones emerge concurrently through the cycles of practice. While many teachers are reflective, informal researchers of their own classes, the practitioner researcher has wider goals than personal reflection, and must adhere to stricter research practices. Three differences (Zeni, 2001) between teacher reflection and practitioner researcher as they relate to my study are:

1. more systematic documentation and data gathering and analysis
2. more self-reflection in writing
3. more audience (collaboration, presentation, publication)

(p. 155)

The purpose of my research was to improve my own teaching and to determine if reading and writing poetry was a valuable and educationally productive way to capture students’ attention to words as a way of knowing and learning more about themselves as students and their uses of language to learn. As a practitioner researcher I chose to employ a nested case study (Stark & Torrance, 2005) as my primary methodology. In this nested case study, I was both the practitioner (teacher) and the researcher.
This chapter is organized into three sections. In the first section I describe the research design. I also discuss my role as a practitioner researcher in my own classroom. In the next section I describe the research site, and the participants in the study. In the final section I describe my methods of data collection and analysis process.

**Research Design**

**Approach**

For this study I chose to employ a case study approach. Case study (Stark & Torrance, 2005), assumes in-depth inquiry, and as such involves multiple methods of data collection; observation, interview, research notebooks and memos, and document analysis with the focus being on depth of description (p. 33). According to Creswell (1998), a case study explores a “bounded system,” bound by time and place, and it is the actual event, program or classroom that is being studied (p. 61). The case study (Stark & Torrance, 2005), “seeks to engage with and report the complexity of social activity in order to represent the meanings that individual social actors bring to the settings and manufacture in them” (p. 33).

**From Teacher to Practitioner Researcher: My Background**

My memory of high school English classes always included poetry lessons, from being part of the high school literary magazine, to writing poetry whenever a creative piece was a choice in a thematic unit or a class requirement. Maybe because I had teachers who valued poetry as I did, maybe because I loved to read and write poetry, I remember those poetry lessons as more important elements of the class. My love of poetry continued as an undergraduate Humanities/Classics major, where I could fit any and all poetry classes offered into my major. When the decision to become an English
teacher changed the course of my career expectations, I acquired another undergraduate degree, this time from The Ohio State University in English Education. There were no classes in the Education Department that offered poetry in the 80’s, and I was on a fast track to get my teaching degree, so I was not able to fit the poetry classes offered by the English Department into my tight schedule and time frame. It was not until I began work on my Masters in English Education, that poetry classes in the Education Department, or rather a poetry seminar taught by Dr. Anna Soter, offered me the opportunity to learn more about how to teach poetry to my students in high school. I took three poetry courses from Dr. Soter over the course of getting my Master’s degree and working towards my doctoral degree, and many of my research papers and class assignments for other classes also involved investigating the role of poetry in teaching English. A combination of reading and writing and collecting anecdotal evidence about the crucial role I saw poetry as playing in my teaching of English evolved into the focus of my dissertation.

While I teach mostly upper level and Advanced Placement English, I have a strong emotional tie to the students in the lower grades who are designated as low-level, low ability, and in less neutral terms, problem students. During the course of my education classes at The Ohio State University, I began to focus my research on these students and what effect poetry reading and writing could have on their performance and attitudes toward English class. My decision to conduct my research for this dissertation as a practitioner researcher allowed me to work toward productive change in a scholarly study of my own classroom, with the intent to publish my findings for the benefit of other teachers, as well as researchers.
Research Site

Gaining Entry

Because the school is not close to a major university, collaboration between universities and teachers is rare. While I know of one such collaboration between an elementary school in the district and the university, I do not know of any that have taken place in the years in which I have been a teacher in the high school. However, in my pursuit of both my Master’s and Doctoral degrees, I have often asked for, and been granted permission to use students and classes as subjects of my individual course work research, and the administrators of both the high school and the school district are familiar with my research. Another advantage that I had in gaining entry is that the principal of my school was also pursuing a doctoral degree, and was therefore very amenable to my own desire to conduct research in my school.

Obtaining of Consent from Parents and Assent from Participants

After verbally explaining the study to all of the student participants in the class, I called parents of students I had chosen as participants in the focus group. I followed a verbal script to obtain preliminary consent from parents of focus students. (See Appendix A). I then mailed consent forms to parents for their students’ participation in the study. (See Appendix B). I also mailed explanatory letters to parents who had verbally consented to their child’s participation as focus students, which indicated consent for both whole class and focus student participation. (See Appendix C). After receipt of consent, I then gave assent forms (See Appendix D), explanatory letters to student participants for participation in the study of the whole class and to focus students for participants in the focus that indicated assent for participation in the whole class or as a
focus student. (See Appendix E). The consent and assent letters were written in language that the parents and the students could understand and opportunities to answer questions they had were given. Because many of the students were absent at least once during the week of my preparations for research, I spent parts of several class periods explaining and repeating the purposes of my research and the showing the students the methods of audio- and video-taping I would employ, and the kinds of notes I would be taking. I wanted to make sure that all students understood why I was asking them to participate in the study, and to ensure that they did not feel they had to participate if they did not want to.

**Description of Site and Participants**

The study is situated in Main High School (pseudonym), the only high school in a Central Ohio Exempted Village School system. I have taught for the last 19 years at this high school. The Central Ohio School System is growing rural/suburban public school district of approximately 5400 students. The majority of the students are Caucasian. In the school year 2008-2009, the high school in which I teach had 1526 students; 1462 were categorized as Caucasian, 12 African-American, one American Indian, 11 Asian, nine Hispanic, and 31 as being multi-race. The main form of diversity in this school is one of socioeconomic character. While figures for the school system are not kept in any database, the city website's demographics page advertises homes ranging from 100,000 to 500,000 dollars, in addition to multiple low-income rental properties and three trailer parks. Figures obtained from the food service director state that out of the 1526 students attending the high school, 300 are eligible for free or reduced lunches.
English classes are tracked and designated as Average, College Prep, and Honors levels. Students are placed in these classes through teacher suggestions, but parents can override teacher suggestions, as can guidance counselors. The Average class is generally considered to be the place for the marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) students in this study.

**Population of the study**

My study focused on a single class of 9th grade English students designated as average level by the school course of study. At the beginning of the study 19 students were enrolled in the class. While the number of students remained constant, one student left the class at the beginning of the research, and moved back in at the end, two students left during the research, and three new students arrived mid-way through the research. However, the total number of students who were included in the case study was constant at 16 students. The three who left and the three who arrived mid-way into the research were not included in my data. While the study included data from all the students in the class, the focus group for my nested case study was to initially include eight students, four females and four males. Those students were chosen through purposeful sampling, a particular type which Patton (1990) calls homogeneous sampling, whose purpose is to describe a subgroup, in this case the disillusioned, unmotivated reader in the particular average level class I was studying. These students were chosen through a process of examining their 8th grade reading achievement scores, their middle school grades, their answers to an attitude survey, availability, and permission and willingness to participate in my study. The students were chosen from those who scored lowest in the class on the 8th grade achievement reading tests, had D’s or F’s in English in 8th grade, showed a lack
of motivation and dislike for poetry from their survey answers, and were available and willing to participate in my study.

I originally chose eight students for my nested case study, but one of the students did not want to participate as a focus student and another relocated. The remaining six focus students in 8th period Language and Literature 9 were lower to middle achieving readers. At the beginning of the workshop, none of the focus students had Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), but at the end of the first semester, one student was diagnosed with a learning disability in reading, and was put on an IEP. From records and discussions with guidance counselors, I determined none of the students except for the one who was eventually tested had been referred for testing, or had parents who had refused testing. From the teachers’ and guidance counselors’ perspective, these students were described as average readers to low-achieving readers and were thus placed in the average level English class called Language and Literature 9. Many students would state informally that they chose this level because it was easy and they didn’t want to work hard.

The students in this study are representative of the students in many public schools who have been placed in low-level tracks, or low ability groupings. They are the struggling students who one can find at the edges of the cafeteria table (the popular students sit in the middle), or hanging out by the farthest door from the main entrance in a small quiet group. Penelope Eckert (1989) who refers to the popular term for them as burnouts, says, “One might more properly consider that these alienated adolescents are ‘burned out’ from long years of frustration encountered in an institution that rejects and stigmatizes them as it fails to recognize and meet their needs” (p. 4). Various labels have
been used to describe these students. One label traditionally used was “at risk” which is
often used in school programs in terms of learning to those who are challenged with
literacy tasks at school, or more recently as “struggling” students according to O’Brien
(2001). Negative labeling always has dangers, but because of the vastly different
definitions found for students “at risk,” (Davis, 2007) for the purposes of this paper I will
refer to the students as marginalized readers (Moje et al., 2000). A marginalized reader is
unable or unwilling to read and write about printed materials at the level required by the
specific standards as defined by the state, school system, grade level, or teacher. As a
result of internalization of this failure, students are in danger or are already failing
academically. These students entered the ninth grade already categorized both by the
system and by themselves as marginalized readers.

Originally eight students were chosen as focus students, but one male refused
assent and one male relocated, leaving six females and two males as focus students for
the remainder of the research study.

**Description of Classroom Context**

Every year students who arrive in my classroom the first day of high school
realize right away that poetry is important to me. After the ritual of names and attendance
I read them Atwood’s poem, “You Begin” and just ask them to listen carefully to the
poem. On the second day, I read it again, and then read Steven’s “The House was Quiet
and the World was Calm”, moving on to the day’s events. Each day for about a week, I
casually read a poem at the beginning of the class, or ask anyone if they’ve heard of a
particular poem or poet. Finally, someone will ask me why I am reading them, and we’ll
discuss my views of poetry and I’ll elicit theirs. My bookshelves have two long shelves
devoted to poetry books, and it is from them that I choose a book from which to read the daily poems, so that students know where they are when the time comes for them to look for poems.

The year in which this study was conducted I veered from my normal pattern of introducing poetry through daily readings and its typical segue into talking more extensively about poetry and metaphor at the beginning of the year, illustrating the sometimes difficult point of intersection between being a teacher and being the practitioner researcher who must wait for the study to be approved. I didn’t want to have my discussions before the students took their pre-tests and their attitude surveys, so I spent those first weeks reading a quote as an opening activity, or talking about a current event, trying to stave off any early spontaneous conversations about poetry before my study began.

Once my study was approved, I explained my research to my students, and spent October gathering the required consent forms for my case study students, administering the attitude surveys, the literary terms quiz, and the Ohio Graduation Test poetry test items. I finally conducted my focus student interviews and returned to my usual poem a day. The actual Poetry Reading Writing Workshop began the second week of November. One of the content pieces required by my district for all 9th graders is the reading of selections from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. As difficult as it is for marginalized readers, I am required to teach it, and since one of my intentions was to incorporate the poetry reading and writing workshop into the established curriculum content, the epic poem *The Odyssey* was a good unit in which to begin.

Table 3.1 represents the actual timeline of data collection for my study.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1-27</td>
<td>Prepare file system for data collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27-</td>
<td>Acquire 8th grade achievement test scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 15</td>
<td>Acquire 8th grade LA final grades</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Collect pre-workshop surveys, literary terms quizzes, and OGT test results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 9-28</td>
<td>Take notes of discussions in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 10-12</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes, Interview focus students, Collect journals, imitation poems, and metaphor lists exercises, Interview focus students Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 18-19</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions, Video-tape week’s class lessons Collect journals, Conduct informal member checks of interviews with focus, students, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 24-25</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions, Video-tape week’s class Collect journals, imitation and personal metaphor poems Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 3-5</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions, Video-tape week’s classes Collect journals, “Five Easy Pieces” poem exercise Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 10-11</td>
<td>Audio-tape week’s classes, Video-tape week’s classes Collect journals, activity packets, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 5-7</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions, Video-tape week’s classes, Collect journal entries, imitation poems, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 12-27</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussion, Video-tape week’s classes, Collect journal entries, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 2-3</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes, Collect journal entries, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 9-13</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes, Take notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.1 Data Collection Timeline

Continued
Table 3.1 continued

Feb. 16-18    Audio-tape group discussions, Take notes in research diary
Feb. 21-      Collect surveys, quizzes, and tests
Mar.1        Take notes in research diary, Interview focus students
          Conduct member checks of focus student interviews

Description of Reading Writing Workshop and Modifications for the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop

The Reading Writing Workshop has been shown to be a valuable method for teaching and learning since the late 70’s (Graves, 1978; Atwell, 1998). Atwell believes that students become better readers and writers if they are given ownership of what they read and write. Within the confines of a structured curriculum, I attempted to give the students as much choice as possible in their selection of poems to read. Atwell’s Reading Writing Workshop writers need to read what they choose and readers need to write what they choose, and both activities require chunks of time to own their topics. Mechanics, editing and proofreading are learned in context with the guidance of teachers who read and write with them, responding to their writing as they write. The Reading Writing Workshop allows students more time, freedom to discuss and work together, and more choice in selecting what they want to read and write (Atwell, 1998).

As a teacher who reads and writes with students, I have found that the format of the Reading Writing Workshop allows for that sharing and interaction that is impossible in a teacher-centered classroom, or a skills-based worksheet dominated lesson plan. In a workshop format, students can discuss their reading and writing without fear of responding with a wrong answer, in an atmosphere where each individual’s opinion is
valued. Atwell (1998), in a description of the successful writing habits of a special education student in one of her workshop, states, “When students aren’t measured against each other, they’ll feel free to take risks and give and accept help” (p. 81). Another aspect of Reading Writing Workshop is the continuity that is afforded. No longer are reading and writing single activities that get assigned, are completed, and the filed away. The Reading Writing Workshop acknowledges the reality that reading and writing is not a linear process, but a recursive one which Atwell (1998) sees as playing a role in “helping [students] grow up, making it possible for them to capture who they are, then come back and measure themselves against their earlier selves… [giving them] control over the distance between their pasts and presents” (p. 93). I chose Atwell’s Reading Writing Workshop as the method for teaching poetry to students, but with some modifications through the addition of small group discussion and more structured poem choices. The addition of the small group discussions were to add poetry comprehension activities, and the more structured poem reading was necessitated by my decision to incorporate the workshop into the already established content curriculum.

**Physical Description of Room**

Since working in small groups is often part of many lessons in both my 9th and 12th grade classes, I generally have the desks arranged in such a way that the students can quickly turn their desks into groups when needed. Students were assigned to one of the groups, necessitated by their consent to participate in video-taping and audio-taping but they could choose their own seat within the grouping to give them some feeling of choice. Students whose parents or who themselves did not give consent for taping were seated in Group One. Also in Group One were students who moved to the school after
my study began. Most students were eager to choose pseudonyms, but three students in the study did not choose names, and did not assent to video-taping or audio-taping. I used initials to ensure their anonymity. The remaining four students in Group 1 were not participants in the study at all because they entered the class after the research began. I included them with initials instead of names on Figure 3.1. Figure 3.1 illustrates the seating arrangement I used for the duration of the study.
Figure 3.1. Classroom Seating Arrangement
My criteria for grouping this class was based on both research needs and classroom behavior management needs. Group One was created as the group of students who did not wish to be either video-taped or to participate in audio-taped group discussions. For the purposes of my research it was necessary to put these students in one group; however, as a teacher, I might have re-organized them. In this case, the needs of my research overrode my teacher instincts. This group had two students with chronic absences, and changed members when the rest of the groups remained static. I was forced to put two new students in this group when they moved in after my research had begun, as I did not have the pre-testing data for them. Fortunately, the small group did not grow larger, as before the two new students moved in, two others moved out. The group size remained the same, but its members changed. Groups Two and Three contained my focus students mixed among the other students who had consented to being taped. I put three focus students in each group, but it took two weeks for me to make those two groups stable, as within each group there were multiple students who for various reasons did not get along with each other, and would fight and argue during the class lessons. Eventually, however, with two focus students in Group Two and four in Group Three, we were able to function without many disruptive incidents.

**Location of Poetry Material**

Poetry was located in various places throughout the classroom. Students were introduced to the poetry shelves through the daily readings. Poems also were taped to the front white board after I read them, where they remained for a week at a time. Poetry books that were my favorite, or which contained poems that I read to a class, were propped up on the various bookshelves in the room. During one of the activities during
the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, the Poetry Supermarket, poems were taped around the room on all four walls, and students rotated around, reading and copying those poems they chose to remember.

**Methods of Data Collection and Analysis**

**Data Collection**

The types of instruments I used to collect data are those most common to case study research: surveys, observations and reflections, interviews, both structured and semi-structured, audio-taped group discussions, video-taped class sessions, and collection of documents (Stark & Torrance, 2005). Table 3.2 shows the relationship between my research questions and the sources of data collection.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions</th>
<th>Time Period for Data Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| How do disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) readers in a 9th grade English class feel about poetry through experiencing reading and writing poetry in a reading writing workshop in contrast to their prior experiences with poetry learning in their previous language arts classrooms? | Pre and post surveys  
Student journals  
Audio-taped  
group discussions  
Poetry Notebooks  
Research Diary  
Teacher Journal  
Video-taped classes |
| Do they develop identities as successful readers and writers in English class through participation in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?                                                                                                                                  | Pre and post survey  
Interviews  
Student journals  
Audio-taped  
Group discussions  
Video-taped classes  
Poetry exercises  
Poetry Projects  
Research Diary  
Teacher Journal |

Table 3.2. Relationship between Research Questions and Data Collection

Continued
Table 3.2 continued

Do their knowledge and use of literary terms improve and do their performances on high stakes standardized reading test questions improve through participating in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

| Pre and post OGT multiple choice, short answer and extended response questions | Literary terms identification exercise |
| Research Diary | Teacher Journal |

Do their understandings of metaphoric language change from before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

| Interviews | Audio-taped group discussions |
| Video-taped class | Student journals |
| Poetry exercises | Poetry Project |
| Research Diary | Teacher Journal |

Observations and reflections. Throughout my research I kept two written documents- a research diary and a teacher journal. By the end of my research, the two documents merged together and one changed its function and focus. According to Altrichter & Holly (2005), research diaries can include data, interpretation, and analysis, and because of the array of notes are valuable as the “researcher’s companion documenting the development of perceptions and insights across the various stages of the research” (p. 25), allowing ongoing analysis. My research diary was specific to the study
I was conducting, and my teacher journal is a journal that I keep whether I am conducting formal research or not.

**Research diary.** One source of data collection was my research diary, which I used to write down observations daily as I observed students talk about poetry. There are many terms for this type of data source; whether it is called field log, diary, logbook, or another term, according to Altricher and Holly (2005), it is an “external memory …used by researchers in many disciplines for recording daily observations in the field” (p. 24). Research diaries include data obtained by observations, informal conversations, overheard comments, additional “found items” such as notes, contextual information about the ways these data were collected, and reflections about research methods (Altricher and Holly, 2005). My research diary was the messiest of my collections, as I was teaching at the same time that I was observing and taking notes. The notes in this log were kept in a hand-written spiral notebook, which I took home with me each night. I revisited my notes from the daily observations either later that day, or the same evening, clarifying my notes, and adding anything that I was unable to write down during the class. This log was particularly difficult to keep because of the nature of the class I was researching. The students were an unusually volatile group, often arguing among themselves, or with me, and discipline issues sometimes eclipsed the lessons and the observational attempts, particularly at the beginning of the workshop. As a result, I would have more work at home each night than I anticipated, so that I could elaborate upon my quick notes taken in class. Notes included comments regarding poetry that students made during the poetry workshop days, and during other class days, attitude comments, discussions between students about grades, tests, school, and other classes.
**Teacher journal/methodological journal.** Another source of data collection was my teacher journal, which as a practitioner I am used to keeping as a means of classroom management and methodology notes to improve my teaching. At least once a week I would use my teacher journal to record more detailed notes in my research diary. Because I was so focused on my research class, I found that I no longer had time to jot down notes from my other classes in my teacher journal; thus my teacher journal turned into a methodological journal for the case study class only. This journal detailed methodology concerning the teaching content and lesson plans rather than the research methods, and I kept those notes on my computer, written after the class or teaching day had concluded.

At the end of my research I reviewed the notes from my teacher/methodological journal, and added them to my research diary. As I continued to read and re-read my data, I viewed the video-taped class sessions adding details such as physical placement of students, movement among groups, interactions between students and me and the nuances of conversation that I missed while trying to teach at the same time. Ultimately, this combination of research diary observations, descriptive notes, methodological observations, notes from my video-tapes, and reflections provided a rich collection of descriptions of what actually happened both during the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop and on the other class days as well.

**Audio-taped group discussions.** Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop is a place where authentic discussion about literature can take place between teacher and students, and among students, a place where knowledge and meaning are co-constructed (Langer, 1995). While Atwell (1998) does not describe small group discussions as part of
her workshop approach, incorporating small group discussions as an integral part of the whole process of workshop affords the readers one more scaffold for comprehension improvement.

I audio-taped the six group discussions in which my focus students were participants. Those students who did not assent, or whose parents did not consent to audio-taping, as well as the students who entered the class after the research began were put in a separate discussion group. The microphones that I used to record group discussions were directional, and only recorded the discussions of the groups containing students whose parents consented and who assented to be participants themselves. I attempted to transcribe the audiotapes, but full transcriptions were not always possible, as students did not speak clearly, and often spoke over each other. Watching and listening to the video-tapes of the group discussions helped to catch some detail, but ultimately, I took notes from the tapes rather than making full transcriptions.

The first group discussions were around poems that we read as a class, poems that were related to the other content that the students were reading about in class the rest of the week. They read and discussed two poems that were related to their required reading of selections from Homer’s *The Odyssey*. They also read and discussed the poems that we used as starting points for imitation poem exercises. The final audio-taped group discussion centered on a small group evaluation and discussion of shared parts of their poetry project.

**Video-taped class sessions.** I video-taped 35 of the class sessions during the workshop days as well as many of the non- workshop class periods. The video camera
was positioned so that it only recorded the students whose parents had consented and who also had assented themselves to be video-taped.

For the first few days, the video camera was a novelty, and students would question each other about whether it was on or not. Sometimes the occasional student would wander over to the camera for a close up smile. However, as the camera was on almost every day, its novelty quickly wore off. Only one time did discussion of the video-tape become a class topic and that was when I had a discipline issue with several students using derogatory and racist language to each other. On that occasion, the students discussed that they knew that they would be punished because their “crimes” were on tape and irrefutable. The video-tapes, as discussed earlier, were intended to fill in gaps in my research diary, and in clarifying some of the group discussions. I viewed the video-taped conversations, transcribing the parts that were relevant, in particular those that included use or discussion of poetry outside of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop days. I also used the video-tapes to help decipher some of the audio-taped group discussions that were hard to decipher from audio-tapes alone. I used the video-tapes primarily for context, but some of the partial transcriptions that I noted in my research diary were coded.

**Audio-taped focus student interviews.** I conducted and audio-taped formal interviews with the focus students, taking notes during the interviews, and refining my notes after the interviews. (See Appendix I). Although I initially intended to conduct three interviews with each student, because of time constraints and availability, I was only able to conduct two interviews with the focus students, each approximately 15-20 minutes long. These interviews took place during the students’ study halls or lunch
period. If the student had a study hall or lunch that coincided with my conference period or my lunch, then I conducted the interview in my room. Even with the door shut, it was difficult to keep other students or teachers from interrupting the interview process, and while this did not happen frequently, it did happen on a two separate occasions. I was able to use my personal leave in hourly increments to schedule interviews when the students’ study halls did not coincide with my conference. Those interviews took place in an empty conference room. Several of the interviews took place after the scheduled date. One student “forgot” to come to my room three days in a row, and another was suspended for 10 days, and had to participate in the interview when he returned. Each interview had planned questions, but some students engaged in more extended conversation concerning both poetry and student identity. I transcribed each of the interviews. The data from these interviews provided information about their attitudes towards poetry reading and writing before and after the workshop, as well as about their knowledge of poetry terms and understanding of metaphor. For those students who were reluctant to speak in their interviews, I supplemented my data collection with informal questions during the workshop.

**Informal member check short interviews.** In addition to formal interviews I conducted member checks with the focus students, following the transcription of interviews and group discussions. I asked them to read over the transcriptions that I had made of their interviews, and to clarify anything that they felt needed clarifying, or to ask questions if they had any about the transcription. These member checks took approximately 15 minutes each and took place during the students’ study halls or lunch. I also recorded in my field logs any semi-structured interviews or short exchanges of
importance that occurred during the workshop or outside that workshop when discussing poetry.

**Collection of students’ written work.** Students wrote student journals, student poetry exercises, and poetry projects as part of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop and I collected the work of all of the students in the class, not just the focus students. I made photocopies, or scanned copies of some of the work, and kept originals when the students were not interested in keeping them themselves. The student journals originally consisted of several pages of purposeful questions, designed to have the students reflect on their own learning as well as to be a source of data for my research. (See Appendix G). After several attempts at this journal type, it became clear that it was too cumbersome and that I was not getting enough data for my research and the journal writing was also taking too much class time and offering too little benefit to the students. I then changed to journal to a two-question format, one that evaluated the poetry learning from the day before, and one that was designed to generate ideas for the next day’s writing. The final journal, which was part of their poetry project, was designed to assess their attitude toward poetry, their knowledge of poetry, and their evaluation of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

In addition to the eight journal entries, I collected the 14 poetry exercises that the students worked on throughout the workshop, photocopying some handwritten ones, and asking students to print me an extra copy if they were using a word processor. I organized the poetry exercises chronologically and by type of exercise. This allowed me to look for changes in understanding of poetry concepts by individual students and as a group. Table 3.3 is a list of the 14 poetry exercises I collected.
Table 3.3. Poetry Exercises

**Poetry collection project.** The final week of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop consisted of the students compiling a collection of three poems that they chose from books available from my classroom library, and those in our school’s library. My intent was to give them a chance to find poems that they could write about that appealed to them on a personal level, as opposed to the poems that I chose for them. Students then had to write a short evaluative paragraph about the three poems they chose, using the terms we had learned throughout the workshop to describe the poems, and adding a personal opinion about their choice. Another component of the collection project allowed them to represent one of the poems they chose through a different medium. Some students chose to make a PowerPoint visual representation, and others to illustrate with markers or crayons. In addition, the poetry collection gave them the opportunity to choose, revise, and include three of the poems they had written as exercises throughout the workshop. The final component of the poetry collection was an evaluation of the
workshop and included more details about what they learned and their attitude toward poetry after the workshop.

**Attitude surveys.** The research questions required an array of data sources in order to describe the students’ perceptions and their performance before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, thus I incorporated both quantitative and qualitative ways of knowing into my case study design. I conducted pre-and post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop surveys with all students in the class. These surveys were designed to elicit students’ attitudes toward poetry reading and writing and students’ perceptions of themselves as students in their previous and current English classes. (See Appendix K).

**Standardized OGT poetry questions.** I also conducted pre and post practice standardized Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) questions on poetry. The OGT Reading Test includes at least one poem with accompanying multiple-choice questions. Because poetry is not taught by every teacher, and especially in the lower tracks, students often have difficulty with those sections. In addition, the OGT is the only quantitative standardized test measure that our school system uses, and passing the OGT determines student graduation. Improvement on the poetry section of the OGT after participating in the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop would be an additional reason for other teachers to try this method. I chose four poems and related questions from four past OGT tests that were released on the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) website and administered the tests before I began the workshop and again the end of the workshop. Each test contained two different poems and accompanying questions. (see Appendix L).

**Literary terms quiz.** Another quantitative measure was a pre- and post-workshop literary terms exercise to determine students’ performances on standardized tests before
and after their participation in the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop. This type of test is a tool familiar to many teachers, and I hoped it would, in addition to the OGT results, provide them another reason to teach poetry through the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop. I chose ten common literary terms and devised a matching quiz, where students were to match the term to an example of the term. I administered this quiz before the workshop began, and again at the end of the workshop. (See Appendix J).

Data collection and the reality of schools’ timetables. Because I am both teacher and researcher I find it helpful to relate the lesson plans I am teaching to the sources of data I intend to collect. I undertook this step to help keep my research embedded in my course content, and to avoid disjointedness for the students. My original timetable of data collection was very specific, including specific days and dates for lessons, but even as I made the timeline, I recognized that there would most likely be some variance, attributed to the usual interruptions that occur in the course of the school calendar. Little did I know that my 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop would actually last from November 10th, 2008 to February 18th, 2009, due to a number of unforeseeable interruptions.

These types of interruptions are particular to practitioner research in schools and classrooms, and must be taken into consideration as the research is conducted. Careful documentation of changes made in timeline and observations of participants can help to assure that research results are not compromised. In their discussion of research trustworthiness, Eisenhart and Howe (1992) suggest in their fifth standard that quality research have comprehensiveness in three ways:
(a) having the overall clarity, coherence, and competence of the research; (b) balancing the overall technical quality of the research with the risks to participants, and (c) being alert to and able to use knowledge from outside a particular perspective and tradition in which one is working as well as to consider various explanations for what is discovered in a study (p. 46).

I had originally intended to conduct my research at the beginning of the school year, in August, but as final approval from the IRB took longer than expected, I was not able to start until November. My original plan to conduct the workshop two days per week within the school’s nine week grading period was not possible, and not only did I have more interruptions from school closings because of inclement weather, multiple assemblies and the usual meetings that I expected, but the workshop was also interrupted by the traditional winter break. At first I was concerned that the interruptions might affect my findings, but my fears were assuaged as I reminded myself that I was doing practitioner research, and that a real school setting is always fraught with unforeseen interruptions to the daily, weekly, monthly pursuit of teaching and learning. These interruptions would only make the research setting more realistic.

Other changes that occurred in my original timeline were made to some of the lesson plans. As a practitioner, my first concern is my students, and when some of the lessons I had planned were not working well with the particular makeup of the class, I decided to incorporate some other exercises and a project that students had responded positively to in previous years. I was not after all wedded to the actual lesson plans, but did need to ensure that the poetry lessons remained imbedded as part of the actual curriculum content.
In summation, the data I collected consisted of daily video-tapes, during the two or three Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop classes per week as well as the other days each week. I did not video-tape during the showing of a film, not did I consistently video-tape during the Poetry Collection Project in the Media Center, as I could not position the camera to avoid those students who had not assented to be video-taped. I video-taped 35 class sessions. I audio-taped the six focus students’ pre-and post-workshop interviews, for a total of 12 audio-taped interviews, and also audio-taped the six planned group discussions. I collected 14 poetry exercises (or as many as each student completed) from all of the students in the study, as well as the Poetry Collection Notebooks from every student in the study.

Data Analysis

The focus of my study was to determine whether participation in a 10-week Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop would exhibit a change in my 9th grade students’ attitudes towards poetry and themselves and in their knowledge of poetry and metaphor.

For a case study (Cresswell, 1998), analysis consists of making a detailed description of the case and its setting. The researcher recursively collects and analyzes data, reading and making initial notes, and forming initial codes. From the initial codes, categories are developed, and through the process of initial coding and refining, patterns emerge. From these patterns, the researcher is able to develop “naturalistic generalizations… that people can learn from the case either for themselves or for applying it to a population of cases (p. 154).

Data analysis for my nested case study was ongoing and recursive between fieldwork and reflection. My analysis was guided by the belief that it is important to
alternate data collection and data analysis (Corbin & Holt, 2005), and that this recursive process continues and occurs together during and after the data collection. The importance of this recursive process is to ensure the identification of concepts in the data that may drive the direction of subsequent data collection. For example, I had devised a rather extensive journal format for students to use, one which would serve both as a means of self-evaluation of their learning, and as a source of data for my research. After my initial reading, and attempt to code the early journals, I found that because there were so many questions, students would choose not to answer most of the questions. When I switched to a simpler format, my data became richer.

I re-read my research diary and transcripts as I continued to take notes and transcribe interviews and discussions. I viewed and re-viewed my video-tapes after reading the field notes in my research diary. This allowed me to shape and refine my research questions. As I began to collect the written documents from the students, I read them along with the field notes from the day the exercises were written. This process helped in the coding of the data, which I will explain in detail in the next section of this chapter.

I broke down each question into a series of smaller questions, and was able to establish codes within the question for further analysis. For example, in the refining of question four about metaphoric language, I broke down the question as follows:

4. How do students define metaphor before and after the workshop?
   A. Do they develop an understanding of metaphor in their reading of poems?
   B. Are they able to identify the use of metaphor in poems?
   C. As they read and discussed poems, do they develop a richer understanding of a poem’s meaning through a more developed understanding of metaphor?
   D. How does their creation of metaphors in poetry exercises change throughout the
workshop?

**Open coding.** I began my analysis of the data sources with the procedure called open coding, where patterns and themes that are noticed are coded, and sometimes form the basis for subsequent data collection (Corbin & Holt, 2002). For example, I suspected that the open coding I did with the first surveys I gave to the students might shape the forms of questions I asked in my focus student interviews. In fact, the examination of the survey data indicated that I would need to be much clearer about what I was asking in my interviews. As I observed the students completing the surveys, many completed the hurriedly, and did not ask for explanations, leaving some answers blank.

I coded the focus student interviews next. Table 3.4 represents the initial coding (colors) and the subsequent categories (acronyms) that I used for the surveys, and then the focus students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial color codes and explanation</th>
<th>Detailed Codes and explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yellow PT (Poetry terms used to talk about poems)</td>
<td>PTR (Poetry terms used to talk about reading poems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>PTW (poetry terms used to talk about writing poems)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orange MP (Can define or recognize metaphor)</td>
<td>MPR (recognizes metaphor in reading of poem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MPW (uses metaphor in writing)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3.4. Open Codes

Continued
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initial color codes and explanation</th>
<th>Detailed Codes and explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pink  RP (Attitude towards reading poetry)</strong></td>
<td>RPL  (Likes reading poetry)  RPSS  (Favorite poems are self-selected)  RFPPE  (Favorite poems relate to personal experience)  RPFS  (Favorite poems are short)  RPE  (Reading poetry is easy)  RPA  (Feel an accomplishment when reading and understanding poem)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Green  WP (Attitude towards writing poetry)</strong></td>
<td>WPSS  (Favorite writing is self-selected)  WPL  (Likes writing poetry)  WPE  (Writing poetry is easy)  WPA  (Feel an accomplishment when writing poetry)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Red  SS (definition of successful student identity)</strong></td>
<td>SSGG  (Defines good student as having good grades)  SSB  ( Defines as good behavior)  SSM  (Defines as morally good)  SSI  (Defines as other definition)  SSDW  (Defines as doing required work)  SSMM  (Own definition is mismatch with actual performance)  SID  (Defines self as successful student)  USID (Defines self as unsuccessful student)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I recoded the interviews with sub-codes after the initial color-coding. Figure 3.2 represents a portion of a coded interview, showing the refined categories.
SK: If you’re doing homework?
V: Yeah,

SK: Tell me about your experiences with writing poems— you already told me you’re not good at it. Why do you think you’re not good at it?
V: Because I can’t get my sentences to like match with the title, and what it’s supposed to be about. I don’t know...

SK: Well, you told me the poems rhyme. Do you try to make yours rhyme?
V: Yeah, I guess I do make them rhyme.

SK: Do they have to rhyme?
V: No. But most of them do.
SK: Do you have a favorite poem?
V: No.

SK: No? Okay, so that’s pretty much it about poetry— anything else you want to say about poetry, your experiences in school Do you like it?
V: Yeah, I like it, I’m just not good at it.

SK: Let’s talk about yourself as a student. If you were going to use words to describe yourself as a student, what words would you use?
V: I’m organized and a good student, like I respect the teachers.

SK: Okay,

V: I should respect the teachers.
SK: And then when you don’t want kind of things do you consider not respecting the teachers, that you do.
V: Um, what do you mean by that?
SK: Well you say you should respect the teachers, does that mean you don’t always respect the teachers?

V: No. I do but like I can get an attitude with them...
SK: What causes that?
V: People in class, like how they act towards people, like I don’t know how to explain it.
SK: And that rubs off on you?
V: Yeah
SK: Um, do you described yourself as a student, mostly you just talked about behavior, and you said you’re organized. Is there anything else that would come into being a student, any other descriptors that would, like do you consider yourself a good student?
V: Yeah
SK: What does that mean, being a good student.

V: Um I guess like follow directions when they’re given, and I just pay attention most of the time.
SK: Okay, so a successful student follows directions, pays attention, is organized, is respectful? Those are the things I heard you say.

V: Yeah

SK: And you describe yourself as a successful student.
V: Yeah
SK: Do you think grades have anything to do with being a successful student?
V: Yeah

SK: It should be but, I’m not the best person when it comes to grades.
SK: But you still feel like you’re a successful student.

Figure 3.2. Coded Interview Section
Memo writing. As I examined the data sources for key concepts I also carried out memo-writing, writing down questions and notations about my coding as I conducted the analysis. Memos allow the researcher to return to conceptual ideas as analysis continues (Corbin & Holt, 2002). I wrote memos as I examined the data, adding them to my transcriptions, my notes from watching the videos and listening to the audio-tapes, and ultimately adding them to my research diary. The memos I added to my research diary as I read and re-read my data were important to help me keep track of the concepts I was observing, and to make appropriate changes in my data collection if needed.

After the preliminary codes were established, I continued to analyze my data sources. I would re-visit and re-read my data sources as I collected them, refining, merging, renaming, or removing codes (Corbin & Holt, 2002).

Data code refining. By reading the data and the memos, asking questions and making comparisons, I further defined my data. I expected to have my preliminary codes in the first few weeks, but I found that I needed to collect more student work before I was able to have adequate sources to begin coding. I attempted with the focus student interviews, and the surveys, but my audio-taped group discussions were not good sources of information, particularly in the beginning of the workshop. Once I was able to do preliminary coding, I then began refining the codes by re-reading earlier data sources and my teacher reflective journal even as I continued to analyze new data sources. One process that I found useful as the data collection and analysis continued was to make synoptic and frequency charts and bar graphs (Lather, 2007) from the data I collected.
This helped to confirm whether the codes were useful, and sometimes revealed new patterns and themes to be coded.

Data analysis of the group discussions and the video-tapes provided me with information about the discursive processes the students used to think and reason about the poems they were reading. I hoped that the workshop would afford the students time and format to discuss both reading and writing of poetry. I wanted to examine students’ talk about poetry for information about their development of reading comprehension and high-level thinking about poetry. In addition, an examination of the audio-taped group discussions were an opportunity for me to discover if students actually did participate in high level thinking and comprehension. Small group discussions have rarely been a part of low-level English classes (Oakes, 1985; Page, 1990; Lee, 2007), and it was my intention to include them as a regular part of the workshop. As a data source for examining high-level thinking processes I was disappointed. Students did not have enough time to learn the process of small group discussions in the timetable of my research. It was clear that they had had little experience in small group discussion in previous years. As a result, while the discussions were a source for other data about poetry learning, they did not yield as much information about the process of talking about poetry as I had anticipated.

The final process of data analysis (i.e. selective coding) identifies a core category to which the others are related, and begins the process of developing a theory (Brott & Myers, 2002). I did not begin selective coding until after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop was completed, and also not until the school year was over. I found it difficult to sustain the level of lesson planning, teaching and grading for my six classes,
and still find time to conduct the data analysis in my research class for my dissertation. My expectations exceeded the physical and mental reality of teaching and researching, and I was forced to slow down so that I could do justice both to my students and my own work.

**Data analysis timeline.** Table 3.5 repeats the data collection timeline on the left, with the corresponding analysis steps on the right. This timeline represents the actual dates of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, which as with the data collection timetable, ended up being much longer than I had originally planned.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Data Collection</th>
<th>Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 1-27</td>
<td>Prepare file system for data collection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 27-Oct. 15</td>
<td>Acquire 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade achievement test scores</td>
<td>Open code surveys</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Acquire 8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade LA final grades</td>
<td>Tabulate quiz and test scores</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 8</td>
<td>Collect pre-workshop surveys,</td>
<td>Open code field notes in research diary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>literary terms quizzes,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and OGT test results</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oct. 9-28</td>
<td>Take notes of discussions in research diary</td>
<td>Compare test, grades, survey results to choose focus students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 10-12</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes and teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview focus students</td>
<td>Transcribe focus interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collect journals, imitation poems,</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>metaphor lists exercises</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview focus students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take notes in research diary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
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</table>

Table 3.5. Data Analysis Timeline  Continued
Table 3.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity Details</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 18-19</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions Video-tape week’s class lessons Collect journals</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes and teacher journal Transcribe focus interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct informal member checks of interviews with focus students Take notes in research diary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 24-25</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions Video-tape week’s class Collect journals, imitation and personal metaphor poems Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes and teacher journal Transcribe group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 3-5</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions Video-tape week’s classes Collect journals, “Five Easy Pieces” poem exercise Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes and teacher journal Transcribe group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 10-11</td>
<td>Audio-tape week’s classes Video-tape week’s classes Collect journals, activity packets Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal Continue to transcribe group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dec. 20-30</td>
<td>Code focus interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 5-7</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions Video-tape week’s classes Collect journal entries, imitation poems Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Code focus interviews Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jan. 12, Jan 27 (Snow days)</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussion Video-tape week’s classes Collect journal entries Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Code focus interviews Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Continued
Table 3.5 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activities</th>
<th>Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 2-3</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes</td>
<td>Categorize poem exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collect journal entries</td>
<td>Code group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take notes in research diary</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb 9-13</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take notes in research diary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 16-18</td>
<td>Audio-tape group discussions</td>
<td>Transcribe group discussions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take notes in research diary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 21-</td>
<td>Video-tape week’s classes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 1</td>
<td>Collect surveys, quizzes, and tests</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Take notes in research diary</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interview focus students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>conduct member checks of Interviews</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 2-Jun.</td>
<td>Take field notes</td>
<td>Transcribe focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus interviews</td>
<td>Add to research diary from video-tapes, teacher journal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conduct unstructured Interviews of study students</td>
<td>Continue coding of case study students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 6-Aug.</td>
<td>Begin data reduction</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Score post-workshop surveys literary terms, quizzes, OGT test items and create comparison EXCEL files</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Create bar graphs, charts Diagrams</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Further refining and nesting of research questions</td>
<td></td>
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Continued
Table 3.5 continued

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<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Task Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aug. 13-Nov. 1</td>
<td>Write Methodology and data analysis chapters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nov. 1, 2009- Aug., 2010</td>
<td>Write and revise remaining chapters</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Summary**

My study was a case study of my 9th grade average level English class within which were nested six focus students. I chose the focus students based on low grades in middle school or low 8th grade Achievement scores in reading, and negative attitude towards poetry ascertained from the pre-Poetry reading and Writing Workshop Survey. I was a participant as the teacher of the class in which I conducted my research. I conducted this study to explore the possible effects on attitude, school identity, and poetry knowledge upon a low-level tracked class of 9th grade disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) students after they had participated in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. I specifically chose to conduct this research in my own classroom because as a poet and a teacher I believe poetry is a powerful medium through which students can improve their performance and use of language. I hoped to enhance my anecdotal evidence of the effective use of teaching poetry to students with evidence that was research based.

My research was conducted in two interactive phases, including the purposeful data collection during the actual Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and the analysis of...
data, which ensued during and after the actual workshop timeframe. My role was simultaneously that of participant and researcher.

I collected data through my research diary, teacher/methodological journal, audio-taped group discussions, video-taped class sessions, formal and informal interviews with focus students, collections of student written poetry exercises and evaluations through student journals, pre and post-workshop attitude surveys, pre and post-workshop literary terms identification quizzes, and pre and post Ohio Graduation Test poetry section tests questions.

Data analysis began during the data collection but continued after the workshop and the school year. Refining of my research questions began during the data collection, and continued through the data analysis process. The writing process gave me yet another opportunity to examine and reexamine my data, and to re-organize my categories as new patterns emerged. Continued focus on my role as the students’ teacher gave me further opportunity to reflect and research the way practitioner research is bound up in the analysis of student activities.

In Chapter Four I will discuss the individual class members in the social context of Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, the attitudes of all of the individuals in the class towards poetry and themselves as students, with a more detailed examination of the focus students. I will then discuss the components of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop and the students’ interaction with them.
Chapter 4: Analysis and Discussion

I designed this nested case study to examine what happened when students in the lowest level of a tracked, 9th grade English class experienced the reading of poetry and the responding to poetry through poetry exercises in a curriculum-imbedded Reader Response based 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. My intent was to determine if this workshop enabled students to develop a more positive attitude towards poetry, and develop identities as successful English students. In addition, the study was designed to determine if the workshop approach enabled the students to learn more about poetry terms and to perform better on the poetry section of a high stakes 10th grade graduation test after participating in the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop.

This chapter contains four parts: two descriptions of typical days to illustrate the social context of the class, a comparison of the 16 students’ academic performances and their attitudes about themselves as successful or unsuccessful students in English class, and a more specific description and discussion of the six focus students and their participation in the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop. I analyze and discuss the data I collected and coded from my research diary, teacher/methodological journal, audio-taped group discussions, video-taped class sessions, formal and informal interviews with focus students, collections of student written poetry exercises and evaluations through student journals, pre and post-workshop attitude surveys, pre and post-workshop literary terms identification quizzes, and pre- and post-workshop Ohio Graduation Test.
comparable poetry section test questions. I begin my discussion of the whole class, and then explore the data from my nested class study of six focus students. Next I describe the components or tasks included in the workshop in which students participated.

**The Social Context**

**Scenario I: First Week of Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop: A Typical Day**

Language and Literature 9, the class that contained the students in my study, was a class fraught with tension from the first day of school. In the 19 years that I have taught at Main High School, I cannot remember a class that took so long to become cohesive, and the first month or so I was not sure if I ever had control. Because of the nature of the relationships among the students, there were several Poetry Reading Writing Workshop days that simply ended before they began, causing the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop to span three days instead of two per week. One particular example, one where the class was interrupted and remained derailed into the next day’s class, illustrates the tension. The class was watching the episode from *The Odyssey* that they had read for homework, where Odysseus meets his wife after twenty years at sea.

A.J. (a student who left school in December): Man, why she taking him back after bangin’ that Calypso for five years!

C.N. (also a student who left the class): Can you f’n’ turn it up? This is good!

Kody: So he killed two people with one arrow, like two birds with one rock.

Justin: Like two birds with one stone.
Despite the inappropriate language, from their conversations about Odysseus’ relationship to Calypso and discussions of his actions I could tell that these students were comprehending the plot and some of the character motives, and an opportunity to mention similes arose, but before I could discuss them, Justin said something unintelligible to Kunte, who then called him a “Dirty Mexican.”

Justin: What?

Kunte: Yeah, you’re gay.

A.J.: Call us all Crackers! We are all Crackers in here. Can’t get in trouble. Blacks can say the “N” word and not get in trouble.

The rest of the class was laughing, and Vienna, Mercaides and Kody were making faces at the video camera and discussing the fact that what the boys said was on the video-tape.

The plan for the rest of the workshop had been to read Cavafy’s “Ithaca” and discuss it in groups, but that activity was put on hold while I dealt with the inappropriate language and the screaming students.

As a teacher, I felt that the probable office punishment of suspension would be appropriate, but as the researcher I had just set up one of my focus students to be absent on the day I planned to interview him. In this case, my role as teacher took precedence over my practical considerations as a researcher. The next day, I had hoped to return to the workshop, but during the first five minutes the two boys were called to the office to receive their suspensions, and then returned for the remainder of the class. The result of the office referral was that Kunte and A.J. were suspended for five days. When they returned from finding out their punishment, they both stormed into the room, sharing their suspension papers with the rest of the class.
Kunte: Five f’ing days!

C.N.: Can I change to another class? This class is too crazy.

Kody: Shut up.

Mercaides: What are you talking about?

T.B.: Get out of her face. (To me) Why are you always yelling at me and Kody? Mercaides never gets in trouble.

That day also ended in chaos, with the four students who were all yelling surrounding me in the hall while the rest of the class patiently waiting for us to return.

**Scenario II: In the Middle of the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop:**

**A Typical Day**

In preparation for an OGT-style timed essay (required practice each term) about goals, one that would interrupt our full workshop day once again, I had read Frost’s “A Road Not Taken” the previous day at the beginning of the period. On the second day I read it again, and we discussed the poet and the poem, using the information in their textbook as reference points. During the reading of the background information about Frost, several other activities were taking place. Kody finished texting and slid her phone into her pocket. Mercaides twirled her hair and exchanged glances with Vienna. Alejandro, Kunte, Chuck and A.J. were absent, the average number of students who were absent each day, although the names changed.

Kody: What are we doing today?

Teacher: Who has heard of Frost?

Mercaides: Poetry is boring.
Chase: I like poetry.

Teacher: (repeats) Who has heard of Frost?

Kody: On the wall. (Points to poem from yesterday.)

Justin: On the back of the cross country shirts- “miles to go before I sleep.”

That’s from a Frost poem you read last week when it snowed.

Kody: What’s a dilemma?

Kody had read ahead in the textbook and was questioning the meaning of a word in the explanation of the poem. The rest of the period was spent with the students planning what they would say in their essays by writing in their journals. Some of the students referred to the poem in the journal, referencing the two paths they might have to choose between when they graduated from high school.

This second conversation demonstrates that some students had begun referencing poems they had heard before in the workshop, and recognizing lines from those poems outside of English class. This is an example of what poets and teachers of poetry claim about how students’ work with poetry helps students write in other genres (Christensen, 1991; Wormser and Capella, 2004; Jocson, 2006).

Class Academic Performance and Attitudes

Academic Profile of Period 8 Students

The students in Language and Literature 9 are designated as “average” by the 8th grade teachers who send them on to high school. Their 9th grade English class is the lowest of three available English classes: honors, college prep, and average. At the middle school there are three tracks: honors English, “regular” English, and a program for students at risk for failure in all academic classes, called “Trails.” The criteria for
deciding in which 9th grade class they are placed, according to a verbal conversation with the department head of the middle school, are based on the student’s 8th grade teachers’ judgments. The students take a 7th grade achievement test in reading, but the 8th grade teachers do not use that score for placement, feeling that it might not be relevant to the students’ 8th grade reading ability. The 8th grade Ohio Reading Achievement Test is given in the spring, and the teachers must make their recommendations for 9th grade by January, before the 8th grade tests have been administered. The department chair also said that many times parents will override what the teachers recommend, and sign for the student to be in a higher or low-level, sometimes based on information they have heard from older siblings or friends. Students who wish to be in Honors 9 must apply by writing an essay, and receiving a recommendation from their 8th grade teacher. The rest of the students are either placed in the college prep English or the “Average” level. From conversations with the 8th grade teachers, grades in the 8th grade seem to be the main criteria for recommendation. As a result, the “average” level 9th grade classes are usually filled with the students who received low grades in 8th grade, or were in the “Trails” program described above. Tracking continues from 8th grade to 9th grade.

The students in 8th period Language and Literature 9 arrived at the high school with a range of grades from their 8th grade Language Arts classes: 2 A’s, 3 B’s, 4 C’s, 4 D’s and 1 F. Two of the students transferred from other schools and their records had not yet arrived. Their scores on the 8th grade reading achievement test ranged from 384 to 444, with 400 being the score of a basic reader. All but one of the students had been in the average level class in 8th grade. A.J. came from the “Trails” program, where according to his explanation for not knowing how to write, he had “learned nothing.”
While I was not able to obtain the records of student absences from 8th grade, multiple absences affected both grades and learning during the months of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. During informal conversations, a few of the students assured me that they had had even more absences in the 8th grade than they had in the 9th grade. Kody told me that she had been in more trouble in 8th grade. She did not seem to be bothered by her 12 absences during the workshop, all but two for suspensions, stating that she had missed many more in the 8th grade. A.J., whose 42 absences were a huge factor in his poor grades and performance, let me know that he was suffering from the same illnesses he had as an 8th grader. Kunte, D.C., and T.B also had been suspended many times in the 8th grade, and continued that trend in their 9th grade year. Table 4.1 shows the 8th grade final grades, and 8th grade reading scores, and 9th grade absences during the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop weeks.
Table 4.1. 8th Grade Reading Scores, 8th and 9th Grade Final Grades, 9th Grade Absences

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>8th grade Read. Achv.</th>
<th>8th grade English Final Grade</th>
<th>9th grade English Final Grade</th>
<th>Absences 11/10/08-2/11/09</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Kunte</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Derek</td>
<td>409</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kody</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mercaides</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vienna</td>
<td>406</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rosalie</td>
<td>411</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>447</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.B.</td>
<td>422</td>
<td>D-</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>436</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.J.</td>
<td>384</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>42</td>
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<tr>
<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>430</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>420</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>McLovin</td>
<td>N/AVAIL</td>
<td>N/AVAIL</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>444</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>N/AVAIL</td>
<td>N/AVAIL</td>
<td>Relocated</td>
<td>N/AVAIL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Students’ Feelings about Being Successful Students upon Entering High School

At the beginning of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop I administered a school attitude survey to determine how students felt about themselves as English students, and how they felt about themselves as readers and test takers. The initial survey was to be used to help determine my focus students. I administered the same survey after the workshop was completed. Figure 4.1 shows the results of the survey for the whole class.
A1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
SD= strongly disagree
A2. Felt success in middle school LA
D= disagree
A3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
U= undecided
A4. See myself as successful in other subjects
A= agree
A5. Consider myself a good reader
SA= strongly agree
A6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

Figure 4.1. School Attitude Survey Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop: Whole Class

Figure F.1 (See Appendix F) represents the results of the pre- and post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop attitudes towards school by individual students.

I administered the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop surveys immediately before and after the workshop. Item One asked students to rate their experience with elementary school language arts. On the pre-workshop survey, eight students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt success in elementary school. No students claimed to unsuccessfull, and three students were undecided. When asked to respond to the same item on the post-workshop survey, 13 students felt success in elementary school, no students felt they were unsuccessful, and one was undecided. When asked informally why they had
different answers, students had no explanation. Eight students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt success in middle school language arts on the pre-workshop survey Item Two, while no students responded that they did not feel successful, and three were undecided. Seven agreed or strongly agreed they were successful on the post-workshop survey, three students felt unsuccessful and three were undecided. Again, when asked, students could not account for their different answers.

When asked if they expected to feel successful in 9th grade English, on the pre-workshop survey 11 students agreed, or strongly agreed, no students felt that they would be unsuccessful, and two were undecided. On the post-workshop survey the total students who expected to be successful remained the same at 11, but only one student strongly agreed as opposed to five on the pre-workshop survey. No students responded that they did not expect to be successful, and two were undecided. 50 % or less students claimed to have felt successful in middle school, while their expectations for success in high school overall remained at 68 % both before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. Item Four asked students if they felt success as students in other classes. On the pre-workshop survey, nine students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt successful at the beginning of the workshop, one student did not feel successful, and two were undecided, approximately one month into the 9th grade year. 15 weeks later, after the first grading period, 11 students agreed or strongly agreed that they felt success in other classes, one student felt unsuccessful, and three were undecided. Examination of their grades in other classes revealed that seven of the eleven students who agreed or strongly agreed that they felt successful had received either a D or an F in one of their other classes.
Items Five and Six asked students to rate themselves as successful students at reading and on standardized tests in all subjects. Seven students either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt success as readers on the pre-workshop survey, one student felt unsuccessful, and three were undecided. 10 students either agreed or strongly agreed that they were successful readers on the post-workshop survey, while one felt unsuccessful and two were undecided. As standardized test takers, seven either agreed or strongly agreed that they felt success on the pre-workshop survey, three felt unsuccessful, and two were undecided. On the post-workshop survey, only three agreed or strongly agreed, while four felt unsuccessful and six were undecided. At the time the students took the survey, they had not received their results of the standardized poetry OGT test items. In fact, 11 of the students improved their scores on the poetry test items after the workshop. I surmise that since many of their definitions of success are tied to scores, they might have experienced feelings that the test was difficult, and based their answers on that judgment.

A closer look at the focus students’ differing definitions of success may account for the discrepancies between students’ feelings about themselves as successful students, and an examination of their grades from 8th and 9th grade, a discussion that will be taken up in the following section. The results of the pre-workshop attitude survey were helpful in choosing focus students, as I was looking for students who had not felt success in language arts in 8th grade, but overall I did not find the results to be consistent either with the students’ comments in interviews and journals, or with their 9th grade grades. I could not determine accurately from the attitude surveys if students’ attitudes towards school had changed from before the workshop. Another factor that made me determine that the
surveys were not as helpful as I intended was that some students did not answer every item.

**Student Attitudes towards Reading and Writing Poetry**

As with the Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop school attitude survey, one reason I administered the reading and writing poetry attitude surveys was to help determine my choice of focus students. Another reason was to determine if the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop changed students’ attitudes towards poetry. Figure 4.2 shows the results of the pre- and post-workshop survey attitudes towards reading.

**R1. I enjoy reading poetry.**
**R2. I enjoy learning more about poetry.**
**R3. My English teacher in middle school made reading poetry fun.**
**R5. Only college bound students should learn to read poetry.**
**R6. It is easy for me to read poetry.**

**Key:**
- SD=Strongly Disagree
- D=Disagree
- U=Undecided
- A=Agree
- SA=Strongly Agree

**Figure 4.2. Reading Poetry Survey Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey**
Figure G.1 (See Appendix G) represents the attitudes towards reading poetry by individual students.

On the pre-workshop reading attitude survey, six students agreed or strongly agreed that they enjoyed reading poetry, while three disagreed and three were undecided. On the post-workshop survey, seven agreed, three disagreed, and five were undecided. On Item Two, when asked whether they would enjoy learning more about poetry, before the workshop five students agreed or strongly agreed, three disagreed, and four were undecided. On the post-workshop survey, two agreed, six disagreed, and seven were undecided. For Item Three, when asked whether middle school teachers made reading poetry fun, on the pre-workshop one person agreed, six disagreed, and three were undecided. However, three agreed on the post survey, 10 disagreed, and two were undecided. When asked informally about their different responses to Item Three, the students could not explain why they answered differently on this item. As with the writing survey, I did not feel that students understood Item Four well enough to consider their responses as accurately reflecting their attitudes. For Item Five, whether students thought only college bound students should read poetry, on the pre-workshop survey, no students agreed, nine disagreed, and two were undecided. On the post-workshop survey, one agreed, 11 disagreed, and three were undecided. When asked whether reading poetry was easy, on the pre-workshop survey, eight students agreed or strongly agreed, three disagreed, and one was undecided. On the post-workshop survey, 10 agreed, two disagreed, and three were undecided.
Figure 4.3 shows the results of the pre and post-workshop attitudes towards writing survey for the whole class.

W1. I enjoy expressing my thoughts through writing poetry.
W2. I enjoy learning more about writing poetry.
W3. Middle school teachers made writing poetry fun.
W4. Learning to write poetry is a waste of time.
W5. Only college bound students should learn to write poetry.
W6. It is easy for me to write poetry.

Key:    SD=Strongly Disagree
        D= Disagree
        U=Undecided
        A=Agree
        SA=Strongly Agree

Figure 4.3. Writing Poetry Survey Pre and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey: Whole Class

Figure H.1 (See Appendix H) represents the results of the pre- and post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop attitudes towards writing poetry by individual students.
When asked on the pre-workshop writing attitude survey Item One if students enjoyed expressing their thoughts through writing poetry exercises, three students agreed or strongly agreed, five did not enjoy expressing their thoughts, three were undecided, and four students did not answer this item. On the post-workshop survey Item One, six agreed that they enjoyed expressing their thoughts, disagreed, and one was undecided. On the pre-workshop Item Two, whether students would enjoy learning more about poetry, six students agreed, four disagreed, and one was undecided. On the post-workshop Item Two, three agreed, four disagreed, and six were undecided. On Item Three, whether students felt their middle school teachers made poetry fun to learn, three students agreed on both the pre- and post-workshops, six did not enjoy it on the pre-workshop survey and eight on the post, three were undecided on the pre- and four on the post-workshop survey, and three did not respond to this item on the pre-workshop survey.

The discrepancies in their pre and post-workshop survey answers on this item about middle school was another reason I did not feel the surveys were an accurate reflection of the students’ attitudes. After discussing Item Four with the students, after the survey, several told me that they hadn’t understood the question, so just put an arbitrary answer or did not answer it at all. Item Five asked students to agree or disagree whether writing poetry should be only for college students. On the pre-workshop survey, no students responded that poetry should be for college students only, six disagreed, four were undecided, and seven did not answer this item. On the post-workshop survey, three students thought it should only be for college students, seven disagreed, five were undecided, and two did not answer this. When asked whether students thought it was easy to write poetry, on the pre-workshop survey three students agreed or strongly
agreed, three disagreed, and three were undecided. After the workshop, five students agreed, seven disagreed, and three were undecided. My observational notes on students’ discussions during the sharing of their Poetry Collections and comments in their Poetry Collections poem responses and final journal confirmed these answers.

As with the attitude survey, it was difficult to determine any trends from this survey’s pre-workshop and post-workshop administration. In informal discussions with the students, some indicated that they did not understand, in particular Item Four, and some said they did not feel like answering some of the items. Comments in the journals and in the focus student interviews tended to contradict survey responses at times and to agree with responses on other questions.

**Summary**

While these surveys were somewhat helpful as indicators in choosing focus students, overall, the number of students who did not respond to several or any of the items, and the number of journal entries and interview answers that contradicted this information made them less useful than I originally hoped. Answers on the post-workshop survey may also have been influenced by the fact that the students received their 2nd term grade cards immediately before the survey was given. In addition, factors such as whether the students’ answers were influenced by the fact that their teacher was asking them to respond to the survey cannot be ignored.
Focus Students in 8th Period Language and Literature 9

The Focus Students and Successful Student Identities

The six focus students in 8th period Lang and Lit 9 were lower to middle achieving readers. They had been placed in the average level class either by 8th grade teachers’ or counselors’ suggestions or parent choice. As mentioned earlier, while this class was designated as an average-level class by guidance counselors, it was commonly referred to by students as the low-level class, and in fact, was the lowest class in the school’s tracked system.

I will describe my observations about the focus students from my role as their teacher, their own definitions of a successful student, their perceptions of themselves as successful or unsuccessful students before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and their grades in English class throughout the year. I will then follow with separate sections describing their attitude towards and knowledge of poetry before and after the workshop.

Kunte. Kunte, a 15-year-old Caucasian male, was slightly older than many of the other males in his class, and his demeanor suggested that he felt himself to be more mature. He dressed in hip-hop attire, low-slung pants, and the same sweatshirt every day. He always carried his baseball cap, which, while he was not allowed to wear it during school hours, often was surreptitiously slipped on his head until he knew a teacher was looking or until he was told to take it off. It remained on his desk otherwise. Kunte carried a backpack with him, and always had notebook paper and a writing utensil.

Self-perception as a successful student. During his interview, Kunte presented himself as a thoughtful, honest young man. As with many adolescent 15-year-old males I
have come in contact with in my years of teaching, he did not maintain much eye contact with me as we spoke, but his answers seemed candid and open. He talked of the fact that he had been an excellent student in the elementary school through 6th grade, but as a 7th grader in a school in Arizona, he said he had been bored, and that he acted out and as a result his grades started to slip.

Teacher: Where was this school?

Kunte: Arizona...and they didn’t really teach well there, there wasn’t…it really wasn’t the teachers; it was the whole curriculum, it was weird, so I had a hard time staying up with everybody, and after that I just, I don’t know…It was just stuff, a lot of stuff I already knew… like a review of 6th grade.

Then, to explain his poor grades in the 7th and 8th grades after he had returned to Main, he said that in addition to the school requiring more of him than he was used to giving, he was influenced by the many problems that he had started to have at home.

Kunte’s description of a successful student was unique in parts. He said, as did many of the students, that a good student pays attention, takes notes, and does his class work and homework. In addition, however, he said that a good student is “real kind” to others. In hi first interview, Kunte did not see himself as a successful student in English, but he said that he would like to be one. He admitted that he knew he was a good reader, and could write, but did not like to write, and often chose not to. Kunte recognized that there was a possibility to change his identity as a successful or unsuccessful student, citing his change for the worse after 6th grade, and thought that he was trying harder this year, although his grade had not yet started to reflect that change. Kunte expressed that he
knew that doing better in English than he had in previous years was necessary for him to be successful not only in English, but in later life as well. I asked him about whether he fit his definition as a successful student as far as being “real kind,” and he replied that he was moody, and sometimes if he was caught in a bad mood, he was not so kind. My observations of Kunte’s behavior in class supported this statement, as some days he was upbeat, and amusing, such as the day every sentence he spoke in class ended with a “Meow,” while he and others were mimicking a recent movie they had seen with great humor. And yet, he could be the angry student as well, the one who called another student a “Dirty Mexican,” as mentioned previously.

In Kunte’s final interview, his opinion of himself as a successful student was much less hopeful. He included in his definition of a successful student one who doesn’t get in trouble, and admitted that he had gotten in trouble several times already during the academic year. He defined himself as a somewhat successful student who was getting better grades in some of his classes, but not English, and claimed that his poor grade in English was because he did not finish the writing part of his poetry collection, a factor that supported his original opinion of himself as a good reader but one who chose not to write because he did not enjoy doing so. Despite his self-knowledge of the importance of writing, he had not changed his performance in English class. I offered him extra time to complete his collection, and to revise and turn in his writing so that he could get a higher grade. He agreed that he could try to do that, but never followed through, and thus received a failing grade for the project.

**Performance in general.** Kunte’s 8th grade Ohio Achievement Test reading score of 420 clearly placed him in the proficient level, yet his final grade as an 8th grader was
an F. Kunte ended 8th grade English with a final grade of F, received a D, and a D- for the 1st two terms of 9th grade English, but slipped back to F’s for the second two terms, and failed the course for the year.

**Derek.** Derek was a very young looking 14-year-old, Caucasian male, small in stature and extremely quiet in class. I chose Derek to interview because of his absolute dislike for poetry more than his grade.

**Self-perception as a successful student.** He described himself as a student by saying, “I just kind of sit there and listen and sometimes talk.” His definition of a successful student was smart, focused, and quiet and got good grades. Derek had no absences or office referrals. He thought of himself as partly successful because he was focused most of the time, but said sometimes he wasn’t interested and would do poorly because he wasn’t paying attention. He would check his grades on the online grade book, and considering that in most classes his main grades were from worksheets, concluded that doing well on worksheets was part of being a successful student. He thought he had potential to be a better student, but to do so would have to “cut out the fun stuff,” and study more. That wasn’t an option for him, and he was “comfortable” with the C’s and B’s he was getting. In English his mother told him he needed to maintain an A or a B, and he was willing to do that because she would keep him from going skiing if he didn’t. Therefore, he saw his mother as his main motivator for being a successful student.

While Derek completed his poetry collection, and had done well on the assignments during the workshop, by the end of the workshop he did not feel he was doing as well as he had been before. His focus was on the two reading assignments he had forgotten to complete from the nonfiction unit, which were assigned on days we
were not doing the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and since he had gotten zero’s on those, when he looked at his online grade and saw the “red” boxes, indicating zero’s, he translated that as not being successful. “Yeah, if you are a good student you should do your homework.” His definition of what constituted a successful student had not changed, and while he was worried, he also expressed the belief that with a little more work, he would once more be successful because he generally did pay attention and was quiet.

**Performance in general.** Derek scored a 409, at the low end of proficient on his 8th grade Ohio Achievement Reading Test, and came to the high school with a C+ in English. He improved his grade in 9th grade, maintaining 3 B’s, and an A, with a final grade of B for the year in 9th grade English.

**Kody.** A diminutive Caucasian female, 14-year-old Kody was constantly loud, whether she was being funny, telling jokes, asking inappropriate questions, or more often railing about the injustices reaped upon her by the teachers and administrators of the school. She sometimes dressed in hooded sweatshirts and jeans, and at other times in short skirts and fashionable shirts, each close to the limits of what was allowed by the dress code. Kody seemed determined to interrupt every class at the beginning of the year. She would come late, yell at me, scream at other students, telling them to shut up when she was trying to concentrate, but then being equally loud when others were trying to concentrate. She was a close friend of another female student in the class, and the two of them felt that I was often unfair to them, constantly telling them to be quiet, and ignoring the other equally loud students in the class, in particular two other girls whom they told me I did not punish because they were “preps.”
Often Kody’s anger was related to her drug habits; she was on probation for her behavior in school, often suspended for loud fights with other students, teachers, or administrators, and was in a rehab program for her drug use. When she was not high or in need of drugs, Kody could be quiet, and thoughtful. She would often follow one of her raging tantrums with uncontrollable tears, and a desire not to be the angry person she exhibited to many of her teachers. After a particularly angry class beginning, Kody stopped by my room later that day and threw a piece of paper at me, with a sorry and a thanks surrounding a bitter, sad remonstration of the unfairness of my treatment of her.

Koukis,

I’m sorry for today, but you really made me mad. …. Yeah were [sic] the worst class ever, but your [sic] going to have to find a way to deal w/it…And I don’t think it’s fair that me and [T.B.] get in all the trouble, but when other kids open their big mouths, what happens? NOTHING! …I think it’s pathetic… You can go a head and turn this in to the office, write me up, tell them a lot [sic] of things that aren’t true, but I don’t care. I’ve gotten written up 5682096 times today. ONE more isn’t going to hurt.

Thanks, [Kody]

**Self-perception as a successful student.** Kody’s first interview took place a week after the other students’ interviews because she had been suspended for a week for fighting and using profanity with the teachers and administrators who had tried to intervene. She came to her interview during lunch, despite having been disciplined the previous day in my class for repeatedly being disrespectful to me and to others in the class. She willingly answered questions at length, even though her body language
indicated boredom and disinterest as she slouched in the desk facing the window and stared at her hands during the whole interview.

Kody described a successful student as one who gets good grades and doesn’t get in trouble. She saw herself as a good or average student, with good or average grades in her class, defining a C as a good grade compared to the F’s that many of her other acquaintances had. “I’m passing some of my classes, and passing is passing.” In her words, she was “rambunctious,” “crazy,” and “rude.” She claimed not to be rude on purpose.

Kody: No, it just happens that way, and then after I say [it] I feel bad for saying something rude, but then it just flies by really…

Teacher: What do you mean it just flies by?

Kody: I mean…like I just don’t care about it too much after.

This attitude did not interfere with her being a successful student because she felt that people made her mad, and she got angry easily, but justifiably so. After discussing herself for a few minutes, she then decided she was not a successful student because her grades were not good, and while she was not in as much trouble as she had been in the 8th grade, she still was getting into trouble this year. She reluctantly stated that people could change their identities as students, citing her mother’s advice to her that things happening to her were just an excuse, but then Kody admitted that she was okay with her role, and didn’t care if she was successful. She also reflected that her friends’ behavior also affected hers, and that if she was not around them, she might be a better student.
After the workshop, Kody (whose second interview was again much later than the other students because she had been suspended for five days,) discussed herself as a student. She said despite her bad grades, she still felt successful.

Kody: Um, I don’t think I have book smarts, but I think I have smarts other than that. I think I’m smarter at things other than book work…because it’s more on my own rather than having to follow a book…

She listed the activities she had become involved in, her gymnastics, and the hours she missed from school every morning because she had to get her two eight-year-old sisters up and ready for school since her mother was at work, and explained that she could try to change into everyone else’s idea of a successful student but that she didn’t have nor did she want to take the time. She was satisfied that she was no longer getting in trouble outside of school.

**Performance in general.** Kody continued to get in trouble at school, but always made up any English work she missed. She received a D+ the first term, followed by an F, a B+, a C, and ending the year with a C average.

During the remainder of the year, Kody continued to get in trouble in school, and was finally expelled. The Juvenile Court judge, however, decided since the only class she was passing was English, that she could return for that period only for the final five weeks of school, which she did faithfully.

**Mercaides.** Mercaides was a boisterous, either cheerful or angry, but always loud 14-year-old Caucasian female. She was tall and athletic, dressing in popular styles such
as Abercombie and Gap brand name clothing, and was constantly fixing her hair and looking in her mirror.

**Self-perception as a successful student.** In her survey she indicated a strong dislike for reading, and for poetry in particular. Mercaides defined herself as an average student, getting “C’s and above average” grades. She saw herself as getting off topic frequently in class, and as being unable to concentrate. Her definition of a successful student was quite particular, and included more than behavior and academic characteristics. She defined a successful student as one who got good grades and was …good at all sports. Gets along with everybody. Pretty much as friendly, nice. Doesn’t have grudges against people, I don’t know… [gets] into clubs and stuff, but like a person, that, I guess you could say who doesn’t care what people think about themselves, what they think about them, they just do what they want to do-they don’t care. They’re not caught up in all the drama.

Although she saw herself as trying to stay away from drama, she said, “I usually get good grades and I tried out for sports and stuff. And I try to stay out of drama, but it doesn’t… drama seeks my way- it’s really weird!”

Mercaides spoke of wanting to do better with her grades in all her classes, but felt held back by her inability to concentrate on material that she found boring. She was motivated to keep trying because she wanted to be the first one in her family to go to college, but at the same time, she felt that enjoying her freshman year was more important than getting good grades, and that she would have time in the following years to do better.
Her definition of a successful student after the workshop had narrowed to a focus on grades and doing homework. She felt successful in English, but not in science, because her grade was an F. She spoke of being more off task than before, and attributed it to a personality change, although she didn’t elaborate as to why this had happened.

**Performance in general.** Mercaides missed eight days of school during the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, but the days were not in sequence, and did not really affect her performance in class. The school psychologist began testing Mercaides around the second week of the workshop at the request of her father, as her grades in some of her classes were not as good as he thought they should be, and because she had been talking about how she couldn’t concentrate. She was given a diagnosis of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), a learning disability that qualified her for special education assistance. Near the end of the workshop, she was placed in a study skills class, where her tutor would make sure that she completed any unfinished homework or work missed due to absence. She scored the lowest of the focus students on the 8th grade Ohio Achievement Test in reading, with a score of 397, in the basic range. Her grade from the middle school, however, was a B-, and she maintained a B in the class every nine weeks on 9th grade, both before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

**Vienna.** Vienna, a tall, athletic, generally pleasant 14-year-old Caucasian female, was Mercaides’ best friend. While I spent some time arranging the seating groups to try to keep them from sitting near each other, they still managed to talk incessantly, often making sotto voice jokes, or negative comments about Kody and her friend T.B., causing
frequent outbursts from one or the other. When Mercaides was absent, however, Vienna, who had missed only one day during the workshop, was quiet and usually attentive.

**Self-perception as a successful student.** Vienna found it difficult to express her thoughts when interviewed, and often paused to think of what to say, ending with a frustrated, “I don’t know.” When asked to define what a successful student was, Vienna described one who follows directions, pays attention, is organized and respectful. I asked her if grades had anything to do with being a successful student, and she replied that they ought to, but that she was not the best student when it came to grades. She saw herself as successful because she was organized, and usually respectful, though occasionally she could get an attitude with other people in class who were acting out, especially when, “like how they act towards people. Like I don’t know how to explain it…” She felt that she could become a better student by focusing more and thought doing so would result in better grades. Compared to her 8th grade year, Vienna felt that she was doing better because her family and friends had encouraged her to do so. Vienna had trouble maintaining her concentration even in the interview, asking me twice what I had asked her about, and often waiting for me to elaborate, then having no reply, or again, saying she didn’t know. By the end of the workshop, Vienna’s grade in English was an A, yet as a whole, she still saw herself as only somewhat successful, despite defining a successful student as one who gets good grades, behaves in class, and gets all her work done.

**Performance in general.** Vienna scored a 406, at the low end of the proficient scale on her 8th grade Ohio Achievement Test in reading, and received a final grade of D+ in English during her 8th grade year. She improved her 9th grade year, achieving a B+ the first nine weeks, an A, a B- then a C, averaging a B for the final grade in English.
Rosalie. Shy and introverted, Rosalie was a small, 14-year-old Caucasian female, dressed in dark grays and black, frequently wearing a sweatshirt that pictured a wolf on the back, the subject of much of her writing. She spent most of every 8th period Language and Literature 9 class period working in her notebook, either completing assignments or drawing. Rosalie described herself as a student who was quiet and artistic.

Self-perception as a successful student. Rosalie said she got “kinda good grades,” loved everything about reading and writing, and hated math. She saw a successful student as one who didn’t get in trouble and got fairly good grades. As she was defining a successful student, she clarified that she was not so successful because her grades were not that good. The main problem she described was her difficulty doing well on tests, and while she saw herself as an advanced reader, with good grades, she still felt somewhat unsuccessful because of her test performance. Another factor that Rosalie felt affected her academic performance was how quiet she was in class as well how little she participated. She felt that except for two students, the rest were loud and annoying, and often made fun of her. After the workshop Rosalie said that she still felt like a “medium” successful student, not very much more confident about taking tests, but more confident about understanding what she read, and claimed that the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop “just made [her] think different.”

Performance in general. Rosalie scored a 411, at the low end of the proficient level on the 8th grade Ohio Achievement Test in reading. Her final grade from 8th grade English was a B-. Her placement in the low-level English 9th grade class, despite her self-perception as an advanced reader, was based on her 8th grade teacher’s belief that she
would not perform well on tests in the 9th grade, and her lack of participation in class discussions.

Table 4.2 indicates the number of times each focus student made a comment about feeling he or she was a successful or unsuccessful student in interviews before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

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Table 4.2. Number of Times Focus Students Described Selves as Successful or Unsuccessful Students in Interviews Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

There were 11 more total utterances of feeling like a successful student before the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. Students did not seem to have equated liking poetry, or feeling successful at reading or writing poetry as part of their definition of a successful student. They had just received their term grade cards before they took this post-Poetry Reading Writing Survey. When speaking about identity as successful students, the focus students equated their success with parts of the their own definitions of a successful student, in particular getting good grades, getting work done, and staying out of trouble.
Focus Students as Poetry Readers and Writers: Memory and Attitudes

Many of the students came to the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop with a very limited understanding of poetry. They could cite a few types of poems such as Haiku and Acrostic and most remembered a few instances where they had learned about poetry in middle or elementary school. Several remembered reading “The Raven” by Poe, and most remembered liking poems by Shel Silverstein. Mention of enjoying poetry was almost nonexistent in their initial interviews.

Kunte. Kunte had changed schools several times, moving to and from Arizona during middle school. While he had a strong opinion about the curriculum and his performance, his memory of poetry went only as far back as 6th grade where he recalled doing a poetry unit that didn’t go into much detail, and remembered that the unit was “broad and very quick.” He recalled writing haiku and some other types but could not recall their names, simply calling them “random poetry.” Outside of school Kunte listened to rap music, and called it poetry because of its rhyme scheme.

During the 9th grade workshop, Kunte always read the class poems, and completed the reading, regardless of the assignment. His opinion about the poems we read as a class was often short, such as “I can’t relate,” to our reading of “I Was a Skinny Tomboy.” However, in one of the only journals he wrote, he responded to this poem by saying, “When I read the poem I was visualizing everything the author was saying.” Kunte rarely wrote any of the poetry exercises, completing only four of the 14 exercises. When I would encourage him to write the poetry exercises, he would quietly sit with a blank paper. During the final interview with Kunte, I felt that he was trying to please me by saying that he enjoyed most of the reading and writing, and liked having a choice of
topic to write about, but then he repeated his refrain that the reason he had not finished his poetry collection was that he just didn’t like to write anything. This profile of male students who do not like to write is supported by numerous studies of writing and adolescents (Collins, 1998; Finders, 2005; Smith & Wilhelm, 2006; Beers, Probst, & Rief, 2007).

**Derek.** Derek was quick to let me know that he found poetry boring before the workshop began. His memory of poetry reading and writing in elementary school was nonexistent. He could remember choosing to write acrostic poems whenever they had to write a poem in 6th grade and 8th grade, primarily because they were easy to write. He remembered writing an acrostic poem in response to reading an essay about Martin Luther King, Jr. In addition, he remembered a small unit on poetry, which lasted about a week, but they “didn’t really go in depth… it was just part of the learning we had to do.” Derek could recall reading poems from *Where the Sidewalk Ends* outside of school, calling them “hugely funny.” After the workshop, Derek remarked on the amount of poems they had to read and write, commenting that it was more than he usually did. He thought his writing exercises were easy, completing 13 of the 14 exercises, and that writing them made reading the poems easier. He like getting to choose poems for his collection, and chose funny ones from a collection called *Doodle Soup*, chuckling as he retold me the joke in one of the poems by John Ciardi. Derek admitted to having fun during some of the workshop but in the same breath added, “but I still don’t like it.” Derek’s final Poetry Reading Writing Workshop evaluation journal summed up his conflicting opinion about poetry:
I don’t have a very positive attitude towards poetry or poems. I find them boring and useless. I feel most poems are diaries put into rhyming and rhythmic of literature. Poetry doesn’t mean very much to me. I never read it unless I have to. Although [sic], this class has shown me some poems I don’t mind. I found a few doing this project that are pretty clever. I learned a lot about poetry in “Lang and Lit” but just found it worse.

Derek’s continued negative attitude towards the reading and writing of poetry is supported by studies I discussed in Chapter One. One ten-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop had not changed his attitude. Studies of teachers who hated teaching poetry revealed that many began with a love of poetry, but grew to hate it in secondary school and perhaps in college, primarily because they hated the way it was taught and the feelings of inadequacy that were instilled in them (Wade & Sidaway, 1990; Fleming, 1992; Benton, M. 1992; Benton, P. 1999; Dymoke, 2002). Student attitude was the focus of one such study in England. Fleming (1992) concluded that students’ constructs of poetry as an aesthetic genre is clearer when they are younger, and when they still “take delight … in the sounds and rhythms of language” (p. 12), but that as they get older, and as there is more emphasis on the functional uses of language in schools, they begin to dislike poetry, primarily because they hate the way it is taught and the feelings of inadequacy that are instilled in them. (Wade & Sidaway, 1990; Fleming, 1992; Benton, M. 1992; Benton, P. 1999; Dymoke, 2002).

**Kody.** Kody thought carefully for a minute when I asked her during her first interview if she knew any poems, then jumped out of her seat and said, “I know “Cat in
the Hat!” She could recall writing some poems in 7th and 8th grade, and remembered the teacher telling them the poems had to rhyme. She remembered reading a few poems in the 8th grade textbook, and that they “skipped around” in the book. “If you count songs,” she listened to poetry outside of school, but didn’t read any. Kody wrote in her notebook frequently, but not poems. She told me about listening and writing down what people said, and when I suggested maybe she could use some of that dialogue in a poem, she seemed thoughtful and nodded. She had looked forward to the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, but had been somewhat disappointed, although she enjoyed writing the poem exercises.

Kody still did not like reading poetry after the workshop, particularly the class poems, because she didn’t understand them. She found reading poems harder than reading stories. When given the opportunity to choose poems for her poetry collection notebook, however, she found one that she could say was her favorite. She related to the poem in a personal way, and while she didn’t talk about the poem in literary terms, she could explain how the poem created an image in her own head. About “I Remember my Father’s Hands,” by Majaj, Kody wrote:

I think I like this poem because my father passed away also. I like the description that she used. The way she described just her father’s hands and nothing else is what stuck out to me. When you think of her poem, you have a perfect picture in your head. When I read the poem, I could automatically tell that she knows exactly what she is talking about. And I like that. She described how the hands felt, what they did, where they
were. Even though the poem didn’t make sense at the beginning, it did after I got done reading it.

**Mercaides.** Her lack of memory for anything that happened before 8th grade was usually a reason Mercaides gave for having difficulty remembering anything she read, and later for the difficulty she had in writing the poetry exercises. When asked what she remembered about poetry in elementary school and middle school, it was not surprising to me that she said little. She could not remember any specific poems other than nursery rhymes. She didn’t remember reading any poetry in 7th and 8th grade, but remembered a “little cycle” of poetry from 6th grade, where she had written a poem about herself. No one in her family read at home, and she never read or wrote poetry outside of school. During the workshop, Mercaides usually prefaced both reading and writing with the complaint that she didn’t understand or couldn’t remember. However, with coaching, and sometimes help from other students, she managed to complete 11 of the 14 poetry exercises.

At the conclusion of the workshop Mercaides felt that reading poetry was still boring but she was able to find poems that she liked, among them Simic’s “Watermelon,” and poems that are short and relate to personal stories. In her final evaluation, Mercaides added her preference for love poems as well:

I prefer to read poems about love. I didn’t use to really read or even think about poetry before we started to learn about it. I’m not really a big fan of poetry, but I learned to deal with it better… I think poetry is a way that some people can express their feelings. People write poetry that is sad, happy, depressing and funny.
**Vienna.** At the beginning of the workshop Vienna told me she was good at reading poems, but not at writing them. She said she liked reading poems because they were easier to remember than stories, and more interesting. Vienna could not recall a poem that she knew, or remember reading any poetry from earlier grades. While no one in her family read poetry or any other reading material at home, Vienna said she read poetry online, but had difficulty explaining what she meant by reading and writing poetry. Her lack of vocabulary impeded her ability to express what it was that made poetry writing difficult for her.

Vienna: [I read poetry]…like if they’re in quotes, like if I’m looking for like quotes or something.

Teacher: If you’re doing homework?

Vienna: Yeah.

Teacher: Tell me about your experiences with writing poems…Why did you say you’re not good at it?

Vienna: Because I can’t get my sentences to like match with the title, and what it’s supposed to be about… I don’t know…

After the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, Vienna felt that she had learned how to write poetry with more ease and had completed 11 of the 14 poetry exercises. She still enjoyed reading poems, but mainly if she picked them herself. In particular, she would choose poems that dealt with life, and as she said, “all reflected on me.” In her final journal, Vienna gave some advice for other readers. “By reading poetry I believe it’ll help more people who hate to read, and make it where they will like to read and stuff.”
**Rosalie.** Of the six focus students, Rosalie had the most detailed, and the fondest memories of her experiences with poetry in earlier grades. She remembered being in the library and writing poems, and the librarian letting her put them on the walls of the library. She too remembered writing the ubiquitous haiku in 5th grade, and writing some humorous poems. In 7th and 8th grade she recalled more reading than writing of poetry, and that one of her teachers would have them read poems from which to learn and be tested on vocabulary. In 8th grade, during a unit on Edgar Allen Poe, Rosalie stated that he favorite poem was “The Tell Tale Heart,” perhaps confusing the short story title with some other poems by Poe that she had read. She also remembered “The Raven.” According to Rosalie, “those poems have always inspired me to write, and actually try to make my writing something else than just words on a piece of paper.” Rosalie always began writing as soon as I explained the poetry exercises, and would sometimes stop by my room the next day before class to show me what she had been working on, or ask me to read what she had written so far during class. Rosalie completed 12 of the 14 poetry exercises, revising more than any of the other focus students. After the workshop she claimed that poetry made her think differently, and also that she could read poems more easily than she could stories. She stated that the subject of poems was more interesting than many stories, and that they held her attention. In her final evaluation she wrote:

> This segment of Language Arts is one of my favorite topics, considering I can express myself. I’ve enjoyed being able to write poetry, and I’m going to miss writing it, considering that I don’t know what to write outside of school… writing [poetry] is fun because I actually can think freely and not be in a limited boundary of possibilities.
**Summary.** Individual choice of poems was key to enjoyment and value of reading poetry for the six focus students. Five out of six mentioned having fun or enjoying the process of reading or writing at least one of the poetry exercises in the workshop. Lauscher’s (2007) study of 10 post-high school students in a poetry workshop found that her students revealed their ability to choose what they read and wrote was important to their seeing poetry as an emotional outlet, and their willingness to write. One of Atwell’s (1998) main principles for the successful Reading Writing Workshop is that students be given choice in their reading and writing selections. My focus students’ comments about the poems they chose versus the poems I chose for them support this research.

Table 4.3 lists the number of times the focus students mentioned in their pre- and post- workshop interviews that they liked to read poetry. In both cases after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, student enjoyment of both reading and writing poetry increased.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Likes reading poetry</th>
<th>Pre-</th>
<th>Post-</th>
<th>Likes writing poetry</th>
<th>Pre-</th>
<th>Post-</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Rosalie</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mercaides</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Derek</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kody</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vienna</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kunte</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Numbers represent number of times students said they liked reading poetry in their interviews

Table 4.3. Focus Students “Liking Poetry” Utterances in Interviews
Focus Students and Definitions of Poetry

The students’ definitions of poetry prior to the workshop indicated their lack of experience with reading and writing poetry in previous years, and a vague understanding of some difference from prose in form. At the same time they would often refer to poetry as a story. Their responses are typical of students who have not had instruction in comprehension strategies specific to the genre of poetry (Pike, 2000; Eva-Wood, 2004). By the workshop’s conclusion, the focus students had a slightly clearer understanding of the difference between poetry and prose, generally explaining it through the use of a few poetry terms.

Kunte. During his initial interview, Kunte described poetry as something with stanzas that usually rhymes.

It kinda has a flow to it…it’s usually telling a story. It’s kinda like you really gotta pay…I don’t know how to say it; it’s like you gotta really read a story to understand it, the morals of it, the theme of it.

After the workshop, Kunte, while at first claiming he couldn’t define what a poem was, went on to explain he would know one when he saw it, because it “goes in stanzas instead of paragraphs, and also has a rhyme scheme usually,” making little change in his initial definition.

Derek. For Derek a poem was a type of passage that has rhythm. He defined it more in terms of length and content, as “short and boring…usually about like life and wonders and stuff…” After the workshop, Derek’s definition of poetry included explaining that poems were written in stanzas instead of paragraphs, were rhythmic, and had “a lot of different terms…like to understand it better, like simile and
alliteration.” In addition to boring, he added the adjective confusing to his evaluative definition.

**Kody.** Kody’s initial definition of poetry was primarily concerned with purpose. Her definition did not include recognizing poems, but rather defined the writing of poems.

…if I’m writing something that’s for me then I think poetry is like something that comes from you and only you and you know what you’re talking about and it doesn’t have to rhyme or anything but really you have to have all these different words in it.

After the workshop Kody’s definition continued to be a personal one. She repeated that poetry isn’t something one learns, but instead is felt, and said, everyone writes different poetry because everyone feels different than everyone else…. [it’s] someone’s feelings… or what they’re thinking…so if you want it to be romantic or if you want it to be your life, or like something random like watermelon or something.

**Mercaides.** Initially, Mercaides defined poetry as a short story that usually rhymes, about someone or something. She knew they could be written in different ways, but could not explain what she meant when asked to elaborate. After the workshop, Mercaides added that poems are a way of expressing feelings, reiterating that many of them rhyme, and adding that poems are divided into stanzas. In remembering poems that she had read during the workshop Mercaides stated that poems could be written in such a way as to evoke memories in the reader.
**Vienna.** Vienna defined poetry as something that usually rhymed, had deep, good meaning, and was written in paragraphs. After the workshop, she defined poetry more in terms of content, saying that it would reflect people’s lives and personalities. In describing the structure of poetry, Vienna knew they were different from stories, using the term stanza instead of paragraph, and stating that they were written in sections on left side of page.

**Rosalie.** Like Mercaides, Rosalie initially defined poetry as short story, but included that it commonly was about emotions, or a way of expressing feelings. She did not mention that poetry usually rhymed, but instead said it “can be expressed in any way. Without the vocabulary to explain what she meant, she concluded with:

I can’t think how to explain it…like if you’re upset you can put certain words in it and then if you’re happy you can put in different words like happy words, express colors.

Rosalie’s definition of poetry after the workshop was a litany of terms they had learned during the workshop. She defined poetry as being written in many forms, usually in stanzas. Poetry had similes, metaphors, onomatopoeias, assonance, alliteration, all in poems to “help out, elaborate” meaning. She repeated that poetry was a way to express feelings.
Table 4.4 lists the number of times focus students used poetry terms to discuss poetry before and after the workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Used terms to discuss poetry (PTT)</th>
<th>Before</th>
<th>After</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Kunte</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Derek</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kody</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mercaides</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vienna</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rosalie</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.4. Use of Poetry Terms: Number of Times Focus Students Used Poetry Terms in Pre- and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop During Interviews

**Focus Students and Understanding of Metaphor**

Metaphors are an integral feature of poetry, and thus an understanding of how they work is necessary to read and write much poetry, but learning to recognize and to create metaphors are also tantamount to understanding one’s identity and place in the world (Ortony, 1975; Rosenblatt, 1978; Lakoff and Johnson, 1980/ 2003). To understand metaphor the student must actively read, and in doing so, must slow down, pay attention and reflect (Bartel, 1983; Hirsch, 1999).

During the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop I spent much time teaching students about metaphors, how to identify them, and how to create them. Initially most of the students had an idea that a metaphor involved some kind of comparison, but only one student was able to give an example. During the workshop, I did not always differentiate between metaphor and simile, though as the workshop progressed, students began to recall earlier definitions of simile and metaphor, primarily that they had been taught the
difference as having something to do with “like or as.” In my initial explanation to them, I explained that similes were a kind of metaphor. My purpose was to move the students beyond understanding metaphor as simply different from simile, towards understanding the concept and function of metaphor. In one of the poetry exercises, students wrote extended metaphors of several lines to describe themselves. We also examined poems that contained extended metaphors and similes beginning with the Homeric similes in *The Odyssey*. During their final interviews, in order to determine if they understood metaphor, I asked the focus students to recall the metaphor each of them had written to describe the wildness of our class at the beginning of the year.

**Kunte.** As Kunte’s first interview did not take place until after we had already discussed metaphor, I did not ask him for his definition. In the post-workshop interview, Kunte defined a metaphor as used to describe two seemingly unlike things. He had not participated in the class metaphor exercise, and could not recall an example of a metaphor.

**Derek.** Derek did not know the definition of metaphor before the workshop, but gave the example that he remembered from the film, *Forrest Gump*, “Life is like a box of chocolates.” After remembering an example, he then defined metaphor as comparing something real, or life, to an object. After the workshop, Derek remembered his first example, then defined metaphor as “putting a quality to something that shouldn’t have it.” He described his class as “an explosion because it’s crazy and you never know what will happen.”

**Kody.** When asked what a metaphor was in her initial interview, Kody said it was something compared to something else. After the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop,
she could remember writing them, but not how to define them. However, when asked to remember her metaphor for the class, she said the class was “a light switch, always on or off.” This metaphor was one that she invented for the interview, but written in her poetry notebook, was actually, “This class is a crossword puzzle.”

Mercaides. Mercaides’ first definition of a metaphor was one she recalled from an earlier year. She defined it as comparing something to another object, but had no examples. After the workshop, Mercaides defined metaphor as comparing two things with like or as. She stated that metaphors could be found in essays and poems, and everywhere. When asked for an example she recalled her personal metaphor, where she defined herself as a barking dog, “because I am loud and I put my opinion whether anybody wants it or not.” She compared the class to a jungle.

Vienna. Vienna could not explain what a metaphor was other than to say it described something. In the final interview, when asked for her definition, she said that she knew what one was, but could not recall the meaning. She did, however, remember that she had described the class as a zoo, and that she had written a poem comparing herself to a bright marker, “like the brightness of the marker part.”

Rosalie. In her initial interview, Rosalie said that a metaphor was comparing something to another thing. She remembered that metaphor did not use like or as from a previous language arts class. However, in her final interview, Rosalie defined metaphor as a comparison between two unlike things using like or as. She discussed that metaphors were found in life as well as in poetry, and remembered his class metaphor as, “This class is a jungle.”
Summary. After the workshop five of the six focus students could define metaphor, whether with the dictionary definition or their own version, and five of the six could give an example. Writing examples in exercises and reading examples in poems enabled students to recognize and recall metaphors, and four of the six defined it in their own words, further evidence that they understood the term. When students connect emotionally to poetry, as many did in their self descriptive metaphor poems, or with the self-selected poems in their Poetry Collection, According to Eve-Wood (2004), “readers’ awareness of their emotional responses to poems can lead to deeper, more complex responses to poetry” (p.189).

Table 4.5 shows the number of times the focus students recognized or gave examples of metaphors in the pre- and post-workshop interviews.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognizes metaphor (MPR)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Kunte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Derek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kody</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mercaides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vienna</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rosalie</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total:</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: Numbers indicate number of times students indicated recognition of metaphor or gave an example of metaphor on interviews.

Table 4.5. Evidence of Understanding Metaphor in Focus Students’ Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop: Occurrences in Interviews
Poetry Testing

The reality of teaching is that to see the value of a certain method or concept, many teachers and certainly administrators look to quantitative results for evidence. If the results of my research are to matter to some of my colleagues, one aspect of my research needed to involve objective testing before and after the workshop to show whether students learned more about poetry. In addition, in order to graduate, students in Ohio where I conducted my research are required as 10th graders to take and pass the Ohio Graduation Test (OGT). Included in the OGT Reading Test are two or more poems, with corresponding multiple choice, short answer, and extended response questions. To that end, I designed a short literary terms test (see Appendix J) and a pre- and post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop test of OGT poetry test items from two previous reading sections, choosing two poems for each test, to determine if students’ knowledge of poetry terms, and scores on the poetry section of the OGT would improve after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

Literary Terms Pre-and Post-Reading Writing Workshop Tests

I administered the literary terms pre-test before I began the workshop to determine if participating in the Poetry Reading Writing Poetry Workshop improved students’ recognition of literary term examples and definitions. As I observed the students take this 10-item quiz, I saw some frustration, as many of them did not know more than one or two of the terms. I had explained to them the concept of a pre-test, that I did not expect anyone to know the answers, but the frustration level was palpable. One student, A.J., shook his head after reading over the test, saying, ‘I don’t know any of these,” and he left the quiz blank. The quiz, a 10-item matching exercise, took most of
the students from 15 to 20 minutes to complete. Students were asked to match the following terms to either a definition or an example: imagery, alliteration, onomatopoeia, rhyme, personification, metaphor, stanza, lyric, meter, assonance. The literary terms quiz I administered is found in Figure 4.4.
Literary Terms Quiz

Match the terms listed in section A with the definitions or examples listed in section B.

A. Literary Terms

_____ 1. imagery
_____ 2. alliteration
_____ 3. onomatopoeia
_____ 4. rhyme scheme
_____ 5. personification
_____ 6. metaphor
_____ 7. stanza
_____ 8. lyric poetry
_____ 9. meter
_____ 10. assonance

B. Literary Terms Meanings and Examples

A. “her eyes were blue fire”
B. sometimes the equivalent of paragraph breaks, or verses in a song or poem
C. “buzzzzzzz”
D. “the tree’s branches lifted the wind”
E. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
F. making word pictures appealing to the senses
G. “She stood large, shaking the shiny white, rippling sheets into the sun’s glow”
H. “Behind my face
   There is no place
   For purple thoughts
   Or “shoulds” or “oughts”
I. “zipping instantly into the slimmest inchy crevice”
J. the regular rhythm in a poem: “Within this room/ A watcher waits”
K. musical poetry expressing feelings

Figure 4.4 Literary Terms Quiz
When the workshop was completed, I re-administered the same quiz. This time students took less than 10 minutes to complete it. A.J., who had expressed such frustration during the pre-workshop quiz, wrote answers this time, but again showed frustration by shaking his head as he took the quiz quietly. He had not been at school for the majority of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and had not made up any of the work he had missed. Two students were absent from the quiz, and made it up in the next week during their study halls.

Figure 4.5 shows the pre and post-workshop results of the literary terms 10- item matching quiz by student, and Figure 4.6 shows the pre- and post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop results by test item.

![Bar chart showing pre and post-test results for literary terms quiz by student.](image.png)

**Figure 4.5. Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop 10- Item Literary Terms Quiz Scores**
All but two students improved their scores. Vienna and Mercaides scored much lower. On that day, they were both angry and I had said something to them about their talking. They may have chosen to do poorly on the quiz, knowing that the results were part of my research data. Their application of the terms in their poetry collection responses did show evidence of knowledge of more terms than they identified on the literary terms quiz. However, Mercaides claimed to perform poorly on tests, and both Vienna and Mercaides had claimed to have difficulty remembering what they had learned from day to day. T.B and A.J. and both scored a 0 out of 10 on the pre-test and a one out of 10 on the post-test. Both students were extensively absent during the workshop. T.B.’s absences were 74; A.J.’s were 42. Neither made up work after the absences. Kody’s absences during the workshop were 12, but she made up all work, asking questions as soon as she returned. Her pre- workshop test score was already eight, so her final 10 was not surprising.
Recognition of examples of all items improved. Alliteration, meter, and assonance were the least familiar to students at the beginning of the workshop and students made the most gains in recognizing these terms. Despite extensive work with metaphor recognition and construction during the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, the metaphor item was only answered correctly by 80% of the students. While 80% is higher than the 64% previous to the workshop, I expected a higher percentage of recognition than students reported.

**Ohio Graduation Test (OGT) Poetry Test Items**

I measured student knowledge and comprehension of poetry through one other quantitative test, two poem selections on the pre-test and two poem selections on the post-test, all taken from Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT) (See Appendix L). Each test consisted of two poems and their corresponding multiple choice, short answer, and extended responses questions which I took from two past OGT tests that had been released to the public and were posted on the Ohio Department of Education website. I deliberately did not have students complete any practice OGT poetry tests before or during the workshop, as my intent was to see if the workshop method would also help students improve their understanding of poetry as evidenced through OGT reading questions. I did have students practice the method of writing short answer and extended responses during the non-workshop days, as part of their writing about current events. The possibility that practice in the test skills of short answer and extended responses may have influenced the students’ results cannot be ignored. Figure 4.7 represents the percentages of questions students answered correctly on the pre and post-workshop OGT poetry test items by student.
A comparison of the results of the pre-and post-literary terms test and the pre- and post- OGT poetry test items revealed that 11 students improved their scores on both. Two students scored a lower percentage correct on the literary terms quiz than on the OGT test, and three students scored higher on the literary terms quiz than on the OGT test.

**Poetry Reading and Writing Classroom Events**

**Poetry Reading Events**

Reading a poem gives students immediate experiences, in a way a novel, or even a short story cannot. “It gives them quickly, suddenly, just about whenever we want. John Donne is with his mistress and talking when the morning sun comes in the window. The whole situation is there the moment I open the book” (Koch, 1998, p. 109).
Throughout the 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, I conducted a number of poetry reading and writing lessons. The lessons were varied, to avoid monotony. In addition, I was using both workshop lessons that I had previously tried while continuing to incorporate some of the poems and exercises from the required curriculum. Sometimes I simply read a poem to the students at the beginning of the class, and informally asked if anyone had any response or comment before we moved on to another topic. Other times we read a poem related to the content of the unit we were doing on non-workshop days, and then discussed the poem through questions and answers as a whole class. The students broke into groups and discussed the assigned poem. Some of the group discussions were scripted with written questions, others were less scripted, and students were asked to discuss what they thought about the poem. On occasion I gave each group the poem to read and discuss within the group without reading it aloud first. These poem readings were also discussed in writing individually through the students’ journals. Because my intent was to incorporate the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop within the curriculum, there were several poems that I chose because they were in the textbook and related to the other readings the students were required to complete.

I collected data from these Poetry Reading Events from the audio-taped group discussions, augmented by the video-taping of the class sections. In addition, I used the data I wrote in my teacher journal as I observed the class sessions and group discussions. The data from student journal responses was another source for my analysis of these events and their effects on student attitude and performance.
Two classroom reading lessons involved student choice of poems. The first, which I called the Poetry Supermarket, was a period-long lesson (approximately 45 minutes) and the other, the Poetry Collection Project, took place in the library over a two-week period, and then for two days in the classroom. In this section I will give examples of each lesson.

Class poems. I always chose the class poems, either related to the content of the other days’ lessons, directly related to a poetry lesson, or to use as a model for an imitation poem exercise. I chose some poems related to the curriculum because I was trying to make sure the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop was imbedded in the curriculum, not as an add-on. Others I chose specifically because they demonstrated examples of the literary terms I wanted students to recognize, or create examples of, in their own poem exercises. The occasion poems I chose because they related to current events. Table 4.6 lists the poems I chose for class or group reading and discussion.

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Teacher’s Choice of Poems to Read in Class

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems Related to Unit Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cavafy’s “Ithaca”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millay’s, “An Ancient Gesture”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parker’s “Penelope”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atwood’s “Penelopiad”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Villaneuva’s “I Was a Skinny Tomboy”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poems For Imitation Poem Exercises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cavafy’s “Ithaca”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frost’s “The Road Not Taken”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon’s “Where I’m From”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver’s “Sometimes I am Victorious and Even Beautiful”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexton’s “Courage”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kipling’s “If”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.6. Teacher’s Choice of Poems to Read in Class
Table 4.6 continued

Occasion Poems Read at Beginning of Class
   Atwood’s “You Begin” - First day of class
   Collins’ “The Names” - September 11
   Stevens’ “The House Was Quiet and the World Was Calm” - 1st week
   Alexander’s “Praise Song for the Day” - Day after Inauguration
   Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” - Snowy Day

My research diary, my notes from the video-tapes, and the students’ journals revealed what studies have shown (Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008), that when the teacher chooses the poem, the students are not as interested as when they choose the poem themselves. While my reading of poems to the class at the beginning of the period had become, if not popular, at least recognized as something they could expect, I still could observe facial expressions that seemed to say, “What does she want us to do with this?” as I read the poem. On the day I read Frost’s “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening,” students had become used to my readings, and had begun to relate what they heard to other events. After this reading, a student remembered that he had seen the last line, “And miles to go before I sleep,” on the back of the school’s cross-country shirts, and seemed surprised and pleased that he recognized it.

During the teaching of Homer’s The Odyssey, I included additional modern poems as part of the workshop. Two poems, Millay’s “An Ancient Gesture,” and Atwood’s “Penelopiad” were included in the textbook, so I chose to have the students read them. I read Millay’s poem to the class, and as I listened to their responses in the whole class discussion, it seemed that the poem held their attention and that they were comprehending at least the literal meaning of it. However, the terse comments of
“boring,” and “confusing” in many of their journals as they reflected upon the day’s poems contradicted my initial opinion. I gave the students a copy of Atwood’s “Penelopiad” the next day, and a handout with specific questions. After listening to the audio-taped groups discussions, it was clear that students were able to understand some of the questions, and there was evidence that they were helping each other when they came upon a difficult question. That working in groups to read a poem helped them understand was validated in some of their poetry journal reflections, as was the prevailing opinion that this poem too was “boring.” When we discussed the poem as a class, one comment was that the only reason they read this one was because I “made them.” In preparation for writing poems about themselves two weeks later, I had the students read another poem, Villeneuva’s “I Was a Skinny Tomboy.” Each group read the poem, then discussed the questions that accompanied it in the textbook. The students had become more comfortable working in groups by now, and most focused on discussing the poem. A few however, clearly were not focused. Mercaides put her head down during the discussion, while Kody turned off the microphone in her group, then turned it up and started blowing loudly into the microphone. Kunte said he couldn’t relate. In the following day’s responses to the poem in their journals, most students had brief comments to make, but the three who were not participating echoed their disinterest in the journals.

Student responses to class poems. Table 4.7 lists the individual students’ responses to the poem in their journals as they answered the questions, “What did you think of as you read the poem?” and “How did the poem make you feel as you read it?
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Students</th>
<th>What students think of</th>
<th>What students feel</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>*Kunte</td>
<td>visualizing author’s description</td>
<td>no different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Derek</td>
<td>she sounds like a hillbilly</td>
<td>bored</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Mercaides</td>
<td>don’t remember</td>
<td>(blank)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Vienna</td>
<td>poem is different and creative</td>
<td>no different, normal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Kody</td>
<td>made no sense, just her feelings</td>
<td>don’t remember it well</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>*Rosalie</td>
<td>about how I was a tomboy And refused to wear pink</td>
<td>how I used to feel rebellious and loathed humans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chuck</td>
<td>reminded me of someone I know</td>
<td>no different</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>T.B.</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Justin</td>
<td>that the girl could whatever she wants</td>
<td>curious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alejandro</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bella</td>
<td>it was interesting and strange</td>
<td>nothing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>McLovin</td>
<td>it is a weird story</td>
<td>didn’t read it</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chase</td>
<td>girl didn’t like being a girl</td>
<td>made me realize girls have more work than I thought</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Penelope</td>
<td>I thought of myself</td>
<td>happy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D.C.</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A.J.</td>
<td>absent</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.7. Students’ Journal Responses to “I was a Skinny Tomboy”
Poetry supermarket. The Poetry Supermarket is an activity that I found years ago from another teacher, one of those activities that hides in the teacher’s disorganized file cabinets and resurfaces every so often when there is a need to generate some enthusiasm. Discouraged by the early lack of enthusiasm, I decided to insert this activity into this year’s workshop, in between the required content.

Before the students arrive in class, I tape 20 poems around the room, on walls, windows, boards, and the door. I have chosen these poems from a large file that grows each year that I have all my classes participate in “Poetry on the Wall.” For that activity, students bring a copy of their favorite poem, or their parent’s or teacher’s favorite poem to school, and we tape them up in the hallway, where they remain for a week or two. After the activity, I remove the poems and add them to my file. When I then choose poems for the Poetry Supermarket, I choose poems that are student favorites from past years, hoping this will encourage enthusiastic reading.

For the Poetry Supermarket activity, I welcome students at the door with a three page packet, saying, “Welcome to my Supermarket. Make your list and buy your favorite.” Students must then circulate around the room, writing down the authors and titles of all the poems as they read them, starring their most and least favorite. The next step is to go back to the most and least favorite, and to copy the whole poems in their packet. When finished, they sit at their desks, and answer six questions about each poem.

This year, the supermarket activity elicited attention from 100% of the students. Because they were so active, walking around, and getting to stand with their friends gave the class a more relaxed atmosphere. As I sat at my desk, I observed all of the students
walking around, writing, discussing, reading, and trying to do the activity. As with many of the activities for this class, it was not finished in the first day, but the second day students were eager to get started, and again, all students participated. During the second day, Kody was called to the office for one of her many infractions. She refused to go because she was too busy finding her favorite poem, and I had to email the discipline officer to tell him she would be late.

Table 4.8 contains a list of this year’s Poetry Supermarket poems, and why students chose them as their favorite or least favorite.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poem choices</th>
<th>Number of times chosen as favorites</th>
<th>Reasons for choice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boyd, Donna Gray “Life’s Ribbons”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>describes life from another’s point of view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bronte, Emily “Fall, Leaves, Fall”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frost, Robert “Fire and Ice”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>title attracted him, likes the image of the end of the world, has “jingle” to it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>like it but don’t know word “suffice” would share with dad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frost, Robert “The Runaway”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gluck, Louise “The Mirror”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>line “you cut yourself” drew her attention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harnett, Linda “Somewhere”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>tries to explain the sounds of the beach and ocean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden, Robert “Monet’s Waterlilies”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.8. Favorite Poetry Supermarket Poems
Table 4.8 continued

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poet</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kunitz, Stanley “The Portrait”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>reminds of childhood incident, how hurt never goes away, flows easily</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Markham, Edwin “Outwitted”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>makes point about many challenges in life</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Likes idea of circle shutting you out</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morrison, James Douglas “Horse Latitudes”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nash, Ogden “The Germ”</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>short, sweet, no theme, random, funny</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver, Mary “In Blackwater Woods”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>outdoorsy,” cool metaphor, share with sis</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roethke, Theodore “Child on Top of a Greenhouse”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roethke, Theodore “The Premonition”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Service, Robert “Laughter”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Simic, Charles “Watermelons”</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>title, easy, green Buddha metaphor, short</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Little brother would laugh. Mom would like</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Brings back memories of eating watermelon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennyson, Alfred “The Eagle”</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>makes sense, has clear meaning, likes metaphor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown “Life”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whitman, Ruth “Listening to Grownups Quarrelling”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wright, Charles “Snow”</td>
<td>0</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Given the enthusiasm shown by students as they participated in the activity, allowing students to choose their own poem seems a better method to engender positive attitudes towards poetry. The students’ Poetry Supermarket choices revealed the brevity of poem might have had something to do with their choices since part of the activity was to write down the poem, but only two students actually said in their writing they chose a poem because it was short. Other reasons given for choosing a favorite were that the poem made sense, brought back memories, reminded them of something personal, rhymed or didn’t rhyme, might appeal to a relative, was funny, had an interesting title, or contained words that were interesting. The reasons students chose poems as their least favorites were that they made no sense, were “stupid,” had nothing attractive in them, or had no rhyme or meter.

**Poetry collection project: reader’s choice section.** By the eighth week, we had had so many snow days, vacation days, and assembly days as interruptions that I needed an activity to pull the students back into the workshop. With the success of the my 12\textsuperscript{th} grade AP students Poetry Collection Project, I decided yet again to change my plans for the 9\textsuperscript{th} grade workshop and to incorporate some of the unit I still needed to teach them per the required curriculum into a poetry collection unit. The reading part of the poetry collection involved searching through poetry books and collections to find three favorite poems. Students then had to copy the poems, write a ½ page response for each, and pick one of the poems to illustrate either in a PowerPoint, a computer generated drawing, a hand illustrated copy, or a musical response. I showed students examples from those illustrations made by my AP students, and also played for them two poems that students...
had put to music, and allowed them to look through the Advanced Placement students’
written projects as well.

I scheduled time in the media center for the last two weeks of the Poetry Reading
Writing Workshop, and had the media specialist pull all the poetry books from the
shelves, adding my own classroom collection to our workroom in the media center. In
past years, I had collected many of the poetry books from the media center and worked
on this in class, but since our new media center has computer labs, I chose to schedule
them in the media center. I did not ask students to bring poems from home since most
expressed in their surveys or interviews that they did not read much poetry outside of
school. However, Rosalie and Bella asked me if they could bring in their own books, and
I agreed since my goal was to have them choose poems themselves.

As students worked on this activity I noticed that many of the students were
excited, particularly about the illustrations. Several, who were reluctant or at least not
very enthusiastic during earlier workshop activities, spent a long time illustrating,
looking for pictures and drawing either with the computer or by hand. At least six
students began with the illustrated poems as soon as they found a poem they liked.
Cooperation from students who were skilled at using the illustration software clearly
gave them confidence which spilled over into their attitude when they started the written
responses. Students actively shared poems they found, and read through multiple
selected works to find poems they liked and wanted to copy. Students were more focused
in the computer lab than in the classroom as they searched for poems, and as they
responded to them. There were no disciplinary referrals during that time, an issue that
had still been interrupting the workshop, though less frequently. While all students were
During the workshop, several did not complete or turn in parts of their collection. A.J. had only completed the copying of the poems, and had one-line responses, Kunte copied the poems, but turned in no responses, T.B. and Justin were absent for a part of the last two weeks, and did not make up all of the work they missed. Table 4.9 lists the poems chosen by students as their favorites from the poetry collections available to them.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student</th>
<th>Favorites from Poetry Collection</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| *Kunte-* | “Work” no author listed  
|         | “Relationship” no author listed |
| *Derek-* | “About being very good and far better than most but still not quite good enough to take on the Atlantic Ocean” - John Ciardi  
|         | “About Trapping in the North Woods” - John Ciardi  
|         | “The Old Lady in Bumbletown” - John Ciardi |
| *Kody-* | “I Remember My Father’s Hands” - Lisa Suhair Majaj  
|         | “Apartment” - Cynthia Rylant  
|         | “When I was a Child” - Yehuda Amichai |
| *Mercaides-* | “Zora” - Jessie Schell  
|          | “My Father’s Leaving” - Ira Sadoff  
|          | 50-50” - Langston Hughes |
| *Vienna-* | “Bowling Alley” - Michael Van Wallegan  
|          | “High School” - George Roberts  
|          | “Map” - J. Patrick Lewis |
| *Rosalie-* | “The Peace of Wild Things” - Wendell Berry  
|           | “The Black Snake” - Mary Oliver  
|           | “We reached an old wolf in time to watch…” - Aldo Leopold |

Table 4.9. Favorite Poems from the Poetry Collection Project
Table 4.9 continued

Chuck-  
“Everything the Power of the World does is Done in a Circle” (Native American)  
“Refugee Blues”-Roberta Nobleman  
“War”- Ebeneezer Elliot  

T.B.-  
not completed  

Justin-  
“Niagara”- Carl Sandburg  
“To Make a Prairie”- Emily Dickinson  
“City Traffic”- Eve Merriam  

Allejandro (Silas)-  
“The Road Not Taken”- Robert Frost – (no response)  
“The Black Snake”- Mary Oliver  
“who are you little i?”- e.e. cummings  

Bella-  
“The Wolf’s Allegiance to its Pack Leaders”- Daniel Wood  
“Now is the Law of the Jungle”- Rudyard Kipling  
“A Noiseless Patient Spider”- Walt Whitman  

Mc Lovin-  
“Wars”- Carl Sandburg  
“The Silent One”-Ivor Gurney  
“Cavalry Crossing a Ford”-Walt Whitman  

Chase-  
not completed  

Penelope-  
“The Raven”- Edgar Allen Poe (no responses)  

D.C.-  
“The Drum”- John Stallworthy  
“War”- Stephen Crane  
“The Bridge”- Kasir Affif  

A.J.-  
“Roll Call” no author listed  
“Wash” no author listed  
“Optimistic Man” no author listed
Students’ responses to their favorite poems in the project were generally much more specific than their earlier journal responses to class poems or their Poetry Supermarket responses to poems I had chosen for them. By the last two weeks of the workshop, the students had acquired a vocabulary for talking about poems, and could refer to both structure and content in their reasons for choosing poems. Popular reasons for choosing poems were similar to those mentioned in the Poetry Supermarket responses. Poems that brought back memories, that reminded them of things they liked, that were funny, dealt with subjects of interest to them, or had appealing messages, were all reasons for choosing their favorites. McLovin’s collection of war poems reminded him of his grandfather’s stories of “back in the day.” Derek chose a poem by John Ciardi about a swimmer, because its message “if you try something, and only give 90%, then you’re not going to make it and might as well not have tried.” The sadness of the poem, “My Father’s Leaving,” reminded Mercaides of her parents’ divorce, and expressed the feelings she experienced.

Other students chose poems for their language or structure. Several chose poems based on language and structure in the Poetry Supermarket activity, choosing poems based on metaphors they liked, titles that were appealing, or brevity. In the Poetry Collection project, student responses were longer and more personal. Kody liked the simile in a poem by Yehuda Amichai: “only my mother’s words went with me like a sandwich wrapped in rustling wax paper.” Rosalie chose similes from Oliver’s, “The Black Snake’ because they made her think about how things work. Rhyme and repetition were what appealed to Chuck in the poem, “Refugee Blues.” Allejandro chose the same poem, and while he didn’t use the word imagery, he did state that the author “uses words
to make an image in your head…you can visualize what the author is saying.” In his responses to poems, Chase mentioned free verse, rhyming, colors being compared to other things (without using the term metaphor) as elements that he considered when choosing his favorite poems.

During the final two days of the workshop, students came back to the classroom to share parts of their collection. Each student shared his or her visual representation of a selected poem with the whole class, then the class divided into groups to share the whole collection with the small group. The collections were passed around, and the students each read aloud one of their own or one of their chosen poems. I gave students small comment strips for each presenter, and asked them to write a short, specific positive response about one aspect of each student’s collection. There was much reluctance during part of this sharing, but when students received their comment sheets, they shared and laughed at the comments, and there was visible embarrassment and smiling pride exhibited as they read over the compliments they received. Many of the students comment on the visuals, and there were several comments on the choices of poems, as well as the reader’s delivery. T.B.’s group commented on her selection of poems as well as her reading:

“Put good pictures with the poems.”

“Liked the poem she chose because it was funny.”

“Liked how she read her poem- she was confident.”

“It was about a kid not doing his homework.”

“T.B. did good because she was a clear speaker.”

D.C.’s comment sheets reflected how he read his poem about war.
He gave emotion to his poem.”
“I liked the reading. It was confident.”
“He seemed happy when he read it.”
“He looked at everyone and spoke loud enough for everyone to hear.”

Penelope’s comments focused on the poem’s illustration and the poem’s diction.
“I like her poem because it is easy to understand.”
“Title is pretty cool how it says “spooky!”
“I like how the front says spoooooky poems because it looks cool.”
“I like the way it rhymes.”
“I guess I like the poem because of how the words are.”

**Summary of Poetry Reading Exercises.** Students expressed that they tried to understand poems I gave them by reading and re-reading them. Often there were comments of confusion, not understanding, and the strategy became to just say that. This strategy remained unaltered. Later when we read some poems in groups, a few discussed how they understood it more by discussing it in their groups. The group discussions guided by analytical questions were the least understood and least appreciated according to the students’ comments in their journals. There was evidence that many were not interested in the poems that I required them to read. When asked to tell what a poem was about, the interpretation was usually totally literal- they saw the story but not any further interpretation. Once again, their dissatisfaction with the poems, and unwillingness to or inability to understand them is supported by research that suggests student choice is paramount to success in reading and writing poetry (Atwell, 1998; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008; Lauscher, 2007).
When students were given the freedom to choose poems, their responses grew more animated, and as they learned how to identify and talk about what they liked in the poems, their responses were clearer and longer (Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008). The addition of the visual element and the subsequent sharing of the collection with the class seemed a motivating factor in their positive attitude towards reading poetry.

**Poetry Writing Events**

Poetry allows its readers and writers to play with language, which leads to linguistic mastery. Approaching the writing of poetry in this manner, as play, rather than as a high stakes product to be tested, provides opportunities for students to examine and to manipulate language (e.g., Smith, 1989; Lipsett, 2001; Hess, 2003; Wormser, 2004; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008).

One way for students to learn more about poetry is to write it often. Students’ fears of not being able to write poems can be quelled by explaining to them that they are writing poetry exercises. During the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, I used poetry exercises as a way for students to understand poetry elements and structure, as well as a vehicle for understanding how to read poems. Poetry exercises are word play; a type of play that focuses on language at the level of words. Some poem exercises came from poems that the students read. Imitating the poems by using the same first line, or the same structure gives the students a vehicle for expressing their ideas that is short and condensed, often less daunting than an essay. Imitation poems also help students understand the very poem they are imitating, forcing them to look closely at the level of word and phrase to discover meaning. To teach literary terms, I often used small poem exercises that incorporate the term, allowing them to understand the function of a
technique rather than just being able to identify it. In this section I will describe poetry writing exercises and the process of introducing the exercises. I will also give examples of some student exercises. Table 4.10 lists the poem writing exercises used in the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Poetry Writing Exercises</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Poems Used for Imitation Poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lyon’s “Where I’m From” for “I am From” poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavafy’s “Ithaca” for “When You Set Out on Your Journey” imitation poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oliver’s “Sometimes I am Victorious and Even Beautiful” for 1st line poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexton’s “Courage” for imitation poem</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kipling’s “If” for “If you can say no” oral whole class poem and imitation poem exercise</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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Table 4.10. Poetry Writing Exercises

**Imitation Poems.** During the first days of the workshop I gave students a poem called “Where I’m From” by George Ella Lyon. I read this poem aloud, then as a whole class we discussed the poem, looking at repeated lines, different types of senses described by the poet, and explaining some of the poet’s memories that were unfamiliar to the students. We talked about how the poem didn’t rhyme, a concept very foreign to many students in their early experiences with poetry. Next I read some more current poem
exercises from former students, and my own version. Then I asked the students to think about and then list sensory memories: smells they remembered, phrases they always remembered being told growing up, emotions, tactile memories, activities, but to fit the list into the same structure as the poems they had just heard. As this was the first poem exercise of the workshop, I was not surprised to hear audible complaints. From Mercaides came, “Mrs. Koukis! I really can’t think of anything. I can only remember last week and that’s it!” McLovin’s page was empty after five minutes; A.J. had only one line after 15 minutes. From Kody, emitted in a loud shriek, spilled forth, “Oh my God! I can’t do this!” Then suddenly there was quiet. The bell rang too soon as usual, and I explained we would finish the next day. Kody, who had never done one assignment as homework before, took hers home and brought it back finished the next day. Most of the others picked up where they left off the next day, sharing lines as they worked with each other. Kody’s and T.B.’s versions of the finished “I am From” poems show their use of the poem form to reflect on events in their childhood. The initial confusion and dislike of the poem was overcome by the identification of these students’ feelings in relation to the content of the poem and use of the poem’s form to identify with the text of the original poem (Eva-Wood, 2004).
I Am From

I am from Mario Brothers Video games,
Sitting in the middle of the living room floor
Eating a snack
And me always saying how I’m going to win.

I am from changing diapers
And making 1,000 bottles
To rocking baby cribs
And watching them get older year by year.

I am from climbing trees,
To races at recess
From who can climb the rope and ring
the bell first
and when you try to beat your partner in
the shuttle run.

I am from running around bases,
Catching flying balls,
Outrunning the thrower
And stomping on Home Plate.

I am from a huge family.
From crying twin sisters
To laughing cousins
A humiliating brother
And just one big crazy family
Kody

I am From

I am from sandboxes, swing sets,
And tire swings.
I am from pear trees, corn fields, and
Tiny crickets all over my yard.
I am from my dog who is young and
Ready to play.

I am from corn bread and soup beans,
They made lunch just right,
From the life my grandma lost to cancer,
The ring my father gave to my mother.
On my bookshelf are photo albums
Pouring out pictures
A pile of old memories
I am from my mother, and shopping,
To “Stand up” and “Speak out”
I am from backyards to kitchens
Living rooms also
Room to room, couch to couch.
I am from here and there
Fried zucchini and fruit punch.
To fill my room with joy.
I am from that time.
Those are my memories.
I will never let them go.
T.B.

Metaphor poem exercises. In many English classes, the most students experience in the teaching of and learning of metaphors is the ability to distinguish between metaphor and simile, and when asked what a metaphor is, will routinely say
something like, “Is that the one which uses like or as, or the one that doesn’t?” In the reading and creating of poetic metaphors, our students can learn to give pause, to think, and to recognize ways to express emotion (Bartel, 1983; Eva-Wood, 2008). Reading and writing metaphors may help students see how language shapes our world. A key understanding of metaphor is that it is not just a language device, but also a device that allows us to make connections between what we feel inside and what we are going through, and the expanse of the world around us (Hermsen, 2003).

In the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, metaphors were the topic of many conversations. One of the most interesting lessons was the metaphor exercise that occurred during the chaotic first few weeks, when the class was often on the verge of volcanic eruption. After a particularly trying conversation about how they should behave when a substitute teacher was taking my place, I asked them to write a metaphor to describe the class. Their results, while not all particularly unique, gave them insight into their own actions, and this spawned a generation of new metaphors to describe themselves as individuals within the class. The class was a jungle, a circus, a prison, a crossword puzzle, and air horn. Penelope’s became a short but accurate revised poem:

This class is like a teenager’s purse.
Messy, disorganized, big,
And yet, somehow, everything
stays in order.

The next day’s individual metaphor poems began with a metaphor for me, assigned to me by Kody. “Mrs. Koukis- you are a clock. We watch you and time never moves.” And I sacrificed my pride at being called boring because the class immediately
understood the metaphor. Allejando described himself:

I am a book with many pages
Waiting to be read.

I am a book with many stories
Waiting to be heard.

I am a book
Some people don’t like to read.

Vienna revised her personal metaphor and included it in the self-written poetry section of her poetry collection. She made each line a separate color of ink, and illustrated the poem with a picture of colored markers.

I am a bright colored marker.

I stand out in the crowd (usually) I see the rainbow.

I like to be creative, color and draw.

I’ve got a sense of humor that matches my personality

And that’s how I’m

A bright colored marker.

In the last week of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, we were reading about people who were in the news for their accomplishments. The poem that accompanied this reading on workshop day was Oliver’s “Sometimes I am Victorious and Even Beautiful.” In their journals the day before reading the poem, I asked students to write for ten minutes about something they had accomplished. At the end of the period I read Oliver’s poem, and the next day, read it once again, giving them a copy. Having written imitation
poems several other times, the students were familiar with the task. We looked closely at the poem, and they discovered the personification of the sun at the end, so we decided as a class that the imitation poem requirements would be the first line and an example of personification, would be required in the poem, using the accomplishment they had written about in their journals as content. This exercise came the week that grade cards had been distributed, and many of their grades were less than victorious. It provided them an opportunity to look at themselves in a positive light, to remember that their identities were not only as students. Derek was victorious in his skiing, Kody, in her risk-taking, Vienna in her bowling. Mercaides saw beauty and felt victorious as she handed her father her grade card with good grades on it, and Rosalie felt the same as her “art came to life and spoke” to her. Following is Penelope’s poem exercise:

Sometimes I am victorious and even beautiful-
Like when I lay on my bed with my two best friends- paper and pencil.
I let my red CD player sing my favorite song for inspiration
I lay on my bed in my own world for hours
Watching as my pen and fingers tango across the 
Blue and white dance floor to the beat of my CD player’s voice.
I ponder what I should sketch next-
A person? A place? An object? 
There are so many possibilities,
So many things I could create.
Eventually I must leave my beautiful safe place of drawing-
My fingers and pencil dance for the last time, my CD player 
Belts out one last song- And I have a remarkable drawing.
Summary of poetry writing exercises. Except for the “I am From” poem, which most students completed, they had the most difficulty with imitation poems. The more difficult poems that I used for their writing of imitation poems, such as Cavafy’s “Ithaca”, received less responses, although those who did respond showed clearly that they both understood the poem they were reading and could use some of the techniques in their own exercises. If the exercise was a less specific format, and students could choose what to write about, more students completed it. Very few students would finish a poem for homework, more a reflection on their unwillingness as a whole to do any homework. However, two students who rarely turned in any homework did work on their poem exercises, particularly those they revised for the writing section of the poetry collection.

The other difficulty was with absences. Very few of these students would make up any work they missed. With these students, it was difficult to get carryover work from day to day, and absences and interruptions kept many from succeeding. Whether students completed the exercises or not depended on several criteria: absences, suspensions, difficulty of poem if imitation poem, whether or not time was given to complete poem in class, and interest in the topic. More interest was given to poem exercises that students could find immediate subject matter for, such as personal memories or topics of interest to their personal lives.

Figure 4.8 indicates the number of poem exercises each student completed during the workshop.
At the beginning of writing poetry exercises, there was evidence of frustration and several students did not write anything. As the exercises continued, more students wrote, and by the last week, almost all students had at least attempted some of the exercises. Journal and final evaluation responses indicated enthusiasm for over half of the poetry exercises, and a sense of accomplishment from most students that they had been able to write the exercises. My anecdotal experience when teaching the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop in the past was similar, and the data I collected for this research confirmed my previous experiences with teaching poetry in a multi-week workshop format.

**Poetry’s Crucial Role in my Philosophy of Teaching the Marginalized Reader**

A commitment to poetry guides the teaching of my classes. While not a vital part of my department’s grade level curricula, as a poet and as a teacher who has experienced the emotional power and the success that students feel when they are able to understand and write poetry, I have always considered the reading and writing of poetry crucial to
the design of my classroom lesson plans and have always made a place for the teaching and providing of poetry contexts, regardless of, and sometimes despite the difficulty of “fitting” it with the many required content pieces.

My belief is that the teacher is not a transmitter of knowledge, but rather a facilitator of the process of learning. Bruner (1986), in his discussion of developmental theory says, “The central technical concern will be “how to create in the young an appreciation of the fact that meaning and reality are created and not discovered” (p.141). Because struggling, marginalized students often feel trapped in an identity that was created for them, one of my goals has always been to find a method of instruction that will allow these students to see that identity can be changed, that according to Bruner (1986) “many worlds are possible, that meaning and reality are created and not discovered” (p. 141)

The collision of the two worlds of teaching poetry and teaching the marginalized student came in my pursuit of a master’s degree, and the two worlds began their joint orbit as I continued through doctoral studies. I have found my particular place within the domains of teaching and researching through my progression from the collection of anecdotal evidence and reflections as a teacher to the systematic search of the practitioner researcher.

Summary

In this chapter I analyzed and described the students’ attitudes towards poetry and themselves as successful 9th grade English students before and after a 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. I examined whether the 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop approach enabled the students to learn more about poetry terms and to perform
better on the poetry section of a high stakes 10th grade graduation test after participating in the workshop. I described the classroom context in which the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop approach was used, and the attitudes and academic performances of students with a more specific description of the six focus students and their participation in the workshop through their interviews and their reading and writing tasks. I concluded the chapter with a section describing the inextricable role that being a practitioner researcher plays in the research study.

In the following chapter I will discuss my findings from the data as specifically related to my research questions, the limitations of my study, and the implications for further research on the subject.
Chapter 5: Findings and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to discover whether marginalized (Moje et al., 2000), 9th grade students in a low-level, tracked English class perceived themselves as more successful students in English class after participating in a 10-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and whether their knowledge of poetry terms and concepts such as metaphor, and subsequent performance on the poetry sections of standardized tests improved. My intent was to affirm my belief that teaching students how to read, understand and enjoy poetry is necessary for students in the lowest track of English classes.

My nested case study focused on a single class of 19 students in a 9th grade English class designated as average level by the school course of study, but in reality the lowest level in a tracked system. As a practitioner researcher in the class, I conducted in-depth research with six focus students who were chosen because they had low grades from 8th grade English class, professed a dislike for poetry or were lower to middle achieving readers. While there were other students than these six in the class who qualified as focus students, only these six assented and were available to take part in the study as focus students.

Within the confines of my structured curriculum, I attempted to give the students as much choice as possible in their selection of poems to read during a 10-week Poetry
Reading Writing Workshop. I modified Atwell’s (1998) Reading Writing Workshop by adding small group discussions and some teacher selected poems and assignments.

I collected data on the class and the six focus students over the course of three months. While the original data collection period was to be two to three days per week within a 10-week period, the workshop experience actually was extended throughout 12 weeks, due to interruptions common to school classrooms such as weather related closings, assemblies, and administrative interruptions during the school year.

The types of instruments I used to collect data were those common to case study research: surveys, observations and reflections, interviews, both structured and semi-structured, audio-taped group discussions, video-taped class sessions, research diaries and journals, and collection of documents from the students.

Data analysis for my nested case study was ongoing and recursive between fieldwork and reflection. Data were coded for patterns that represented categories pertaining to my research questions and coding was refined as I gathered and re-read additional data sources. These analytical steps were designed to further explore my research questions:

1. How do disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) readers in a 9th grade English class feel about poetry through experiencing reading and writing poetry in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop in contrast to their prior experiences with poetry learning in their previous language arts classrooms?

2. Do students develop identities as successful readers and writers in English class through participation in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

3. Do students’ knowledge and use of poetry terms improve and do their performances on high stakes standardized reading test questions improve through participating in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?
4. Do students’ understandings of metaphoric language change from before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

In this chapter, I will first summarize the findings of the data analysis from Chapter Four, situating the data within the existing research literature and exploring each of my questions. Next, I will discuss the limitations of this study. Finally, I will discuss implications based on my analysis and findings.

A Return to the Research Questions

Question One

How do disillusioned, marginalized (Moje et al., 2000) readers in a 9th grade English class feel about poetry through experiencing reading and writing poetry in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop in contrast to their prior experiences with poetry learning in their previous language arts classrooms?

Students in traditional low-level English classes typically have little experience with poetry reading and writing (Oakes, 1985; Kozol, 1991; Gamoran & Carbonaro, 2002; Lee, 2007). My students were no different. The focus students’ discussions of what they learned in elementary school and middle school was sparse; few remembered more than a small unit, or a week of reading, and the only poems and authors they remembered were Poe and Shel Silverstein. The only poem types that students remembered writing in middle school were acrostics and haiku.

From the attitude surveys I administered to all of the students, it would seem that enjoyment for reading poetry was about the same before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, as only one more student indicated enjoying reading poetry for a
total of seven of the nineteen students. The survey results indicated that even less students enjoyed learning about poetry, both the reading and writing aspect. Only two students indicated any enjoyment for learning about how to read poetry, and only three for learning to write poetry after the workshop. Were this my only indication of student enjoyment of poetry through the experience of a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, I would assume that there was no difference between traditional low-level English classes and my own as far as student enjoyment of poetry, but a close examination of the focus students’ remarks from their interviews, and my observations recorded in my research diary, teacher journal, and observed in the videos belies their responses on the survey. Students’ definitions of good student did not really change, and as they are entrenched in a system where grades drive where they are placed, whether they move on to the next year, and ultimately whether they graduate, a survey that is not part of a grade is of little importance to them. In addition to the rather cavalier attitude most students displayed as they took the survey, the post-workshop survey was given right after students received their grade cards, and emphasis on grades was again at the forefront of their minds as they took the survey. While many had done well academically within the poetry workshop, it was only part of their English grade, and factoring in attendance issues, lack of makeup work and homework from the days when they were not in the workshop, many of their grades continued to be lower. When asked the same questions about enjoyment of reading and writing poetry during the focus students’ interviews, students responded much more positively than on the surveys.

Discipline problems continued in this class from the first week of school through the first few weeks of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. Amidst the chaos however,
as the workshop progressed, through examination of the video-tapes and my field notes I detected a shift during workshop days, a focus on the class work that was not there previously, or even on the non-workshop days. There was less arguing, and some students began referring to poems when doing other work. Many began doing their poem-related homework, and sharing their work with others with a sense of pride. The final activity, the Poetry Collection, best exemplifies that students could enjoy reading and writing poetry. The attention to the project was almost 100% when students were present. All students participated in searching for poems they liked, even though some did not move any further than finding the poems. During the Poetry Collection activity, discipline issues were non-existent. At the final sharing and evaluation of the students’ collections, interest was high, and all students participated in writing responses praising each other’s work and reading poems aloud. Both student choice (Atwell, 1998; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008; Lauscher, 2007) and identification with feelings about the poems they chose (Rosenblatt, 1938/1995, 1978; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008) facilitated the comprehension of poems and elaboration of written expression about their identification with the poems.

**Question Two**

*Do students develop identities as successful readers and writers in English class through participation in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?*

If students are to rise above the negative labels put upon them by others, but adopted by them, then they must be able to change how they perceive themselves. Theories of identity see this as possible, through dialogic social practices and activities (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Vadeboncoeur & Stevens, 2005). Spaces
within existing places must be created where students can try on new identities and see
themselves as successful. Creating this space in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop
allows for “articulation of the self or performance of identities” (Blackburn, 2005, p. 19).

Again, if I were to examine the surveys, I do not see any shift in identity, as
students continued to base their definition of successful or unsuccessful student or their
original descriptions. Grades rule the definition, as does good behavior, or staying out of
trouble. So the fact that many of the students performed better both on the literary terms
quiz and the OGT poetry practices questions after the workshop was overshadowed by
the many discipline referrals from other classes, and the less than stellar grades that these
students often received. On the other hand, if I were to determine students’ success
according to their own definition of what a successful student is, one who gets good
grades, then examining their grades in English reveals a picture of success for 10
students, who did in fact improve their grades, during the terms which included the
workshop, and over the course of the year as well. In contrast, as they often defined
success as staying out of trouble, some students continued to have many absences due to
suspensions and skipping school, retaining their identity as unsuccessful students.

Creating spaces where students can create a successful school identity is difficult
when the place itself remains the same. Competing identities may prevent students from
changing; continued negative discourses outside the space may override any success the
student may feel (Finders, 2005). One of my focus students, Kody, exemplifies this
struggle, and I will use her as an example of a student who found the space of the Poetry
Reading Writing Workshop amenable to re-creating herself a successful identity in
English class. Kody was one of the most insubordinate students I have had in an English
class during my 20 years of teaching high school. She walked in the room swearing, and often left the same way, hurling her words at me as her target most of the time. During her interview she admitted to being mean, and losing her temper frequently, but found that it didn’t matter to her a few minutes after, when she moved on to another topic. After her initial resistance, Kody found a method of expression writing the first imitation poem. After the first two weeks of resisting reading poems, she began to concentrate on the reading and asked questions when she did not understand. During the Poetry Supermarket, she was so engrossed in the activity that when she was called to the office, she refused to go until she was finished. Her success in this class continued throughout the workshop, despite multiple suspensions due to rule infractions in other classes. In fact, she would ask for her homework so that could complete it while not at school. Despite saying she didn’t care when she yelled at people, at one point after a particularly angry tirade, Kody returned to my room with a letter that contained a small apology. English class had become the space where her identity as a successful student was important to her and she did not want to jeopardize her participation.

Kody could not sustain this identity outside the space of our class, however, and she was ultimately expelled from school. In an unusual decision, because English was the only class she was passing, the judge allowed her to return each day for one period. She succeeded in showing up every day for the rest of the year, and passed English. The English class had become Kody’s “third space” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Soja, 1995) within an institution in which she was marginalized, a safe space where she could take risks (Blackburn, 2005).
Question Three

Do students’ knowledge and use of poetry terms improve and do their performances on high stakes standardized reading test questions improve through participating in a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

Students’ knowledge of terms and performances on the Ohio Graduation Test Poetry Sections that I administered did improve after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. Recognition of examples of all items improved. Alliteration, meter, and assonance were the least familiar to students at the beginning of the workshop and students made the most gains in recognizing these terms. Did these improvements cause a shift in the students’ perceptions of themselves as successful English students? Based on their survey responses and the focus student interviews, these two tests were of little significance to them. The majority did not feel that they had improved at standardized test taking, and no one referred to the literary terms quiz in any of their journals or discussions. These two types of measures are most important in the identification of successful students for the school system, yet according the focus students’ responses in their interviews, the measures played a small role in the perception that the students held of themselves as successful students. Their definitions of success when it was defined by grades, focused more on the cumulative grades for each nine weeks. If school systems rely on standardized tests to measure the students’ growth or achievement, then those who administer them must do a better job at explaining to the students (if possible) the way these measures reflect successful learning.
Question Four

Do students’ understandings of metaphoric language change from before and after the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop?

When asked if they know what a metaphor is, many students will cite the phrase, “It’s the one that doesn’t use like or as.” Many teachers, if they teach anything about poetry, will include an exercise for students to identity similes and metaphors, either from a list or in a poem as if the identification and differentiation of the two were the most important information one needs about metaphors.

Metaphor is central to poetry and language. Through reading and writing poetry students can experience how metaphors work both in literature and in the world. Reading and writing poetry forces attention to language and allows students a space to “unsilence” (Rich, 1997) the silent through self-reflection. Metaphor requires the awareness of personal responses, and necessitates active reading (Rosenblatt, 1978; Hirsch, 1999). It can impress a concept or idea through powerful image or vivid expression. The intellectual process involved in forming and discovering metaphors allows students to explore ideas and to develop insights into themselves and the world around them (Ortony, 1975). If students are able to recognize cultural and literary metaphors, and then are able to describe themselves in terms of a metaphor, the next step may be to create a new metaphor for themselves, forming a new identity that reflects a new success.

My students could recognize metaphor in a test format. On the literary terms quiz 80% of the students identified the metaphor example after the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop as opposed to 60% before the workshop. Eva-Wood’s (2004) study of college freshmen found that students use of think-aloud and feel-aloud strategies for
comprehending poems found that when students can pay attention to how they feel as they read poems, comprehension and identification of literary elements within poems improve. During the post-workshop interviews the focus students five of the six focus students could either define or give examples of metaphors twice as many times as in the, often remembering the metaphors they had written to describe themselves. Students chose poems in their poetry collections because they liked the metaphors; they were able to describe themselves and the class in terms of metaphors, suggesting that they understood the concept quite well. The improvement in their identification of metaphor on the literary terms quiz suggests that the emotional and personal interactions with the metaphors they created in their poetry exercises resulted in improved comprehension and identification of metaphor.

Limitations of This Study

One limitation of this study may have been in the constraints I put on student choice of poems to read and to write. While I did give them choice in the previously mentioned activities, their choices were still controlled by me, as I provided the poems to choose from in the first activity, and limited the students to books in the media center and my own collections. The reality is that many teachers work in schools where they must teach specific content pieces within a defined curriculum. If within that content, students are given some choice, and guided through reading and writing while paying attention to their feelings, they still can improve both in attitude and comprehension of poetry (Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008).

One limitation of this study occurred because I did not receive assent from some of the most marginalized readers. One student had been placed in an even lower level
track since the 6th grade, and had he been a focus student, my data sources would have been richer regarding the effects of the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop on low-level marginalized readers.

Another limitation may have been in my attempt to conduct a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop modeled after Atwell’s (1998) Reading Writing Workshop, which is a very student-oriented model, but at the same time trying to adapt it to fit in the more structured format of my school’s curricular requirements. In addition, my attempt to add small group discussion was unsuccessful because I did not provide the needed scaffolding to enable students to learn how to conduct themselves in those discussion groups (Soter et al., 2008). Without such teacher modeling and scaffolding, students’ participation in their small group discussions was minimal and often ineffective, with little elaborative or exploratory talk.

In retrospect, the videos from each classroom day should have been considered as measures in themselves. The measures I chose to use did not fully capture what I discussed in my narrative, whereas use of the videos as a measurement would have added clarity and support for my findings.

My role as the practitioner researcher may also have influenced some of the data I collected. As their teacher I was sometimes the recipient of their anger. For example, when the students took their post-workshop literary terms quiz, two of the students were angry with me for a discipline issue I had dealt with. These same two students did not pass the quiz, but exhibited more knowledge of the terms several days later in the post-workshop interviews. They may have decided to deliberately fail the quiz because they knew that their results would be part of my study. The school attitude survey that I
administered to the students after the workshop fell just after students received their grade cards. Their responses could have been influenced by bad grades in their other classes, and may not have reflected how they perceived themselves as students in English class. As a researcher, my use of audio-taping and video-taping equipment could have influenced how some of the students acted during small group discussions and some of the activities. Several times during the small group discussions, students would stay silent, and I could see them glancing at the recorder. Other times, students would “perform” for the video camera, stopping in front of the camera and making faces, or yelling into the microphone.

The nature of doing research as a practitioner researcher may also have been a limitation. Doing research as the practitioner confines the research in ways that research done by an outside researcher do not, both in limits to the amount of data being collected, and the ability to devote full attention to the research without the moral obligation to put the students’ needs first. For example, my relationship with some of my focus students might have been different had I not been their primary teacher. The information I gathered from their interviews might have been much richer had I not been the person who was responsible for discipline, and who they also had to rely on for their grades,

A final limitation of this study is that is based on a small case study of one class within which is contained a case study of six focus students and conducted in a limited amount of time. Like all small qualitative studies, it is impossible to make generalizations for large populations. I cannot argue that the teaching practices are in any way “best practices” or that the interactions that I experienced with the students and the understandings I derived from them are the same for every teacher. As a practitioner
researcher, I could add to my findings by conducting the similar studies with additional 9th grade classes and doing a cross case analysis of the results.

**Implications**

**Practical Implications for Practitioner Researchers and Teachers**

Teaching and following six students as they experienced a dramatically different content and approach to learning from those they had experienced previously in English classes provided me with the opportunity to acquire significant descriptions of what they discussed, commented upon, as well as what they wrote about poems they had read, in addition to the poem exercises they created themselves.

My practitioner researcher role and the constraints put upon me as I tried to incorporate a new content concentration of poetry into an established curriculum and a constantly interrupted schedule shed light upon the difficulties teachers experience when they try to change what students are used to, regardless of whether the students’ previous experiences were enjoyable or not. My students often objected to not having worksheets that they could mindlessly fill out, as if it were their right to not be challenged.

It was impossible for me to maintain my two-day-a-week Poetry Reading Writing Workshop, and collect the data I needed or give the students the time they needed to experience the workshop. Sometimes the workshop lasted three days, and the poetry collection project lasted every day of two weeks. I had to be willing sometimes to change my original plans, as I did with the poetry journal, to elicit better data, and to free up more time for more poetry exercise writing. I had to be flexible with the curriculum content schedule, moving units around to accommodate my workshop. While my original intent had been to try to implement a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop imbedded in the
curriculum, I found it very difficult to do so. The poems that were in the textbook were often poems that the students could not relate to. The student groups were formed around those students who had given assent to be video-taped and audio-taped, forcing me to have one group that contained students with very weak skills, and many absences. This group did not function as well as the other two, a sacrifice I made for my data collection at the expense of pedagogical considerations.

In some respects these interruptions can be seen as advantages. Many studies are done in after-school settings, or with students in school who agree to meet during a time period outside of the regular class. Conducting research within the constraints of the school day, and its real life interruptions may make it more believable as a strategy for other teachers to try.

Another constraint that I experienced was in my attempt to incorporate small group discussions as part of the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop. I soon discovered that students had no experience with this kind of discussion, and that I needed time that did not exist to teach them how to work in small groups.

**Importance of student choice of poems.** Students learn better, and are more engaged when they have choices (Atwell, 1998; Eva-Wood, 2004, 2008; Lauscher, 2007). Journal comments from students who were forced to read poems I chose for them from their textbook, whether because they “fit” with the prescribed curriculum, or whether I chose them because I, as the teacher, thought they would help them learn a concept, were consistently viewed as “boring” or “confusing.” The poems in their textbooks that I chose as we were reading *The Odyssey* such as St. Vincent Millay’s “An Ancient Gesture” and Atwood’s “Penelopeiad” were all met with negative comments,
Small group discussions and subsequent journal entries revealed that students could not relate to the content or the format of these poems, and thus often summarily dismissed them as confusing and boring.

Only three times, when a poem that I chose happened to resonate with the students, did it elicit positive responses and provide a model for student imitation poems that reflected their knowledge of poetry and their ability to relate to a poem. Ella Lyons’ “Where I’m From” was the first poetry exercise I assigned which gave students an opportunity to express the events in their childhood that they remembered, and many wrote for the first time that year. Frost’s, “A Road Not Taken” spurred students to write thoughtful essays and Oliver’s “Sometimes I am Victorious and Even Beautiful” allowed students to play with metaphor to remember their own successes, whether those successes were school-oriented or not.

Not surprisingly, the most engagement the students exhibited with poetry was during the Poetry Supermarket Activity, where they could choose poems from 20 poems I had selected from previous students’ favorites, and the Poetry Collection activity, where they had the opportunity to choose their poems from a wide variety of books. In their Poetry Collection responses, there was evidence of personal transaction with the poems. Instead of resistance to efferent question and answers, or worksheets identifying elements of literature, the students found poems that they could laugh with, recall their own memories, grieve to, or celebrate. During this activity I observed students developing the aesthetic responses that Rosenblatt (1938/1995) says leads to growth in the reader’s ability to develop the imagination, and to “escape from the limitations of time and place and environment, the capacity to envisage alternatives in ways of life and in moral and
social choices, the sensitivity to thought and feeling and needs of other personalities” (p. 276).

**Importance of providing a space for change.** Within a tracked system, marginalized students have limited choices to feel successful (Oakes, 1985; Yonezawa, Wells, & Serna, 2002). When students are given a “third space” (Gutierrez, Rymes, & Larson, 1995; Soja, 1995), a “figured world” (Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner & Cain, 1998), or a space within a classroom’s Poetry Reading Writing Workshop where they can transact with poems, then they can practice and play with aspects of their identities through multiple literacies. The students in this study came into my classroom angry or uninterested for at least a month. While they needed to adjust to the unfamiliarity of no worksheets, no drills, and more choice during the Poetry Reading and Writing Workshop, by the end of the workshop more students were engaged in their class work, and more students exhibited an interest in writing poem exercises and sharing them with their peers. I do think, however, that the data I collected and analyzed can give insight into the larger considerations of what could and might occur if teachers were to untrack their marginalized students at least in the space of a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop where students are given the possibility to work through poetry to discover different aspects of themselves.

**Implications for Further Research**

There are many implications for future research associated with this study, implications in the area of the pedagogy of teaching poetry to students in a manner that allows them choice, and freedom to approach poetry from an aesthetic stance instead of as a textbook. More studies of low-level tracked, English classes need to be done to
explore the affective responses of students to reading and writing poetry. Comparative studies could be done with different methods of teaching poetry to students other than the Poetry Reading Writing Workshop. Modifications to the study, including the building in of time to model and scaffold small group discussions and incorporate them into the Reading Writing Workshop would provide additional rich data sources to examine the effects of affective and structured discussions where both teacher and students share an equal role.

This study has implications for practitioner researchers. Many practitioner researchers want their research to reach other teachers as their audience, to serve both theoretical and practical ends for both teachers and researchers. This reciprocity has as its ultimate goal the improvement of education for students. As I conducted my study, I did not close my door and play the role of researcher. I shared the pitfalls and the successes of the research process with the teachers with whom I share friendships and conversations. As we planned lessons together I shared my findings and listened to their suggestions. Studies by practitioner researchers can open conversations about research that many teachers have silenced once they leave the university setting and enter the classroom.

Another area that shows promise was touched upon in my study only near the end during the students’ Poetry Collection activity. Studies (Hermsen, 2003; O’Brien et al., 2001) that use other media to respond to poetry, and to combine with the written word show promise in motivating students to read and write poetry.

Another implication for further research concerns the types of measures needed to capture the elusive nuances that I wrote of in my narrative. In addition to the quantitative
measures such as standardized tests, videos and audiotapes of class discussions and participation in projects would provide rich descriptions as measures themselves.

An important implication for studies of poetry and marginalized students has to do with the area of teacher preparation. More studies need to be done in schools and in teacher education classes that delve into the methods, or lack of methods that teachers use to teach poetry. While there are several major studies of teacher attitudes to teaching poetry in England, there are few in the United States, perhaps because England’s National Curriculum includes poetry comprehension as one if its national standards, and poetry plays only a small role in states standards in many states in the U.S.

A final area of research that shows promise in understanding the identities of adolescents is the study of metaphor and how explicit teaching of metaphor through poetry may play a role in allowing students to become successful in schools.

Closing

I found that this study confirmed some of my original assumptions that I had observed anecdotally concerning the positive effects of teaching poetry through a Poetry Reading Writing Workshop approach. I observed more enthusiasm during the class sessions, and the data from some of the journal responses and interviews with the focus students indicated that they did enjoy themselves while reading and writing poetry. While data from the surveys indicated some students did not feel that they understood poetry, the average scores on their standardized tests over poetry showed improvement. Student identities are tied to what students define as a successful student, and if their definitions did not include scores on these individual tests, they did not see themselves as necessarily successful.
In a subsequent study, I would structure the workshop differently to achieve clearer results and richer data. I did not give myself enough time to model and scaffold the small group discussion participations, and thus that data was not as helpful as it could have been, nor was the small group discussion method as useful to facilitate student comprehension of poetry as it could have been. I still see identities as dynamic, but believe that a 10-week poetry workshop is not adequate time to allow students to work through the changes needed to see themselves as successful students in the English classroom. I would this extend the workshop, keeping it at two days per week, but continuing it for at least a semester.

Teaching with poetry is not a panacea for the ills of the underachieving class. Teaching with poetry is, however, a means of allowing students to enjoy their ability to play with language and to stretch their understanding of its power.
REFERENCES


*Poets' perspectives: Reading, writing, and teaching poetry* (pp. 17-23).

Portsmouth: Heinemann.


Erickson, F. (1986). Qualitative methods in research training. In M.C.Wittrock (Ed.), Handbook of research on teaching (pp. 119-161). New York: Macmillan.


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Appendix A: Recruitment Phone Script

Good (morning/afternoon) (parent name),

This is Susan Koukis from Marysville High School. As you may know, I am (child’s name)’s English teacher this year. In addition to teaching, I am also a student at The Ohio State University, working on my dissertation as researcher under principal investigator Dr. Anna Soter of The Ohio State University I am studying how students experience poetry workshop as part of their English class. I have examined your child’s 8th grade reading scores, (his/her) grades from 8th grade, and have had the students all take a survey that indicates their experiences with poetry. I hope to use the results of this study to help students improve their reading and writing skills, and to help them enjoy learning in English class.

I would like your child to participate in the study as a focus student. I will be observing all of the students in the class, but would like your child to be one of 8 students who will help me learn more about their experiences through participating in several audio-taped one-on-one interviews with me during (his/her) study hall during the ten-week study.

If you agree to allow your child to participate in this study, I will send an informational letter to you in the next day or two, along with a consent form for you to sign. I will also send a letter to your child and along with an assent form for (him/her) to sign. Remember, your child’s participation in this study is completely voluntary. If your child prefers not to answer a particular question during interviews or during the course of discussion, that is your child’s prerogative and your child will not be penalized in any way for doing so. You may withdraw your child’s participation at any time without penalty. Thank you for your time! I look forward to working with your child both in class and as a participant in my study.
Appendix B: Consent Form for Parents

The Ohio State University Parental Permission
For Child’s Participation in Research

Study Title:
AT THE INTERSECTION OF POETRY AND A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS: 9TH GRADERS’ PARTICIPATION IN POETRY WORKSHOP AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC IDENTITIES DEVELOPMENT

Researcher: Susan Koukis

Sponsor: Dr. Anna Soter, O.S.U.

This is a parental permission form for research participation. It contains important information about this study and what to expect if you permit your child to participate.

Your child’s participation is voluntary.

Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to discuss the study with your friends and family and to ask questions before making your decision whether or not to permit your child to participate. If you permit your child to participate, you will be asked to sign this form and will receive a copy of the form.

Purpose:
To study whether participation in a reading and writing poetry workshop will help students succeed in English class, improve their poetry test scores and reading comprehension of poetry.

Procedures/Tasks:
- Your child will need to take two surveys, two pre and posttests about poetry.
- Your child will be audio taped during group discussions.
- Your child will be videotaped during English class.
☐ If you have agreed to allow your child to participate as a focus student after a phone conversation with the teacher, Mrs. Koukis, your child will participate in audio-taped interviews with the teacher.

**Duration:**
If you have agreed to allow your child to participate as a focus student (see checked box above) I will conduct three interviews with your child, each approximately 45 minutes. These interviews will take place during your child’s study halls. In addition I will discuss my write-up of the interviews and group discussions with your child in a process called member-checking. In these discussions I will make sure that I represented your child’s comments correctly. These member checks will take approximately 15 minutes each and will take place during your child’s study halls. Within the ten-week study, your child will spend approximately 3 and ½ hours during study halls with me in the interviews and member-checking sessions.

Your child may leave the study at any time. If you or your child decides to stop participation in the study, there will be no penalty and neither you nor your child will lose any benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Your decision will not affect your future relationship with The Ohio State University.

**Risks and Benefits:**

There are no risks to your child. The activities are part of English class, and all information collected will remain anonymous. Also, all information will be kept in a locked cabinet in a locked room.

**Confidentiality:**

Efforts will be made to keep your child’s study-related information confidential.

However, there may be circumstances where this information must be released. For example, personal information regarding your child’s participation in this study may
be disclosed if required by state law. Also, your child’s records may be reviewed by the following groups (as applicable to the research):

- Office for Human Research Protections or other federal, state, or international regulatory agencies;
- The Ohio State University Institutional Review Board or Office of Responsible Research Practices;
- The sponsor, if any, or agency (including the Food and Drug Administration for FDA-regulated research) supporting the study.

Incentives:

The whole class will participate in a pizza party at the end of the study, regardless of whether you have agreed to have your child audio taped or video taped as a class or during interviews.

Participant Rights:

You or your child may refuse to participate in this study without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. If you or your child is a student or employee at Ohio State, your decision will not affect your grades or employment status.

If you and your child choose to participate in the study, you may discontinue participation at any time without penalty or loss of benefits. By signing this form, you do not give up any personal legal rights your child may have as a participant in this study.

An Institutional Review Board responsible for human subjects research at The Ohio State University reviewed this research project and found it to be acceptable, according to applicable state and federal regulations and University policies designed to protect the rights and welfare of participants in research.

Contacts and Questions:
For questions, concerns, or complaints about the study you may contact Mrs. Susan Koukis at sjk@marysville.k12.oh.us or 937 642-0010 or Dr. Anna Soter at soter.1@osu.edu or 614 292-8049
For questions about your child’s rights as a participant in this study or to discuss other study-related concerns or complaints with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251. If your child is injured as a result of participating in this study or for questions about a study-related injury, you may contact Mr. Matt Chrispin, principal, at 642-0010.

**Signing the parental permission form**

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form and I am aware that I am being asked to provide permission for my child to participate in a research study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have had them answered to my satisfaction. I voluntarily agree to permit my child to participate in this study.

I am not giving up any legal rights by signing this form. I will be given a copy of this form.

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<td>Printed name of person authorized to provide permission for subject</td>
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<td>Relationship to the subject</td>
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<td>Date and time</td>
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**Investigator/Research Staff**

I have explained the research to the participant or his/her representative before requesting the signature(s) above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

| Susan Koukis |
| Printed name of person obtaining consent | Signature of person obtaining consent |
| Date and time | AM/PM |
Appendix C: Explanatory Letters to Parents

College of Education & Human Ecology
29 West Woodruff Avenue
200 Ramseyer Hall
Columbus, Ohio 43210

Dear (name of parent):

We would like to invite your (son/daughter/other) to participate in our research study called At the Intersection of Poetry and a High School English Class: 9th Graders’ Participation in Poetry Workshop and the Relationship to Social and Academic Identities Development. Our proposal involves participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the regular class study. Our proposal involves your child participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the regular class study. We invite your child’s involvement in the following ways:

- participating in audio-taped group discussions;
- participating in video-taped discussions;
- allowing your child’s poetry exercises to be read and analyzed.

Your child’s participation will take place during the regular English class and will not involve any extra time outside of class.

The individual survey results, the audio-tapes and video-tapes of interviews and discussions will not be kept indefinitely; all tapes and transcriptions of tapes will be destroyed after one year. As with all research, your child’s participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw him or her from participation at any time without penalty. If you would like your child to participate in this study please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to Mrs. Susan Koukis at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research or your rights related to participation in this study, please feel free to contact any of us. Thank for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anna Soter
Associate Professor
(614) 292-8049

Ms. Susan Koukis
Doctoral Candidate
(937) 642-0010 ext 1123
Dear (name of parent):

We would like to invite your (son/daughter/other) to participate in our research study called At the Intersection of Poetry and a High School English Class: 9th Graders’ Participation in Poetry Workshop and the Relationship to Social and Academic Identities Development. Our proposal involves participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the regular class study. Our proposal involves your child participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the regular class study. We invite your child’s involvement in the following ways:

- participating in audio-taped group discussions;
- participating in video-taped discussions;
- allowing your child’s poetry exercises to be read and analyzed.

In addition to the above participation, your child is one of 8 students who has been invited to participate in more in-depth interviews with the teacher, Mrs. Koukis, to help the researchers understand their experiences with poetry reading and writing. Your child and the 7 others who agree to participate were chosen after examining their 8th grade reading scores, their 8th grade English grades, and their responses to a survey about their experiences with poetry. We invite your child’s involvement through the addition of:

- participating in audio-taped interviews related to your experiences with poetry and as a student.

The individual survey results, the audio-tapes and video-tapes of interviews and discussions will not be kept indefinitely; all tapes and transcriptions of tapes will be destroyed after one year. As with all research, your child’s participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw him or her from participation at any time without penalty. If you would like your child to participate in this study please read and sign the attached consent form and return it to Mrs. Susan Koukis at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research or your rights related to participation in this study, please feel free to contact either of us. Thank for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anna Soter
Associate Professor
(614) 292-8049

Ms. Susan Koukis
Doctoral Candidate
(937) 642-0010 ext 1123
Appendix D: Assent Forms for Students

The Ohio State University Assent to Participate in Research

Study Title: AT THE INTERSECTION OF POETRY AND A HIGH SCHOOL ENGLISH CLASS: 9TH GRADERS’ PARTICIPATION IN POETRY WORKSHOP AND THE RELATIONSHIP TO SOCIAL AND ACADEMIC IDENTITIES DEVELOPMENT

Researcher: MRS. SUSAN KOUKIS

Sponsor: DR. ANNA SOTER, O.S.U.

- You are being asked to be in a research study. Studies are done to find better ways to treat people or to understand things better.

- This form will tell you about the study to help you decide whether or not you want to participate.

- You should ask any questions you have before making up your mind. You can think about it and discuss it with your family or friends before you decide.

- It is okay to say “No” if you don’t want to be in the study. If you say “Yes” you can change your mind and quit being in the study at any time without getting in trouble.

- If you decide you want to be in the study, an adult (usually a parent) will also need to give permission for you to be in the study.

1. What is this study about?
This study is about students how students learn about poetry reading and writing in a poetry workshop and how they feel about poetry after participating in the workshop. It is also looks at whether participation in the workshop helps students improve on tests about poetry.

2. What will I need to do if I am in this study?
- You will need to take two surveys, two pre and posttests about poetry.
- You will be audio taped during group discussions.
- You will be videotaped during English class.
- If your parents have agreed to allow you, and you wish to participate as a focus student after a phone conversation with your parents and the teacher, Mrs. Koukis, you will participate in audio-taped interviews with the teacher.

3. How long will I be in the study?
   You will be in the study for 10 weeks.
   If you have agreed to participate as a focus student (see checked box above) you will be interviewed three times. Each interview will last approximately 45 minutes. These interviews will take place during your study halls. In addition I will discuss my write-up of the interviews and group discussions in a process called member checking. In these discussions I will make sure that I represented your comments correctly. These member checks will take approximately 15 minutes each and will take place during your study halls. In total you will spend approximately 3 and ½ hours outside of English class, but during the school day within the ten-week study.

4. Can I stop being in the study?
   You may stop being in the study at any time with no penalty.

5. What bad things might happen to me if I am in the study?
   Nothing bad will happen to you during the study.

6. What good things might happen to me if I am in the study?
   You may learn more about yourself as a learner. You may improve your reading comprehension skills and improve your test scores.

7. Will I be given anything for being in this study?
   233
The whole class will have a pizza party at the end of the study.

8. Who can I talk to about the study?

For questions about the study you may contact Dr. Anna Soter at soter.1@osu.edu or 614 292-8049 or you may ask Mrs. Koukis any questions you may have.

To discuss other study-related questions with someone who is not part of the research team, you may contact Ms. Sandra Meadows in the Office of Responsible Research Practices at 1-800-678-6251.

Signing the assent form

I have read (or someone has read to me) this form. I have had a chance to ask questions before making up my mind. I want to be in this research study.

__________________________________________ AM/PM
Signature or printed name of subject

__________________________________________ Date and time
Date and time

Investigator/Research Staff

I have explained the research to the participant before requesting the signature above. There are no blanks in this document. A copy of this form has been given to the participant or his/her representative.

Susan Koukis
Printed name of person obtaining assent

__________________________________________ AM/PM
Signature of person obtaining assent

__________________________________________ Date and time
Date and time

This form must be accompanied by an IRB approved parental permission form signed by a parent/guardian.
Appendix E: Letters of Explanation for Students

Dear (name of student):

We would like to invite you to participate in our research study called At the Intersection of Poetry and a High School English Class: 9th Graders’ Participation in Poetry Workshop and the Relationship to Social and Academic Identities Development. Our proposal involves participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the 10-week regular class study. We invite your involvement in the following ways:

- participating in audio-taped group discussions;
- participating in video-taped discussions;
- allowing your poetry exercises to be read and analyzed.

Your participation will take place during your regular English class, and will require no extra time outside of class.

The individual survey results, the audio-tapes and video-tapes of interviews and discussions will not be kept indefinitely; all tapes and transcriptions of tapes will be destroyed after one year.

As with all research, your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

If you would like to participate in this study please read and sign the attached assent form and return it to Mrs. Susan Koukis at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research or your rights related to participation in this study, please feel free to contact either of us. Thank for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anna Soter
Associate Professor
(614) 292-8049
soter.1@osu.edu

Ms. Susan Koukis
Doctoral Candidate
(937) 642-0010 ext 1123
sjk@marysville.k12.oh.us
Dear (name of student):

We would like to invite you to participate in our research study called At the Intersection of Poetry and a High School English Class: 9th Graders’ Participation in Poetry Workshop and the Relationship to Social and Academic Identities Development. Our proposal involves participating in the poetry reading writing workshop that is part of the regular 10-week class study. We invite your involvement in the following ways:

- participating in audio-taped group discussions;
- participating in video-taped discussions;
- allowing your poetry exercises to be read and analyzed.

We would also like to invite you to participate during study hall as well to help the researchers understand more about your experiences with poetry reading and writing by:

- participating in audio-taped interviews related to your experiences with poetry and as a student.

As one of 8 students to be interviewed, we estimate that it may take about 3 1/2 hours of your time outside of class, but during your study hall to participate in this project. As with all research, your participation is completely voluntary and you may choose to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

The individual survey results, the audio-tapes and video-tapes of interviews and discussions will not be kept indefinitely; all tapes and transcriptions of tapes will be destroyed after one year.

If you would like to participate in this study please read and sign the attached assent form and return it to Mrs. Susan Koukis at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions regarding this research or your rights related to participation in this study, please feel free to contact either of us. Thank for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Dr. Anna Soter
Associate Professor
(614) 292-8049
soter.1@osu.edu

Ms. Susan Koukis
Doctoral Candidate
(937) 642-0010 ext 1123
sjk@marysville.k12.oh.us
Appendix F: Figure F.1. Attitudes Towards School Survey: Pre- and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop: Individual Students

*Kunte*

![Graph showing pre-workshop and post-workshop school attitude survey items for Kunte.](image)

**Items:**
- Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
- Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
- Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
- Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
- Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
- Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

*Derek*

![Graph showing pre-workshop and post-workshop school attitude survey items for Derek.](image)

**Items:**
- Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
- Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
- Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
- Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
- Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
- Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

Figure F.1. Attitudes towards School Survey: Pre-and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey

Continued
Figure F.1 continued

*Kody*

![Bar graph showing survey items for Kody](image)

- Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
- Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
- Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
- Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
- Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
- Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

*Mercaides*

![Bar graph showing survey items for Mercaides](image)

- Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
- Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
- Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
- Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
- Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
- Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.
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Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.
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Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9\textsuperscript{th} grade LA
Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.
Figure F.1 continued

D.C.

Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

A.J.

Continued
Figure F.1 continued

| Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA) |
| Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA |
| Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA |
| Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects |
| Item 5. Consider myself a good reader |
| Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests. |
Figure F.1 continued

Bella

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Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)
Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA
Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA
Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects
Item 5. Consider myself a good reader
Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.

McLovin

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Item 1. Felt success in elementary Language Arts (LA)  
Item 2. Felt success in middle school LA  
Item 3. Expect to feel success in 9th grade LA  
Item 4. See myself as successful in other subjects  
Item 5. Consider myself a good reader  
Item 6. Feel I do well on standardized tests.
Appendix G: Figure G.1. Attitudes Towards Reading Survey: Pre- and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop: Individual Students

*Kunte*

![Graph showing survey responses for *Kunte*]

- Item 1. I enjoy reading poetry.
- Item 2. I enjoy learning more about poetry.
- Item 4. Learning to read poetry is a waste of time.
- Item 5. Only college bound students should learn to read poetry.
- Item 6. It is easy for me to read poetry.

*Derek*

![Graph showing survey responses for *Derek*]

Figure G.1. Reading Poetry Survey Pre and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey: Individual Students

Figure G.1 continued
Item 1. I enjoy reading poetry.
Item 2. I enjoy learning more about poetry.
Item 3. My English teacher in middle school made reading poetry fun.
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Item 6. It is easy for me to read poetry.

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**D.C.**

![Bar chart for D.C.](chart_d_c)

**Justin**

![Bar chart for Justin](chart_justin)

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Appendix H: Figure H.1. Attitudes Towards Writing Poetry Survey: Pre- and Post-Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey: Individual Students

*Kunte*

Item 1. I enjoy expressing my thoughts through writing poetry.
Item 2. I enjoy learning more about writing poetry.
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Item 6. It is easy for me to write poetry.

*Derek*

Figure H.1. Attitudes Towards Writing Poetry Survey: Pre- and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Survey: Individual Students

Continued
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**Mercaides**
Figure H.1 continued

*Vienna

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*Rosalie

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Figure H.1 continued

**D.C.**

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Continued
Figure H.1 continued

**Bella**

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Item 2. I enjoy learning more about writing poetry.
Item 3. Middle school teachers made writing poetry fun.
Item 4. Learning to write poetry is a waste of time.
Item 5. Only college bound students should learn to write poetry.
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**McLovin**

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Appendix I: Focus Student Interview Questions

Interviewer: Explain purpose of research. Tell student that I will show him/her my transcription for member check, as well as my write-up of transcription. Ask permission to audiotape. Explain that research will be used only for this study, and if student wishes not to continue he or she may stop at any time.

Poetry Questions

Tell me what you know about poetry.
Do you know what a metaphor is?
How would you define poetry?
Tell me about your experiences with poems in school.
Tell me about your experiences with poems at home, elsewhere.
Tell me your experiences with writing poems.
Tell me your experiences with reading poems.
Do you have a favorite poem? What is it?

“Student” Identity Questions

Describe yourself as a student.
Describe yourself as a reader.
Define a “successful” student.
Can people change their “roles” (identities)?
Who/What has influenced the way you see yourself as a student now?
Appendix J: Original Poetry Journal

Poetry Journal

Pen Name__________________

Date_______________________

Please use the question on the next three pages to write in your journal each day at the end of poetry workshop. You do not need to answer every question every time, but only those for which you have something to say!

What did you think of as you read the poem? Write the poem’s title first:
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did the poem make you feel as you read it?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did you figure out how to understand the poem?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What do you think the poem is about?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
What poem or exercise did you write today?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________

What influenced your choice of content/topic?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What influenced your choice of form?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did you feel while writing your poem?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

How did you feel after sharing your poem with the class?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Did anyone give you good ideas for revision? What were they?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
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________________________________________________________________________
What did your group discuss?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What did you contribute to the discussion?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

What did you learn about from the discussion?
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

General Observations about poems/poetry:
What interesting things did you notice about poetry/a poem that you read or listened to? Write down the name and author of poem first.
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Did anything you read or listened to remind you of any other poems you have previously read or listened to? Why
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Did you learn anything about metaphors today? What?

Other comments you have to make about poems you have read, listened to, or written?
Appendix K: Pre- and Post- Poetry Reading Writing Workshop Surveys

Pre-Workshop Attitude Survey

Name_______________________________

Directions
On this paper, please circle the appropriate response to each question below. Your name is required for my research tracking, but your honest response is requested and will be most valuable to me for planning future lessons as well as my research.

WRITING POETRY

1. I enjoy expressing my thoughts and observations through writing poetry.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
2. I would enjoy learning more about writing poetry.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
3. My English teachers in middle school made writing poetry fun.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
4. Learning to write poetry is a waste of time.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
5. Only students who want to go to college should have to learn how to write poetry.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
6. It is easy for me to write poetry
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree

READING POETRY

1. I enjoy reading poetry.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
2. I would enjoy learning more about reading poetry.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
3. My English teachers in the middle school made reading poetry fun.
   Strongly Agree              Agree              Undecided              Disagree       Strongly Disagree
4. Learning to read poetry is a waste of time.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. Only students who want to go to college should have to learn how to read poetry.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. It is easy for me to read poetry.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

ATTITUDE TOWARD SCHOOL

1. I felt successful in Language Arts in elementary school.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

2. I felt successful in Language Arts in middle school.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

3. I expect to feel successful in English as a freshman.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

4. I see myself as a successful student in other school subjects besides Language Arts.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

5. I consider myself a good reader.
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree

6. I feel that I do well on standardized tests (Achievement tests in elementary and middle school).
   Strongly Agree   Agree   Undecided   Disagree   Strongly Disagree
Appendix L: OGT Poetry Selections: Pre- and Post-Tests
READING TEST

Directions: Each passage in this test is followed by several questions. After reading the passage, choose the best answer to each question and blacken the corresponding space on your answer document. When you respond to the short-answer and extended-response items, you do not have to use all of the space provided in your answer document, but be sure your answers are complete. You may refer to the passages as often as necessary.

My Father and the Figtree

1. For other fruits my father was indifferent.
   He'd point at the cherry trees and say,
   "See those? I wish they were figs."
   In the evenings he sat by my bed
   weaving folktales like vivid little scarves.
   They always involved a figtree.
   Even when it didn't fit, he'd stick it in.
   Once Joja was walking down the road
   and he saw a figtree.
   Or, he tied his camel to a figtree
   and went to sleep.
   Or, later when they caught and arrested him,
   his pockets were full of figs.

2. At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged.
   "That's not what I'm talking about!" he said.
   "I'm talking about a fig straight from the earth—
   gift of Allah!—on a branch so heavy it touches the ground.
   I'm talking about picking the largest fattest sweetest fig
   in the world and putting it in my mouth."
   (Here he'd stop and close his eyes.)

3. Years passed, we lived in many houses, none had figtrees.
   We had lima beans, zucchini, parsley, beets.
   "Plant one!" my mother said, but my father never did.
   He tended garden half-heartedly, forgot to water,
   let the okra get too big.
   "What a dreamer he is. Look how many things he starts
   and doesn't finish."
Reading

4. The last time he moved, I had a phone call.
   my father, in Arabic, chanting a song I'd never heard.
   "What's that?"
   "Wait till you see!"

5. He took me out to the new yard.
   There, in the middle of Dallas, Texas,
   a tree with the largest, fattest, sweetest figs in the world.
   "It's a figtree song!" he said,
   plucking his fruits like ripe tokens,
   emblems, assurance
   of a world that was always his own.

"My Father and the Figtree" from Words Under the Words: Selected Poems by Naomi Shihab Nye.

1. Which statement characterizes the mother's attitude toward her husband?
   A. She is proud that he retains the memory of his native land.
   B. She is fearful that his obsession with figs will cause further troubles.
   C. She is frustrated by his unwillingness to take firm actions to finish things.
   D. She is supportive of his connecting figs with happy memories of his native land.

2. How does the mother feel about her husband's dreams?
   A. She is frustrated by them.
   B. She shares them with him.
   C. She worries about them.
   D. She admires them.

3. "At age six I ate a dried fig and shrugged." (stanza 2)
   This line from the poem can be restated as
   A. I hated the figs my father grew.
   B. Eventually, I learned to love the taste of figs.
   C. I didn't see why figs were so important to my father.
   D. I ate that first fig and then gestured to have more of them.
4. A line in stanza 3 says, "He tended garden half-heartedly, forgot to water." Which phrase means the same as half-heartedly?

A. to try one's best to accomplish something, but fail
B. to do something with little real interest in it
C. to go about doing something with great dedication
D. to try to make something fall because of intense dislike for it

5. What is a plausible theme for this poem? Support your answer with an example from the poem. Write your answer in the Answer Document. (2 points)

6. The main conflict in this poem is between

A. the father's longing and his reality.
B. the father's figs and his other fruit trees.
C. the father's dreams and the mother's dreams.
D. the father's dreams and his daughter's dreams.
Reading

Caged Bird

1 A free bird leaps
on the back of the wind
and floats downstream
till the current ends
and dips his wing
in the orange sun rays
and dares to claim the sky.

2 But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage
his wings are clipped and
his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

3 The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

4 The free bird thinks of another breeze
and the trade winds soft through the sighing trees
and the fat worms waiting on a dawn-bright lawn
and he names the sky his own.

5 But a caged bird stands on the grave of dreams
his shadow shouts out a nightmare scream
his wings are clipped and his feet are tied
so he opens his throat to sing.

6 The caged bird sings
with a fearful trill
of things unknown
but longed for still
and his tune is heard
on the distant hill
273

Reading

for the caged bird
sings of freedom.

"Caged Bird" by Maya Angelou, copyright © 1983 by Maya Angelou, from SHAKER, WHY DON'T YOU SING? By Maya Angelou. Used by permission of Random House, Inc.

17. The significant difference between the two birds in the poem is that
A. one bird can sing and the other bird is silent.
B. one bird knows how to fly and the other bird does not.
C. one bird has opportunity and the other bird has been denied it.
D. one bird has held on to its dreams of flight and the other bird has not.

18. What is the author's purpose in describing the two birds?
A. to portray the two birds as being similar
B. to let the reader decide which is the better bird
C. to show that one bird is not superior to the other
D. to contrast the free and the caged bird

19. "But a bird that stalks
down his narrow cage
can seldom see through
his bars of rage" (stanza 2)

Which sentence below accurately describes the effect of the metaphor in the stanza above?
A. breaks the bars that confine it.
B. not hope to see the outside world.
C. soon grow to accept the situation.
D. be consumed by its own anger.
We're All in the Telephone Book

1. We're all in the telephone book.
   Folks from everywhere on earth—
   Anderson to Zabowski,
   It's a record of America's worth.

2. We're all in the telephone book.
   There's no priority—
   A millionaire like Rockefeller
   is likely to be behind me.

3. For generations men have dreamed
   Of nations united as one,
   Just look in your telephone book
   To see where that dream's begun.

4. When Washington crossed the Delaware
   And the pillars of tyranny shook,
   He started the list of democracy
   That's America's telephone book.

From COLLECTED POEMS by Langston Hughes. Copyright ©1994 by the estate of Langston Hughes.
Reprinted by permission of Alfred A. Knopf, a division of Random House.

40. Based on the information in lines 1–4 of the poem, which sentence gives the best interpretation of “It's a record of America's worth”?  
   A. The telephone book symbolizes the diversity of America.  
   B. America's value is determined by the worth of its people.  
   C. The telephone books lists the costs of different businesses.  
   D. The value of America lies in its ability to afford telephones.
41. Which best represents the theme of the poem?
   A. The telephone was what connected Americans.
   B. The telephone book is indicative of just how big America is.
   C. Without the telephone, democracy would have a hard time existing.
   D. The telephone book is symbolic of the equality to which America aspires.

42. In the last stanza of the poem, the author says, "And the pillars of tyranny shook."
   Which sentence below represents his intended meaning?
   A. The fort was ready to crumble.
   B. The rest of the world was ready to support American democracy.
   C. The soldiers on the enemy side were shaking.
   D. The support for authoritarian rule was weakening.

43. In lines 1–3 of the poem, when the speaker refers to "Folks from everywhere on earth—/Anderson to Zabowski," what major point is he making?
   A. that different races and nationalities comprise America
   B. that the book lists the name of the first American family
   C. that the dream of equality and freedom is a very old one
   D. that the book contains the names of the rich and the poor

44. The poet's purpose in this poem is most likely to
   A. explain America's socioeconomic system.
   B. criticize social injustice in America.
   C. celebrate American democracy.
   D. discuss American history.
Reading

Grandma Ling

1 If you dig that hole deep enough, you’ll reach China, they used to tell me, a child in a backyard in Pennsylvania, Not strong enough to dig that hole, I waited twenty years, then sailed back, halfway around the world.

2 In Taiwan I first met Grandma. Before she came to view, I heard her slippered feet softly measure the tatami¹ floor with even step; the aqua paper-covered door slid open and there I faced my five foot height, sturdy legs and feet, square forehead, high cheeks and wide-set eyes; my image stood before me, acted on by fifty years.

3 She smiled, stretched her arms to take to heart the eldest daughter of her youngest son a quarter century away. She spoke a tongue I knew no word of, and I was sad I could not understand, but I could hug her.

MEET THE WRITER
Between Worlds

4 As a child, Amy Ling (1939 – 1999) had a special reason for wanting to reach China: She’d be going home. Amy Ling, whose name was originally Ling Ying Ming, was born in Beijing, China, and moved to the United States with her family at the age of six. "Grandma Ling" was inspired by a trip to Taiwan the poet made in the early 1960s. Ling studied and wrote about other American writers who are "between worlds," especially Asian-American women writers.

Used by permission of the author.

¹Tatami: (tā-ta’-me): floor mat woven of rice straw.
Reading

39. Ling's reference to digging a hole to China is effective because
   A. cliches are common in literature.
   B. China is far from Pennsylvania.
   C. the author is Chinese.
   D. the poem is about returning to China.

40. What does measure mean, as used in stanza 2 of the poem?
   A. cross
   B. limit
   C. mark
   D. estimate

41. Explain what is meant when the poet writes, "my image stood before me, / acted on by fifty years" (stanza 2). Use information from the text to support your response.

   Write your answer in the Answer Document. (2 points)

42. Read stanza 3 of the poem:

   "She smiled, stretched her arms / to take to heart the eldest daughter / of her youngest son a quarter century away. / She spoke a tongue I knew no word of, / and I was sad I could not understand. / but I could hug her."

   Based on this stanza, after visiting in China, Ling probably
   A. felt better about leaving China behind her.
   B. attempted to learn some of her native language.
   C. investigated the possibility of moving back to China.
   D. made an effort to learn about Chinese customs and lore.
43. What does the speaker realize when she sees her grandmother in Taiwan?
   A. a closer connection with her grandmother
   B. a sense of accomplishment upon arriving in China
   C. a reason for pride in her heritage
   D. an element of surprise at differences

44. Which summary describes the action in the poem?
   A. A child dreams of meeting her grandmother.
   B. A family leaves China to go to the United States.
   C. A woman returns to her ancestral home to meet her grandmother.
   D. A child digs a hole in her backyard.
Appendix M: Literary Terms Exercise

Literary Terms Exercise

Name___________________________________    Date_______________________

Match the terms listed in section A with the definitions or examples listed in section B

A. Literary Terms
   _____ 1. imagery
   _____ 2. alliteration
   _____ 3. onomatopoeia
   _____ 4. rhyme scheme
   _____ 5. personification
   _____ 6. metaphor
   _____ 7. stanza
   _____ 8. lyric poetry
   _____ 9. meter
   _____ 10. assonance

B. Literary Terms Meanings and Examples
   A. “her eyes were blue fire”
   B. sometimes the equivalent of paragraph breaks, or verses in a song or poem
   C. “buzzzzzzz”
   D. “the tree’s branches lifted the wind”
   E. Peter Piper picked a peck of pickled peppers
   F. making word pictures appealing to the senses
      “She stood large, shaking the shiny white, rippling sheets into the sun’s glow”
   G. AA, BB, “Behind my face
      There is no place
      For purple thoughts
      Or “shoulds” or “oughts”
   H. “zipping instantly into the slimmest inchy crevice”
   I. the regular rhythm in a poem: “Within this room/ A watcher waits”
   J. musical poetry expressing feelings