Teaching Poetry Writing, PreK–12

A Review of Research and Suggested Directions for Teacher Practice and Development

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The Writer
by Richard Wilbur

In her room at the prow of the house
Where light breaks, and the windows are tossed with linden,
My daughter is writing a story.

I pause in the stairwell, hearing
From her shut door a commotion of typewriter-keys
Like a chain hauled over a gunwale.

Young as she is, the stuff
Of her life is a great cargo, and some of it heavy:
I wish her a lucky passage.

But now it is she who pauses,
As if to reject my thought and its easy figure.
A stillness greatens, in which

The whole house seems to be thinking,
And then she is at it again with a bunched clamor
Of strokes, and again is silent.

I remember the dazed starling
Which was trapped in that very room, two years ago;
How we stole in, lifted a sash

And retreated, not to affright it;
And how for a helpless hour, through the crack of the door,
We watched the sleek, wild, dark

And iridescent creature
Batter against the brilliance, drop like a glove
To the hard floor, or the desk-top,

And wait then, humped and bloody,
For the wits to try it again; and how our spirits
Rose when, suddenly sure,

It lifted off from a chair-back,
Beating a smooth course for the right window
And clearing the sill of the world.

It is always a matter, my darling,
Of life or death, as I had forgotten. I wish
What I wished you before, but harder.

Poetic writing has been described as literary language used to represent a writer’s (real or imaginary) experiences and to create a virtual experience for readers (Britton, Burgess, Martin, McLeod, & Rosen, 1975). It has been described as “language distilled,” “the best words in the best order,” and “imaginary gardens with real toads.”

While researchers, educators, and even poets have difficulty with defining poetry as a genre, most literacy teachers and researchers are quick to affirm the importance of including poetry in the PreK–12 curriculum. Poets as well attest to the importance of poetic writing: Christian Wiman, editor of Poetry magazine, writes, “Let us remember ... that in the end we go to poetry for one reason, so that we might more fully inhabit our lives and the world in which we live them, and that if we more fully inhabit these things, we might be less apt to destroy both” (in Byer, 2006, p. 1). And Audre Lorde wrote that, for women (and we would argue, for everyone), “poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into more tangible action. Poetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought” (Lorde, 1984, p. 37). Ultimately, as the speaker in Wilbur’s poem says to the writing daughter, “It is always a matter, my darling/of life or death” (lines 28–29).

Still, in spite of the deep conviction among those who read, write, and teach poetry of its central importance to life—to civilization, to humanity, to understanding, and to education—relatively little research has been done in this area. In the Handbook of Writing Research, there is little mention of poetry (MacArthur, Graham, & Fitzgerald, 2006). For example, there is only one listing in the subject index, referring broadly to the “poetic function of writing” (p. 465), and one chapter (on genre understanding and writing development) touching on the poetry research of Kamberelis (1999) and Schnoor (2004) (MacArthur et al., pp. 131–143).

In writing this chapter on research in poetry writing, we undertook a thorough search of professional literature in indexes, including ERIC, Education Abstracts, Humanities Abstracts, ProQuest Dissertations, and MLA and Sage journals online. We were interested in reviewing the research at the PreK–12 levels as well as research on teacher education and development. Search terms included the following in various combinations: poetry, poetry writing, poetic genres, genre, genre knowledge, development, teacher education, teacher professional development. Additionally, resources were located through hand search and ancestry, using resources uncovered from our original search. Our sources included peer-reviewed journals, handbooks, technical reports, books, and dissertations.

We first searched for those studies that contained explicit research questions or purposes, systematically collected data, and clearly described procedures, data sources, and findings. After employing such criteria, we were left with about 25 studies that fit our parameters. Methodologies employed were case study (Jocson, 2006), ethnography (Dyson, 2003), collaborative intervention (Apol & Harris, 1999; Damico & Carpenter, 2005; Jocson, 2005; Jocson, Burnside, & Collins, 2006), and self-study (Rosaen, 2003). Eight studies analyzed text (Duke, 2000; Kamberelis, 1998; Kutiper & Wilson, 1993; Roberts, 2002; Rodgers, 1972; Schaefer, 1973; Shapiro, 1985; Steinbergh, 1999). More specifically, four of these eight studies (Kamberelis, 1998; Roberts, 2002; Rodgers, 1972; Steinbergh, 1999) analyzed the poetic text created by students. Two analyzed the presence of poetry texts in the classroom. Duke (2000) analyzed the presence of text in 20 first-grade classrooms selected from very low and very high socioeconomic status districts, while Shapiro (1985) analyzed basal reading programs and suggested teaching procedures for the presence of poetic genre. One of the eight studies, conducted by Kutiper and
Wilson (1993), analyzed poetry preferences of children and examined library circulation records. In another study, Schaefer (1973) analyzed questionnaires in order to uncover the influences of poetic expression by children.

In the section of this chapter that focuses on student’s poetry writing, we included two empirical studies which children did not report attitudes or perceptions about poetry writing, nor did they compose written poems (Elster & Hanauer, 2002; Ford, 1987). We mention them briefly in this review because (1) there is a dearth of high-quality empirical work on poetry instruction to inform practice and professional development, and (2) the findings of their studies (given the case that we will make in this chapter for teaching the reading and writing of poetry together) have implications for ways to focus students’ attention on poetic literate language (Elster & Hanauer, 2002) and typical conceptions held by children on the defining features of poetry (Ford, 1987).

Methods of data collection among the qualitative studies selected included participant observation, field notes, observational checklists, analysis of student-authored texts, and self-report in the form of interviews or questionnaires. Among those studies classified as quantitative or mixed-methods, methodologies included experimental (Duffy, 1968; Manicoff, 1939), survey (Benton, 1984; Schwartz, Goble, English, & Bailey, 2006), or mixed-method designs (Kamberelis, 1998). It is important to note that nearly all of the literature on teacher classroom instruction was presented as anecdotal report by teachers of poetry or poets; nonetheless, we decided to also highlight professionally informed suggestions for practice along with implications from the methodological literature review.

Rich quality research of all sorts that focuses exclusively on the writing of poetry (whether that research is case study, ethnographic, survey, correlational, or experimental) enhances an understanding of this genre of writing that helps teachers and teacher educators teach poetry writing more effectively and with more confidence. Documenting existing research provides a map of the terrain in the hope of increased understanding of the wider landscape of research into poetry writing; as well, it identifies the areas that remain unexplored and the need for further study.

In this chapter, then, we provide a theoretical framework on poetry research, then share research on poetry writing across the preschool to high school grades as well as a small but growing body of research on teacher education and development in poetry writing. We conclude with implications and promising directions for classroom practice, teacher education and development, and future research.

BACKGROUND

Our Theoretical Framework

Because much of the literature on poetry writing is anecdotal or dated, frequently the theoretical frame is absent from a study, or a review of literature itself serves as the theoretical frame. When researchers do name theory in studies of poetry writing, it appears to be drawn primarily from rhetorical and/or social traditions. For example, one study viewed the text as an object or a fixed classification (e.g., Dowker, 1989), focusing nearly exclusively on texts’ structural components. More recent work, situated under the umbrella of genre development studies, examines text within social contexts (e.g., Dyson, 2003; Elster & Hanauer, 2002; Kamberelis, 1999; Schnoor, 2004). These modern conceptions of genre knowledge and development are perhaps inspired most by Bakhtin (1986), in whose work genre definitions move from fixed classifications of texts to ones where genre is constructed relative to social practices and personal histories (Bazerman, 1997; Cope & Kalantzis, 1993; Freedman & Medway, 1994; Russell, 1997).

As writers of this chapter, we acknowledge theorists like Bakhtin (1986), Fowler (1982), and Rosmarin (1985). For them and for us, knowledge of genre is essential to becoming a competent writer across contexts, and a variety of experiences in reading and writing in the genre is a key ingredient for increasingly sophisticated conceptions of genre. Building on Chapman’s (1999) broad description of genre, we agree that poetry can be linguistic (oral or written) and/or artistic (visual, performative) and hybridized, given various audiences, contexts, personal histories, and cultures. For example, in studies of poetry writing, one would expect an attention to poetry focused on the form of a written text. Poets, however, can also make decisions on how to transform the written word into a performance text; they might choose to read from the page, recite from memory, or engage in performance poetry, where movement, art, artifacts, props, and/or multimedia are added to achieve their purpose. Poets might also choose, depending on audience and purpose, to blend poems or poetry lines with one or more other genres, such as narratives or songs.

Definition and Demands of Poetry

As mentioned previously, poetry writing has been described as literary language used to represent a writer’s (real or imaginary) experiences and to create a virtual experience for readers (Britton et al., 1975). The features of poetry, however, are numerous, intricate, and sometimes
distinctive from other genres. It is a specialized literary language. We agree with Wilson that the volume of linguistic demands of poetry may make this one of the most challenging sorts of writing (2007). Theorists of poetic language, too, note the importance of poetry writers attending to the many features of texture, register, and structure (Friedrich, 1979; Tannen, 1989), the subtleties of which are not always mutually exclusive.

Poetic textural features at a line or multiline level deal with the effective use of lexicon and syntax. An example is a writer’s sensitivity to word choice and imagery, including using figurative language and words in new contexts and ways. For instance, in the poem by Richard Wilbur that opens this chapter, Wilbur uses shipping images to describe the house (“In her room at the prow of the house,” line 1), the typing process of the daughter (“like a chain hauled over a gunwale,” line 5), the daughter’s subject matter (“the stuff /Of her life is a great cargo,” lines 7–8), and his fatherly wish for her (“a lucky passage,” line 9)—a pun, of course, on the written passage the writer is in the process of producing as well.

Writers of poetry must also have an internal sense of register, or features at the word level, phrase level, or line level that suggest the tone and mood of the poem (for instance, repetition, rhyme, assonance, alliteration, imagery, and metaphor, all of which might operate at the sound, syntactic, and/or semantic level). An example of this occurs in the opening poem by way of Wilbur’s invoking the image of the starling to describe the daughter’s writing process. Notice the intensification in the second half of the poem as Wilbur uses single-syllable words that build to multisyllabic descriptions to convey the starling’s lack of success (“we watched the sleek, wild, dark /And iridescent creature,” lines 21–22), followed by alliteration (“Batter against the brilliance,” line 23) to capture the distance between the bird and its destination—much like the distance between the daughter and her written destination, concluding with the repeated “s” sounds (“how our spirits /Rose when, suddenly sure, /It lifted off from a chair-back, /Beating a smooth course for the right window /And clearing the sill of the world,” lines 26–30) as the bird rises and soars.

Lastly, adding to the linguistic demands, are structural features to consider at the level of the whole text (such as line structure, stanza structure, and, again, rhythm or meter). Here, the poet might consider line length and the shape of the poem, all the while playing with both of these to enhance meaning and cadence. Notice in the Wilbur poem how the stanzas are each made up of three lines, with the center line being the longest of the three. More importantly, notice that early in the poem the stanzas are themselves complete, end-stopped, but that in the second half of the poem—when the description of the starling comes in to illustrate the intensity of the daughter’s writing process—all five stanzas consist of a single sentence, which runs from stanza to stanza, to pull the reader along in a headlong flight until the bird, and the reader, are freed by the resolution of the final (again, end-stopped) pair of stanzas.

Finally, but no less importantly, poets typically attend to issues of conservation—that is, removing any unnecessary words that do not enhance the meaning of the poem. Though Wilbur’s entire poem is a model of conservation—the right word at the right time—this parsimony is particularly evident in the last sentence of the poem (“I wish /What I wished you before, but harder,” lines 32–33), where Wilbur does not bother to repeat the wish, only to note that he wishes it even harder than he did before. With these nine words, Wilbur reiterates the entire poem, but with even more strength—a masterful stroke that gains, really, a double poem from less than a dozen words, but that also summons back the ship imagery and the writing pun (“a lucky passage”) from earlier in the poem.

There are also cognitive demands placed on the writer of poetry—a kind of poetic higher-order thinking, in that poets are always making choices among virtually infinite combinatory possibilities and being confronted with new forms that challenge and expand their conceptions of poetry (Wilson, 2007). Moreover, writers, especially ones new to the genre, have to adjust to reading and writing multiple poetic forms. As Wilson explains:

> Poetry writing requires children to be flexible thinkers because every time they work within a different form, or from a different literary model, they are unlearning the “rules” of other poetic forms. This makes the cognitive load of poetry writing especially demanding for children. (2007, p. 454)

We would also add that there are subtleties of poetic features adding further to the list of linguistic and cognitive demands. For example, even if poets decide to include rhyme, they have to choose whether it will be direct rhyming or indirect rhyming (such as half-rhyme, slant rhyme, or approximate rhyme) or even within-line word music created by the use of assonance (repeated vowel sounds) or consonance (repeated consonant sounds). To further illustrate, a poet might have a general sense of stanza and line structure but also be advantaged to understand the subtleties of line break that are available to him or her as a poet; that is, will the poem better achieve the writer’s purpose when a line carries over from the preceding line (enjambment) or when meaning and rhythm pause or stop at the end of the line (end-stop)? It may take repeated readings of model poems and reading a wide range of diverse poetry for writers.
to learn that end-stopped lines often feature strong end words in both meaning and sound.

We honor the whole field of poetry, and, because poetry is an art form, we hesitate to define what makes a poem good. We do feel comfortable concluding that, because poetry takes multiple forms and the field of poetry is so broad, writers must be comfortable with some ambiguity and with having a vast range of poetic choices, being able to pick and choose among them and having an internal rationale for why they do what they do.

HOW POETRY IS VIEWED BY CONSTITUENTS

Poetry's Place in Schools and Society

Research on writing instruction tends to focus more on narrative or expository writing than on venturing into the ill-defined territory of the poem. This pattern of neglect is not only witnessed in research in the writing of poetry; more broadly, poetry itself has been documented to be an underrepresented genre in schools (Duke, 2000). Elster and Hanauer (2002) contend:

Reading and writing poetry has been both privileged and excluded in modern U.S. language arts education. Classical education based on a classical canon included reading and studying poetry seriously in terms of meter, tropes, and meaning...[but] with the development of experiential, progressive educational approaches, reading and writing poetry has been overtaken by other genres of language arts and content area reading and writing. (p. 90)

Despite the lack of poetry in schools, national organizations have long argued for students to write and speak in a variety of genres (which include poetry), to a variety of audiences, and for various purposes. For example, in their Standards for the English Language Arts (1996), the National Council of Teachers of English and the International Reading Association advocate that students should learn about and use language structure and conventions, technology applications for writing, and genre to compose and respond to print, and, moreover, they should learn to be flexible in their language use to communicate to different audiences and for different purposes (National Council of Teachers of English & International Reading Association, 1996). Indeed, such learning and practice should also extend to the genre of poetry.

For PreK–12 students, poetry does just what the professional orga-

nizations recommend: it tunes the ear and eye, giving students practice with a genre that contains a wide range of possible structures, conventions, and forms (lyric poetry, rhymed poetry, free verse, and haiku, to name just a few) and a universe of themes and subject matters for reading and composition. As well, poetry provides students across grade levels with a voice for play, exploration, and self-expression. Poetry is a natural outgrowth of children's early literate self; indeed, poet Donald Hall traces the roots of poetry back to the cradle and the cave—to developmental and cultural origins (Hall, 1982). And poet William Stafford, when asked when he first realized that he wanted to become a poet, responded, "My question is 'when did other people give up the idea of being a poet?' You know, when we are kids we make up things, we write, and for me the puzzle is not that some people are still writing, the real question is why did the other people stop?" (Stafford, 1978, p. 86).

Yet, despite the professional mandates that support the study of poetry, despite all that poetry offers young writers, and despite the words of poets themselves on the importance of poetry for the young, poetry remains a frequently neglected genre in today's schools. Still, there is a growing, renewed interest in poetry in the adult community, as signaled by the emergence of poetry slams and the reemergence of spoken-word poetry (Eleveld & Smith, 2004; Fisher, 2003; Glazner, 2000). It is likely that this reemerged performative genre will provide exciting spaces to understand literacy practices across the ages and will allow PreK–12 students to return to their poetic roots.

Poetry Perceptions, Preferences, and Attitudes

There is a body of research that addresses poetry perceptions, preferences, and attitudes among various constituents, from young children to adults. It seems undisputed that elementary grade students have very basic perceptions about poetry and appears to prefer rhymed humorous poems (Apol & Harris, 1999; Kutiper & Wilson, 1993; Terry, 1974). For example, Terry (1974) found that fourth through sixth graders rated poems higher if they were funny or about familiar topics while rating poems with figurative language or imagery lower. Similarly, drawing on school circulation records, Kutiper and Wilson (1993) found that elementary students' most popular poets were Jack Prelutsky or Shel Silverstein, poets whose work almost wholly employs direct rhyme. While direct rhyme is among the devices available to poets, so are other forms of word music, such as indirect rhyme, slant rhyme, or free verse; yet, these sophistications are not evident in stu-
Teachers’ Views and Practices

There is very little systematic research on instruction in poetry writing, PreK–12. Duffy (1968) conducted an experiment in 15 intermediate grade classrooms to investigate whether teacher instruction in the musical or prosodic elements of poetry caused children to write poetry differently from those children who did not receive such instruction. While there were no overall significant differences between groups, gains did take place in classrooms where teachers were committed to the curriculum and un hurried, and where students had ample time to write poetry.

Schaefer (1973) used teacher and student questionnaires to uncover teachers’ (and their students’) perceptions of good instructional practices for poetry writing. Teachers identified as good instruction the reading of poetry, good emotional climates, original thinking, and visual and auditory aids, while children mentioned exposure to poetry and ample time for writing. Similarly, Benton (1984) conducted a survey of 175 teachers in 43 secondary schools in the United Kingdom. He asked teachers to rate in importance (1) the reading and discussion of poetry and (2) the writing of poetry in schools, and then to explain their ratings. While 47% rated reading and discussion of poetry as “very important,” only 32% put the writing of poetry in this category. The 153 teachers who recorded worries or problems about teaching poetry volunteered an impressive list of 94 separate difficulties. More than one teacher in five mentioned the problem of pupils’ “distaste for,” “prejudice against,” or “hostility toward” poetry. About a quarter of the respondents reported no discernible qualifications for teaching poetry.

Research reports and anecdotes abound with regard to teaching poetry. Faust and Dressman (2009) conducted a review of all poetry articles published in English Journal through 2005 and found an impressive 530 articles for teachers on poetry, poets, and/or poetry pedagogy. The 2002 themed issue of English Journal, for example, contains numerous compelling classroom research studies or articles on suggestions for teaching poetry, such as Apol’s (2002) response to English teachers who asked “What do we do if we don’t do Haiku?” (p. 89). Across the literature, teacher researchers and poets offer advice (based on their own classroom experience or collaborative interventions) on how to teach poetry writing, from linking the reading and writing of poetry (Apol, 2002; Apol & Harris, 1999; Cerro, 2004; Koch, 1990; Kucan, 2007; Siemens, 1996), drawing on poems from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds (Kuhlman & Bradley, 1999), collaborative poetry writing (Apol & Harris, 1999; Kovalcik & Cerro, 2007; Siemens, 1996), providing opportunities for students to get feedback from peers (Kammer, 2002), emphasizing poetic language and sensitivity (Kovalcik & Cerro, 2007; Siemens, 1996),...
using strategies for struggling writers (Kovaleck & Certo, 2007), to using technology to prewrite poetry and organize for writing (Roberts, 2002). Interestingly, in reviewing the literature on teacher practice, the teaching of poetry writing almost always occurred within the context of reading poetry. A reference might be appropriate here to Wilson (2007), who argues that the linguistic and cognitive demands of poetry writing on children are so great that "they [children] need to have some idea of what a poem might look like or sound like first" (p. 443). First, students, by being exposed to a broad range of poetry, broaden their own repertoire and toolbox for poetry writing. Additionally, students may get their own ideas for composing from reading published poems. Ann Berthoff (1981), referencing the power of language to make new meaning, explained that New York City poet and teacher Kenneth Koch elicited powerful poetry from his young students because he gave them authentic poems to play with and from which to generate ideas for writing. Similarly, Janine Certo (2004) described how she moved her fifth graders from writing poems with direct rhyming forms or humorous topics by having students read diverse canonical and contemporary poets from William Shakespeare to Rita Dove in order to create their own poems, drawing from their own lives. A rural Virginia student, after studying William Carlos Williams's "This Is Just to Say," wrote a poem apologizing to her fictitious horse:

I have mowed the grass
that was rich in the yard.

I didn't know
you were going to eat
after our ride.

Forgive me,
though I didn't like it,
sweating
and pushing. (in Certo, 2004, p. 266)

Jane Hansen also speaks to this theme more generally in her book When Writers Read, explaining that when children read high-quality literature they not only appreciate it but also "mine" the print for ideas for their own writing (2001, p. 3). Teachers need to trust that the students' own voices will eventually come through in the writings and that ultimately, through immersion in dozens of poems by a variety of poets, students will begin to develop a vocabulary for defining quality poetry in general. Perhaps just as important, they will also discover, as adults do, which poets they prefer.

Teaching Poetry Writing, PreK–12

There is a small cluster of studies of poetry writing that focus on the views and/or practices of teacher educators or preservice teachers in university or field settings (Certo, Apol, Wibbens, & Hawkins, 2009; Jocson, 2005; Jocson et al., 2006; Rosaen, 2003). Rosaen published a rigorous self-study in Teachers College Record of how she used "Where I'm From" poems to have her preservice teachers explore both their own cultures and the writing of poetry. She found that preservice teachers became much more intimate with the genre as writers, able to use poetic elements and language to articulate poems as well as explain the power of their poems (Rosaen, 2003). Jocson found in her ethnographic work related to June Jordan's Poetry for the People (P4P) that human and material resources organized in a collaborative intervention between the university and urban youths could reshape the secondary school poetry curriculum and pedagogy (Jocson, 2005). In the project, the teacher, Ms. Tanner, was "not into hip hop," but she recognized P4P's ability to make connections between poetry and rap and how key that was for students (Jocson, 2005). Later, drawing on her own action research with adults and teachers in a digital visual poetry course, Jocson (2008) invited teacher educators, inservice teachers, and staff developers to consider the power of digital visual poetry as a new literate genre that allows for the assembling of texts in complex ways.

Using descriptive methods, Certo et al. (2009) found that elementary preservice teachers entered a university course on reading, writing, and teaching poetry with little subject matter or pedagogical content knowledge of poetry. Those few who came with more knowledge and positive experiences or dispositions mentioned only a single middle or high school teacher as the source. This lack of familiarity with poetry should lead teacher educators to contemplate how they might address pedagogical skills and subject matter knowledge in their university or college classrooms. What seemed to make the difference in terms of the prospective teachers' growing sophistication in terms of reading, writing, and teaching poetry was the exposure to a variety of poets, poems, and prompts to address various interests and learning styles and the notion of authenticity (that is, doing what real poets do).

HOW POETRY AFFECTS DEVELOPMENT AND PERFORMANCE

Attention to Language

Elster and Hanauer (2002) conducted an empirical study on poetry reading to document how elementary teachers shared poems with their stu-
Composing and Performing Poems: Genre Knowledge and Development

In the small body of research on children's ability to compose poems, findings reveal that children are, indeed, capable of writing poems independently as well as capable of incorporating teacher-instructed attributes into their poems (Apol & Harris, 1999; Dowker, 1989; Dyson, 2003; Kamberolis, 1998; Rodgers, 1972). This finding extends to preschool-age children as well (Dowker, 1989; Schnoor, 2004). In a combination observational and experimental study using picture scenes and oral readings across several sessions, Dowker (1989) elicited oral poetry from 133 British children ages 2 through 6 and found that some 78 of the children produced 606 poems (most producing only one or two poems, while a few created dozens). Sixty percent of the poems contained rhyme or alliteration, although the frequency of alliteration declined with age. There were no significant differences in students' poetry as a function of age. These results showed that the relatively informal out-of-school intervention was likely to elicit poems from many young children; a finding that was consistent across social class and even in children with limited knowledge of English. In fact, in several cases, nursery school teachers were surprised by the complexity and quantity of their students' poems. Dowker concluded that young children were much more likely to produce poems if they came to more than one session, if examples were provided, and if children's poetic responses were approved and encouraged.

Schnoor (2004) found that, with repeated exposure to poetry, preschool children are capable of engaging with and responding to poems through the use of varied forms of expression, including poetry writing and art. What seemed to make the difference was repetition or repeated readings of the poems so that preschool children could move beyond literal interpretations to make reflective comments and re-create aspects of the poems. The poems with the greatest meaning-making attempts were ones with rhythm or rhyme, although it is important to note that the 33 poems used in the study were selected by Schnoor to mirror commonly used forms in elementary school: narrative, lyric, free verse, haiku, limericks, concrete poems, rhyming poems, humorous or nonsense poems, and chants or choral poems.

In Dyson's (2003) work with a kindergarten class, she found that children appropriate material for their own poetry writing from their home and school cultures. She noted that children have a sense of line structure, for they bring in lines from popular songs and engage in literary borrowing from poetry books in their classroom. Her work supports theoretical and pedagogical visions that allow children to bring their "cultural and textual tools" into the classroom context. Apol and Harris's (1999) study also allowed for fifth graders to draw from their own neighborhoods and lives to write poetry. They created spaces for preadolescents to engage in collaborative poetry writing, culminating in Paul Fleishman-like (1988) choral poems for two voices. Through the careful study of choral poems, the students composed their own poems for two voices, revised the poems (with peer feedback), and performed the poems.

Perhaps the most widely known work on children's poetry knowledge and development is that of Kamberolis (1998, 1999), whose work focused on primary grade children writing stories, science reports, and poems. As part of his study, he asked 54 racially, culturally, and economically diverse children in grades 1–3 to produce a written poem about an animal. Each student was then asked to talk about the kind of text he or she had written and where he or she had gotten ideas for it. Through textual analysis, Kamberolis found that children composed poems that depended heavily on rhyme and sing-song meter patterns. Children who had a difficult time writing poems tended to produce texts that were more like stories than poems. On the other hand, he found that some young children were capable of producing quite sophisticated verse. Whereas most children used rhyme, "Keisha" built her poem out of subtle literary devices, deliberately employing her understanding of line and meter structure. In her poem reproduced below, there are three similes along with evidence of assonance, alliteration, and imagery. When asked about her poem, Keisha replied, "Poems can rhyme, but they don't have to, and this one doesn't rhyme, but it has a beat, and it describes exactly what my fish looks like."
My fish has a body like a small peace of gold.
And his eyes looks like a white bolbe shinning.
And his tail looks like a duck swaming upside-down. (in Kamberelis, 1999, p. 430)

Steinbergh (1999) provides an interesting chronicle of how children and adolescents develop in their use of metaphor in poetry writing, drawing from her own collection of children's poems across elementary and middle grades. She found that primary grade children demonstrate metaphor use, whether intentionally or unintentionally, but that from the fourth grade on, students (especially with teacher guidance) can increasingly and more consciously expand the kinds of metaphors they use (including persona, personification, and the comparison of abstract ideas with concrete images).

There has been less systematic study of students’ performances of or oral readings of poetry (Mentzer & Boswell, 1995), although a common theme in the research across all grade levels is that a sense of, and preparation for, an authentic audience for poetry motivates students to write, revise, and perform poetry (see, for example, Apol & Harris, 1999; Jocson et al., 2006; Kammer, 2002; Kassab, 1994; Kovalcik & Certo, 2007). Through analysis of anecdotal recordings, observational checklists, interviews, and original poems, Mentzer and Boswell (1995) found that poetry writing, in combination with drama and performance, contributed to boys’ verbal and physical expression of thought and feelings. This case study also revealed that behaviors associated with creative thinking—fluency, flexibility, and originality—were evident in both boys’ movements and written poems. Of note, Kassab (1994) found that high school students who read their written original poems improved their oral skills for presentation, demonstrated increased comfort with oral communication, and had a sense of improved self-esteem and self-image. Kammer (2002) suggested that a supportive learning environment coupled with a poetic/performance approach can improve a student’s oral expression.

**IMPLICATIONS AND DIRECTIONS FOR PRACTICE AND TEACHER DEVELOPMENT**

The findings about students' poetry perceptions and genre knowledge in previous sections suggest that many students, especially children, believe poems should rhyme or often rhyme. Cazden (1976) has suggested that language play functions as language practice; also, an affinity for rhyme can be traced back to humanity’s cultural and developmental origins (Apol-Obbink, 1990; Hall, 1982). Consequently, it may be the case that experimenting at a young age with rhyme and alliteration may enable a child to practice sound combinations. However, when reading and writing poetry, instructionally we believe it will also be important for teachers to expose children of all ages to a variety of poetic forms so that their perceptions of poetry represent the broader genre and so that students recognize that their own compositions do not have to rhyme or be overly alliterative to achieve their purposes.

It is arguably challenging to teach (or to engage in research about) poetry because of the intrinsic characteristics of poetry. Because poetry is an art form, it may be more difficult to identify objective criteria to evaluate or analyze than for other genres of writing. As Kamperelis wrote, “No general set or sets of structural descriptions have been written for poetry that are comparable to the kinds of text grammars created for stories and informational texts” (Kamperelis, 1998, p. 21). Worthy of mention is that in conducting this review, we found no studies that focused on teacher evaluation or assessment of poetry writing, or that offered suggestions for teachers in evaluating or assessing the genre. Because poetry is a highly unique form of expressing an idea, observation, or emotion, it is not surprising that the variables studied in the literature are mostly affective, with less research focused on how to assess or to improve the quality of students’ poetry writing.

Donovan and Smolkin (2006) pointed out that increased exposure to a particular genre is linked to increased genre knowledge. It follows that we need further research on how to develop teachers who have not just the knowledge but also the skills and dispositions to become poetry readers, writers, and teachers. Such research could eventually connect teachers’ poetic genre knowledge with their ability to support student development in this area.

The work on students’ poetry genre knowledge is limited to the primary grades (Kamperelis, 1998, 1999), and we know relatively little about what students can do with poetry across the full time span of education. Research is needed that captures rich descriptions of teachers’ approaches to writing instruction in poetry, but particularly as it relates to children’s and adolescents’ growth (Donovan & Smolkin, 2006).

We also need to pursue research lines that capture and/or measure environments and contexts that motivate students to write poetry. Although there is a resurgence of spoken-word poetry (Eleveld & Smith, 2004), widespread rhetoric about the importance of authentic audiences, and acknowledgment of the relationship between social purpose and text
structure (Cope & Kalantzis, 1993), there are few studies that explore the spoken and performative aspects of poetry (Fisher, 2003; Kassab, 1994; Mentzer & Boswell, 1995).

In fact, much of the poetry writing research we need mirrors that of writing research in general. We need research that documents and describes how students engage with all the recursive facets of the writing process, including revising their poetry (independently, through peer writing groups [both face-to-face and online], and through student–teacher conferencing). We need research that documents what kinds of feedback and assessment are necessary to support and evaluate poetry writers, along with research that suggests ways we might support a diverse student population in poetry writing, including students with special needs, different learning styles, and different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. These lines of research into the writing of poetry are necessary as part of an ongoing quest to better understand writing and writing instruction across a range of genres. They are particularly important given that at present poetry as a genre is significantly under-taught, underresearched, and neglected both in PreK–12 classrooms and in preservice and inservice teacher education. These lines of research are particularly important to those of us who try to give children, adolescents, and teachers access to poetry and who believe that poetry helps us make sense of ourselves and the world. Rather than being peripheral to everyday life and classroom routines, it has a place at the center of our intellectual and civic lives (in fact, past poet laureate Joseph Brodsky advocated the idea of providing poetry in public places, including supermarkets, hospitals, and airports, and even went so far as to create a program that left poetry books in hotel rooms next to the Gideon Bible). These lines of research are particularly important to those of us who believe that, indeed, “poetry is not a luxury” (Lorde, 1984, p. 37). It is meant to explore, find, name, and speak of the depth and breadth of human experience.

REFERENCES


