POETRY PEDAGOGY IN SECONDARY ENGLISH: TWO ARTICLES USING POETIC INQUIRY

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ABSTRACT

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In two articles the author extends insight into poetry pedagogy for secondary English classrooms underpinned with theories of Dewey, Friere, and Ranciere. Both articles examine the teaching practices and corresponding identities of the English teachers who teach poetry despite current pressures for testing and accountability that often narrow the high school curriculum. The first article is an analysis of interviews and a focus group exploring teacher-poets' perceptions of how poetry affords identity and agency growth for themselves and for their students. This study views identity and agency from the guiding perspective of Moje & Lewis's (2007) work which places these entities within sociocultural contexts. Analytical findings showed that the three teacher-poets reported growth in students' identities and agency as writers, and that the teacher-poets' own poetry writing afforded personal identity and agency to teach poetry writing. The second article also explores teacher-poet pedagogical agency, this time through an autoethnography that centers on the author's development as a teacher of poetry writing in the secondary English classroom. Here, the author draws first on Foucault (1972) to frame her exploration of her early classroom practices that depended on teacher control of the students' behavior and assignment output. Then she describes how her pedagogy proceeded to emancipatory practices evoking Freire (1970) and Ranciere (2010). Pedagogy in this article moved from traditional teacher-as-expert practice, to a classroom where students are empowered to own their learning as equals in a classroom of inquiry and sharing.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

IDENTITY, AGENCY, AND AESTHETIC EXPERIENCE: A POETIC INQUIRY OF THREE TEACHER-POETS

ABSTRACT

What is lost if we diminish the standing of poetry in secondary school curriculum? This qualitative study uses collective case study, thematic analysis, and poetic inquiry, to examine three teacher-poets' perspectives on identity, agency, and aesthetic experience when teaching poetry writing in secondary English classes. With Moje and Lewis' (2007) lens that views identity and agency in a sociocultural context, I analyze two interviews of each teacher-poet and a focus group, working from the research questions 1) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher -poets perceive poetry writing as a vehicle for expressing identity for th*emselves *and their students?* 2) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe how poetry can develop agency for teachers and students*? 3) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe the aesthetic experience of poetry writing for themselves and for students?* Findings demonstrate that teacher-poets felt identity growth for themselves and for students due to their own poetry writing. When teaching poetry writing, teacher-poets assisted students in personalized ways that fostered identity development in students. Evoking Deweyan (1907, 1916) theory, teacher-poets promoted poetry readings and writing in the classroom for creating aesthetic experiences that draw students to language arts. In this study, Poetic Inquiry, a method that views poetry as "both a tool of discovery and a unique mode of reporting research" (Brady, 2009, p. xiii) highlights and deepens examination. To this end, I situated myself among the teacher-poets, included my own experiences, and wrote poetry to represent and interpret the data. The resulting poetry is interspersed throughout the article.

Close Reading
I have handed out a poem:

please read closely.
They nod,
pencils point,
when the ceiling lifts,
opening the sky.
No one looks up,
they only mark a shift, asking
what has fallen away?
in the white space.

We dwell in a place
where walls come down,
valleys rise,
bridges stretch outward.
My students read into and under the poem,
kicking loose stones.
Finally they put pencils down.
It's strange, they say—
we like it.

In the hallway
an administrator walks by
smelling data.

Poetry, that strange and wonderful genre, it seems, may be losing ground in U.S. high school curriculum. Some English teachers may not include poetry because test preparation has narrowed the curriculum, while others may avoid or narrowly teach the genre because they do not feel adequately prepared to teach it. Despite these obstacles, many secondary English teachers persist, myself being one of them as evidence by my poem above, "Close Reading." Some teachers, like myself, teach whole semester-long classes of poetry, some teach poetry in creative writing classes, and still others teach it within general education English classes. Regardless the situation, there are secondary English teachers who continue teaching poetry because they believe the benefits reach far beyond students' language and literacy skills. Secondary school English teachers who also write poetry report how issues of identity and

agency of both themselves and youth can be influenced by thoughtful, sustained, and meaningful poetry reading and writing. This study focuses on the perceived experiences of these teacher-poets.

In this article, I argue that reading and writing poetry in secondary English classrooms can foster growth in both students' and teachers' identity and agency, and specifically, how poetry affords an expansion of the teacher's capacity to facilitate student writing. I further argue that the teacher-poets in my study found poetry to be rich in opportunities for aesthetic experiences, experiences that deepen students' engagement with language. These two arguments will be supported from findings derived from interviews of three teacher-poets from the Detroit metropolitan area. Throughout the study, I situated myself among these educators, included my own experiences as an English teacher and poet, and after compiling and analyzing the data, through a process of poetic inquiry, I wrote corresponding poems to represent and interpret findings from teachers' reports.

Poetry in Schools

The research on poetry in U.S. schools is growing, but suggests that poetry is either avoided or narrowly taught (e.g. Certo, Apol, Wibbens, & Yoon, 2010; Donovan & Smolkin, 2006; Scherff & Piazza, 2005). For example, Scherff and Piazza (2005) found in a survey of 2000 high school students that creative genres like poetry were taught "hardly ever or not at all" (p. 287), and Certo (2013) has argued that it is even possible to graduate high school without ever being invited to write a poem in school. This situation is complicated by the advent of Common Core State Standards (CCSS), adopted in 2014 by more than 45 states. Namely, the high school standards emphasize rigorous reading of interpretive literature with poetry listed as an *option* along with stories or dramas for teaching connotative meaning and sound devices. That

being said, the range of reading and level of text complexity in the CCSS does specify stories, dramas *and poetry*, and further, that poetry reading should occur in grades 11-12, including the reading of Shakespeare's plays as texts that are "particularly fresh, engaging or beautiful." In contrast, the high school standards on *writing* include writing narratives that involve developing characters and multiple plot lines, but without naming poetry as a genre for writing (Common Core, 2017). The most significant move in CCSS involve genres, the move to a larger share of non-fiction in the language arts curriculum. In the secondary grades, along with the omission of poetry writing, the focus on non-fiction reading and writing may replace attention and space that might have been granted to poetry. Therefore, a genre that was already marginalized prior to Common Core, may now be further neglected.

In a perfect world educational scholars and poets would not have to defend teaching the arts. Yet, in this age of accountability and testing, teaching poetry seems to need justification. A classic stance is put forth by poet Marianne Moore (1920) who sardonically writes in her poem entitled "Poetry," "there are things that are important beyond all this fiddle." The poem goes on to explain how "hands that can grasp, eyes/ that can dilate, hair that can rise/ if it must" are important. Poetic imagery, for Moore, must be as raw and real as "imaginary gardens with real toads in them." She finally rests her argument on there being "a place for the genuine" in poetry. Like Moore, I see that poetry enriches life through its genuineness and its usefulness. Therefore, teaching poetry to students is essential for me.

English teachers who teach poetry beyond the traditional canon often turn to poets from a diverse range of racial and cultural backgrounds to reach and tap a diverse student body. One use of poetry in progressive classrooms, typically in the upper grades 6-12 of public school, positions poetry as a vehicle for democratic expression. Informed by the writings of Dewey (1907, 1916)

and Freire (1970), some researchers used poetry in the schools to motivate learners both socially and academically. For example, Kinloch (2005) found that 6th graders responded to reciprocity in literacy learning through poetry. Working as a visiting poetry teacher, Kinloch used poetry to open and enhance social connections between students from diverse backgrounds. Another study found that poetry worked effectively as a genre that introduced critical literacy and social justice issues into two classrooms of young learners (Flint & Laman, 2012). These fourth graders showed through their poems and interviews how they were developing key skills in critical literacy. In addition, Fisher (2005, 2007) used spoken word poetry in school contexts within urban settings and found them to resonate with youth by facilitating identity negotiation and fostering agency. In that vein, Fisher's (2007) Power Writing class in a Bronx high school "used the energy of their connections to drive [them] through the content" (p. 14). Thus, Fisher's spoken word poets, or "Power Writers," found agency to assert their identities in the world, and to "develop a sense of purpose around reading, writing, and speaking" (p. 4). Another initiative using poetry, was a joint project of secondary and post-secondary urban students in which Jocson (2005) reshaped the curriculum with June Jordan's concept of *Poetry for the People* (P4P). In this collaborative intervention was an overarching principle students were guided to teach poetry within the program, a democratization of education and poetry. Here, student-teacher-poets learned workshop protocols and found their voices both as poets and teachers. In yet another initiative, Jocson (2008) used technology to augment learning, wherein teachers and students explored the use of digital visual poetry as a way to further democratize language arts and foster transformation through education.

Democratic classroom pedagogy often evokes the personal and culturally-lived experiences of youth. One example is the "Skin Poetry" assignment described by Dressman

(2010). This assignment asks young students to write about skin colors, theirs and others', using figurative language and inspired by "Poem for Nina" by Nikki Giovanni. These lessons attempt to encourage students to engage with poetry in personal ways through the use of vivid imagery, and by granting them agency to make their own language choices to convey meaning.

Other studies found that poetry can be a vehicle for literacy exploration, for both research and for teaching literary elements. A study looking at how students approach different genres found students spent more time with poetry as they advanced in grade level, with 12th graders taking more time with poetry than prose (Peskin, 2010), suggesting that poetry engages students and that poetry is intellectually challenging. Another type of research, poetic representation, increasingly used in research, is also cited as a poetic activity for school children (Glesne, 2010). That is, Glesne (2010) described how students interviewed classmates, transcribed the interviews, and distilled the interviews to important, potent phrases, creating poetry out of the interviews. Furthermore, Dressman (2010) stated that poetry can be an excellent way to teach many aspects of language arts: how to make claims, locate evidence, and as texts for teaching grammar and writers' craft. These approaches are all part of a populist movement that encourages students to both read and write poetry for many purposes.

Although English teachers may not always identify themselves as writers of poetry, they teach the poetry provided in their curriculum (and some do teach poetry writing.) In the context of poetry writing, studies suggest teachers who teach poetry tend to favor a progressive approach, showing flexibility by using models and prompts (Wilson, 2010). In addition, educators, often poets themselves, write extensively about teaching poetry to youth, citing the importance of using a variety of approaches (Apol, 2002; Dressman, 2010; Hirschfield, 2010; Koch, 1990; Stenig, 2010; Perfect, 1999; Wiseman, 2011). When poet researchers teach, they

most often teach the reading and writing poetry together (Kucan, 2007; Siemens, 1996), and they emphasize the use of culturally diverse poetry in their classrooms (Certo, Apol, Wibbens, & Hawkins, 2012; Damico & Carpenter, 2005; Kuhlman & Bradley, 1999). Using a diversity of contemporary poems as models, these progressive pedagogies presented students with opportunities to explore their lived experiences through language.

My study asks secondary English teachers of poetry to describe how they teach poetry reading and writing in their classrooms, how poetry influences the identities and agency of students and the teachers themselves, their perception of what poetry affords students, and how poetry might be enhanced in school curricula. This study continues this line of research into the situation of poetry in the classes of contemporary high school English teachers. Through interviews and a focus group, I invited three teacher-poets to describe their teaching of poetry, their own writing of poetry, and the affordances provided by the interaction of activities in their lives. Research questions that provided the foundational thinking for this study included: 1) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher -poets perceive poetry writing as a vehicle for expressing identity for themselves and their students?* 2) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe how poetry can develop agency for teachers and students?* 3) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe the aesthetic experience of poetry writing for themselves and for students?*

Theoretical Framework

> Orb,
> gray and round,
> heavy as a raincloud.
> I turn the stone in my hands, judge the smoothness,
> apply spit, see truth.

O, how can this piece of earth
thrown to heaven
in a wide arc of love
cry out?

This question probing theoretical truth led me to explore multiple viewpoints from which to examine my topic. Thus, my study is supported by theories of identity, agency and aesthetic experience. The teacher-poets' pedagogy links to these theories in multiple ways. Teacher-poets identify on a personal level with the texts they teach because as writers, they experience the struggle to make meaning through writing, even as the speaker in my poem above might ask how her "piece of earth/ thrown to heaven/ in a wide arc of love" can produce meaning for others. Teacher-poets' identity as writers affords them agency when teaching youth, adding to a "special knowledge that teachers own" which Shulman (1987) refers to as Pedagogical Content Knowledge (PCK). The draw, too, for these teachers, is the aesthetic experience that poetry, both read and written, brings to a classroom.

Aesthetic Experience

To begin, aesthetic experience is at the heart of this study. Dewey (1934) differentiated between experience and having "an experience" (p. 36). The experience is a whole that begins somewhere and progresses toward a point, a type of consummation. While having any experience is internalized and subsequently emotional, aesthetic experiences specifically are those that emotionally and intellectually respond to a perceived object of art. Poetry in particular can evoke these aesthetic experiences, since the action of making the art involves focus on the topic's many elements and the emotions that surround the elemental context. Former United States' Poet Laureate Juan Felipe Herrera called writing poetry "a way to attain a life without borders" (2008). Like many writers, I can attest to having such experiences when I write poetry, although the experiences will vary. For example, I recently worked on a poem over a span of a

few months about a medical emergency that became an intense intersection with pain and the medical community's efforts to measure and document pain. I felt the intensity of the memory each time I revised the poem. It became a chronicle of not just the pain, but also the ghost of pain, revisited each time I went back. I wrote as I recalled, but felt the anxiety and intensity of focus and feeling coming together into the form of a poem. For example, I described my pain:

> My brain wants the bottom,
> to hear the splash echo upward,
> security of limitation.
> After children, I thought I knew--
> yet at this time, I discover new depths,
> new chords of humanity,
> another way of knowing.

This anxiety is physical, perhaps the physical manifestation of something emotional and mental; Dewey (1934) stated that "craftsmanship to be artistic in the final sense must be 'loving'" (p. 49). Thus, it might be said that my attention to the aesthetic quality of the poem showed love. The poem writing was thus an aesthetic experience, just as the performance of the poem can be. Dewey (1934) explained, "the artist embodies in himself the attitude of the perceiver while he works" (p. 50). Intellectual and emotional focus on lived experience, an event, or an idea, produces the aesthetic experience in a way that others can appreciate as a reflection of the human experience. To this point, poet John Ciardi (1975) affirmed, "Once one has learned to experience the poem as a poem, there inevitably arrives a sense that one has experienced himself as a human being" (p. 3).

Identity

Of course, even while having aesthetic encounters, English teachers and students hold personal and social views of themselves, and they develop these views and ways of being within social discourse. Thus, a broad view of identity is presented as the discourses in which a person

participates and the hierarchy that borders these within social boundaries (Bourdieu, 1977, Foucault, 1972). Within this view is the general definition of distinguishing or categorizing by similarity. For Foucault (1972), identity was socially restricted by the hierarchical environment, bound within power structures. Bourdieu (1977), however, described identity formation as happening as a result of social relationships within a situation. In this broad sense, the teachers in my study identified themselves as teachers, poets, and parents—social roles they enacted within their social realm. These identities function as labels that assist conventional classification and social relations. Later theorists, however, see identities as dynamic within social settings. For example, Butler (1990) described identity as a performance, thus lending agency to the individual. Furthermore, identity can be created through the narratives told by individuals, shaped by the choices made in this discourse (Denzin, 2000; Georgakopoulu 2002), again displaying personal agency. Yet, as May (2001) asserted, even this agency is circumscribed by social forces. My use of the term identity includes these broad definitions and also shifts to a more specific type of identity, that which is formed in written discourse.

Writer identity is a term used to describe the way a social identity is constructed and reflected in discourse, specifically the written text (Halliday, 1985; Fairclough, 1992). Halliday (1985) differentiates between the content conveyed through language and the interpersonal meaning, the message about the person who is delivering the content. In addition, Fairclough (1992) names the two components of the interpersonal meaning: social relations and social identity. While social identities include both that of the language producers and the receivers, and both are important in discourse, this study is most interested in the identity of the producer, that is, the writing and speech involved in discourse.

This study considers, from the perspective of teacher-poets, how poetry writing can explore the multiple identities of both students and teachers as they write poetry that reflects their lived and imagined experience. This means that writers explore personal stances, values, and beliefs in order to position themselves in their written texts. Positioning is an act that requires the forming of an identity, whether intentional or not (Ivanic, 1994). Placing self in a position to explore content and present it creates discomfort and poses difficulty for writers because it forces individuals to grapple with who they are, the roles they fill in life, and interrelationships that define these roles.

Agency

While identity is personally owned, agency allows individuals to employ identities in action. The belief of personal efficacy "is the foundation of human agency" (Bandura, 2006). The Vygotskyan (1978) view, that the social aspect determines the capacity for agency, is what my study follows, examining how classroom social interaction can influence the agency of students' writing. For Bandura (1989), the agency of a person is fully situated and influenced by the people interacting in that "figured world." Because the power to act is seen as social, the situation will influence how the individual will find empowerment to act. This empowerment may be felt and shared between students and teacher. Students make many choices as they learn, and these choices are situated and dependent on a student's identity within the context. Within a classroom, the teacher and other learners compose the social relations that will determine capacity for agency. These relationships are reframed in a sociocultural context (Moje & Lewis, 2007). In a secondary English classroom, the social relations can become most crucial for one learning to write. Here, the identities of the student are multiple and positioning is continually

negotiated. English teachers can use poetry to help students negotiate their identities, thus nurturing writer agency to choose, to take risks, and to use feedback to inform writing moves.

Aesthetics, identity and agency are not mutually exclusive. For example, a writer's agency to make choices may produce an aesthetic effect, a carefully considered encounter with composition. This agency to choose correlates to what Dewey (1934) calls "art as experience," an experience that "we must summon energy and pitch it at a responsive key in order to *take* in" (p. 55). *Taking in* art holds true for both the writer and the audience when they are aware and fully engaged in the art, thus employing identity and agency as artists who engage in the creation and appreciation of art. Dewey's description of the encounter supplies an apropos framework for viewing teachers' statements regarding their classroom poetry pedagogy and how students respond to poetry.

Another influential thinker, Freire, promoted a closer connection to content. He contended that use of language was a form of activism. He writes of naming the world as an act of change and writes that "hopelessness is a form of silence" (Freire, 1970, p. 91). Here, the progressive thought is that language is a tool for individual agency, and the teacher can be the facilitator of agency when she presents poetry and invites students to write their own poems. Progressivist theory suggests that students, in writing their own poems about personal perceptions can be empowered by the process and validated by the product.

However, student empowerment involves more than student agency to write poems. Empowerment in the classroom relies on shared power between all participants. Traditional classroom structures position teachers at the front as the authorized "explainers"--those who possess the knowledge that is to be shared. This placement withholds power from students, since the act of explaining requires that one knows and the other does not, therefore placing one as a

superior over the other (Freire, 1970 ; Ranciere, 2010). In a progressive classroom, the teacher attempts to upset this configuration and distribute the power. Shared power means that the teacher is not the sole authority, the distributor of knowledge. When teachers assume a learner's role alongside their students they can eliminate the oppressive "explainer" role, and intellectually emancipate the students. Ranciere's philosophy describes: "The student is always a seeker. And, the teacher is first of all a person who speaks to another, who tells stories and returns the authority of knowledge to the poetic condition of all spoken interaction" (p. 6).

Methodology and Analysis

A Method

Thoughts hover over the
possibility of summer's last poem.
Perfectly warm
words in the midday
sun sleep like
dogs.
Hours later, long shadows
define, identify.
Twitch.
Scratch.

As the poem above suggests, Poetic Inquiry is a method that resides on the understanding that poetry is another way of knowing and researching, a way of thinking deeply about a topic and reviewing those thoughts under varying light, even "long shadows." In this study, I aim to use poetry as "both a tool of discovery and a unique mode of reporting research" (Brady, 2009, p. xiii). Thus, I gathered the statements of secondary English teachers who identify as poets, and I added my own experiences as a poet and English teacher to the mix, resulting in the *Vox*

Participare category of Poetic Inquiry (Prendergast, 2009). The resulting poems at the end of sections are my own internalization of these collected data, a method that follows Prendergast's listing as "like narrative inquiry with which it shares many characteristics, interested in drawing on the literary arts in the attempt to more authentically express human experiences" (p. xxxvi). In addition to the poems written about participants using their very words, I also included poems as preface to sections of this paper. For example, the poem above entitled "When the question is asked" reflects the *Vox Theoria* criteria for Poetic Inquiry, described as "researcher-voiced" poems written about literature, theory, or "inquiry itself" (p. xxii). Whether *Vox Participare* or *Theoria*, my poems are the honest expression of my gathered thinking upon each theme, and I include these poems with due humility, noting that Piirto (2009) critically separated the efforts of poetic inquiry into the "seekers" and "masters, and also "poetasters" and "poets" (p. 98).

This study focused on finding participants who were tenured high school English teachers, practicing poets, and who were committed to teaching poetry reading and writing. The decision to use these criteria was based on a desire to know how teachers who write poetry felt about teaching poetry and how they viewed both writing and teaching poetry. Another practical consideration in seeking participants was the driving distance to interviews and a culminating focus group meeting. To meet these criteria, I attempted to recruit from teacher groups and poetry groups on Facebook and called other acquaintances in teacher and poetry networks. The teachers who consented to participate all had received tenure at their schools, had poetry published, and were teaching poetry in their classes (though one was teaching Advanced Placement (AP) Language and Composition and had to wait until after the AP testing was finished to teach his poetry lessons). I chose pseudonyms for each participant in order to respect confidentiality.

Once I found participants, I interviewed them on two occasions each, lasting 45 minutes to an hour, and recording each. My questions covered their backgrounds and teaching; questions such as *What is poetry? How is teaching poetry different from teaching prose, if at all?* and *What if anything has most influenced your poetry teaching?* (see Appendix A). After the interviews, conducted over a period of three months, I read and coded the interviews and found linking themes of identity, agency, aesthetic experience, and curriculum. Since I noted these themes were common to all three participants, I wondered how participants would respond to direct questions about these themes within a focus group. I then organized the focus group discussion to meet three weeks after all the interviews had concluded. At a centrally located public library the group discussed questions such as *How, if at all*, *might identity be developed through poetry*? *How, if at all, is poetry a conduit for writer agency?* (see Appendix B).

The interviews and focus group followed semi-structured protocols. That is, I freely went off-script when a question or probe occurred to me. In the focus group, I situated myself as a teaching colleague and asked questions from a prepared protocol as well as participated in the discussion by offering my own experiences and viewpoints. Participating, or embedded research is used by many qualitative researchers, among them those using Poetic Inquiry. These researchers are not merely observers, but also seek data through their own participation, essentially becoming one of the group. One specific example of this is Jane Piirto (2009), who described her own "complicity in the status quo" in a scene spewing racist language to which she wrote a poem, but did not directly confront the group (p. 96). My participation was authentic in that I was, similar to my participants, an actively teaching colleague and serious poet. Naturally, during this focus group at a public library, we offered viewpoints, shared poems we have taught

our classes, and ended with a ten-minute writing session that focused on the topic of testing. This discussion was recorded, transcribed, and coded similar to the initial interviews.

I began the analysis by reading the transcriptions of the interviews and marking my initial observations of theme patterns. Then, I aligned the comments by color coding the statements, sometimes overlapping the colors as the themes intersected (see Appendix C for themes). Finally, I focused on each theme, summarized the findings, and allowed myself to internalize and interpret the statements, tying them to my own experiences, both in the classroom and within the space of interviews and focus group discussion. For example, Carmen's statements about finding poetry reading and writing as a youth in the *Inside Outside* program, being an avid reader, and broadening her use of poetry in her teaching all pointed to identity negotiation. She was positioning herself as a reader, writer and teacher in the interview. This focus resulted in my rendering of topics into poems, aimed to function both as poetic reviews and as aesthetic poetic responses to themes as I perceived them embodied in the interview responses. The poems I wrote about each teacher-poet use only the teachers' words, but the arrangement—line breaks, sequencing and any added italics—are mine, following the approach described by Glesne (2010) in which she states, "qualitative researchers increasingly shape words they hear through interviews and conversations into poetic forms" (p. 30). The poetry that resulted was another truth, a way of knowing and owning the theme, a truth situated specifically within my experiences as a participant and embedded researcher in this study. Further, Glesne points out, "Through attention and craft, you sometimes come to know something that was not seen or realized before" (p. 31).

My own experience as a high school English teacher of 16 years, published poet, and a teacher who infuses my classroom curriculum with poetry reading and writing informs this

study. I realize now that at the beginning of my teaching career, I focused on a New Criticism approach to poetry, an approach emphasizing analysis, where line by line, each poem would be examined. However, in addition to teaching analysis, I also gave space for my students to write poetry, since I wrote poetry myself since high school. As I learned more about poetry and teaching, my pedagogy evolved, and I began to focus on contemporary and multi-cultural poetry as poetic texts with my class. This exploration process coincided with my doctoral research on poetry pedagogy and this study of teacher-poets. During these interviews, I positioned myself as an interested and engaged listener; however, I participated in the focus group discussion, adding my experiences to the mix of narratives and posing questions.

The Teacher-Poets:

Identity Negotiation Through Poetry

Because my study considers identity as a condition of being within a sociocultural context, identity negotiation through poetry will be explored through how teacher-poets perceive their own and their students' identities as cultivated through poetry writing and reading. I used a three-poem approach to conjure the varied features of these teacher-poets. First, I present a brief description of each teacher-poet, then I use the words of that teacher-poet to present the individual in 1) a poem of my writing, through her words, "to control representation and effect" (Cahnmann-Taylor, 2009, p. 18). Then, I include 2) a poem or poems each teacher-poet shared in a recent poetry lesson and 3) an original poem written recently by each teacher-poet, either one given me at the interview or written on-site during the focus group meeting. How these teachers identify themselves in the interviews, share poems they teach, and what they reveal in their own poetry, conjoin to present a multi-faceted portrait, a reflection of each teacher-poet's identity.

As mentioned previously, I began the interviews asking each teacher, "How do you define poetry?" I used this question not only to discover what poetry means to them, but also to uncover their personal motives: how did they perceive their relationship to poetry and what brought them to lend so many of their free hours to talk about poetry and teaching? The answers tied to freedom, to choice, to fine distillation of language. And in their answers I heard their passion for teaching and reaching others through poetry. In these cases, for Ben, Carmen, and Adam, teaching poetry to high school students was central to their *identities*—that is why they gave their time to talk with me about this shared interest.

These interviews revealed how their identities, bounded by social discourse (Bourdieu, 1977; Foucault, 1972), were expanded when they experienced poetry through social interaction (Bourdieu, 1977) and then began to write poetry themselves. While they all discovered poetry as a particular expression of literature, building on already developed interests in reading and writing literature, two of the teachers, Carmen and Adam, became interested in writing poetry through the spoken word or slam movement, Ben found his interest in poetry from reading poetry in and out of school, and then felt further influenced during his time at Columbia University. During the initial interviews, these participants described how they perceived themselves as teachers and writers, and they discussed their writing and teaching in conjunction with these multiple identities. They reflected on how early experiences with poetry and poetry writing specifically changed their perceptions of how language can be used to express thought.

My first interview was with Ben, white and fortyish in a serious tie, and sleeves rolled. He welcomed me into his carpeted, spacious classroom in a working-class suburban high school where he currently teaches AP Language and Composition. He explained that he taught an elective course on poetry, and that he expects to teach it again, perhaps next year. Despite its

proximity to Detroit, the high school has few minority students, only ten percent African American and under five percent Hispanic. Ben explained that his undergraduate degree was at Columbia Teachers College where he took a class taught by poet Maxine Green, who fostered his interest poetry. He expressed that, as a student, "The written and spoken word changed the way I saw language, it changed the way I saw people, and it changed the way I saw the possibilities of where my life could be." Currently, Ben writes prose most often, but speaks with commitment about continuing with poetry. When he reflected on his lived experience, he identified how writing a poem transformed his identity and his agency. In the poem below, I tried to evoke Ben's scope of possibilities, those that came about because he experienced poetry writing and thus, as a writer, re-conceptualized his identity. In the poem below, the words are Ben's from the interview; I both arranged his words to suit my vision of his identities and added the italics to highlight Ben's personal reflection about his self-conceptualization within the discourse of writing poetry.

Because I Wrote a Poem

I teach because
I wrote a poem once.

It was a long route,
a stumble into writing.

It changed the way I saw
language,
people,
possibilities of life.

Now, as I am writing with my class, I think,

I've been doing this for thirty-five years longer
than these kids have been alive.

Still,
I am drawn to
        what words can do,
                what I can do with words.
Poetry is my ability to do
things
        with words,
                realization.

Again, this poem uses *only Ben's words* to examine his stated identity as a writer who has "possibilities of life" and then restructures as one who "has been doing this for thirty-five years longer than these kids have been alive." Ben described clearly how he perceives himself within the discourse, and how all his lived experiences culturally and socially influenced his perception of life possibilities. Thus, he feels transformed as a result of writing poetry, a clear writer identity, and he also presents himself as a teacher who writes along with his students, adding significant detail to his teacher identity. These two identity structures reflect stable personal perceptions of personhood, and as such they are fluid and generative (Lewis, Enciso & Moje, 2007). As a writer, Ben experienced the power of language within his own life, offering evidence of this as a career prompt and having experienced this power personally, expands the experience with his students.

Ben's own writing further supports his stated identities. Teacher-poets were asked to bring an original poem to the second interview and although Ben did not bring a recently written poem to the second interview, he wrote a poem in response to my suggested prompt about testing:

When we sat down to answer
all the questions, I thought the
hard part would be over
after I made up my mother's
email. Then I turned the page
and saw the list to choose
from classes I had planned

to take, and majors. I don't
even know what I will eat
for lunch tomorrow--how should
I know how to chose from
700 words to name the classes
that I want to focus
on in college? I picked the ones
I wanted by their numbers; 0413,
my birthday; 0767, first plane
that I ever rode on; 1031, favorite
holiday. Who doesn't love to wear
a mask?

To clarify, the poem above was a draft written in a ten-minute writing session near the end of the focus group. This poem affirms Ben's poet identity— that he is agile with imagery, and the poem also adds detail about his teacher identity, detailing his knowledge about the testing process. Here, Ben positions himself, as the poem's speaker, to be a student preparing the answer form for a standardized test. He captures the playful tone of an 11th grader, while suggesting a teacher's political conflict toward testing: "I don't even know what I will eat for lunch tomorrow—how should I know how to choose from 700 words to name the classes that I want to focus on in college?" A final point is that Ben's poem ends with "mask," a word also invoking identity. While the speaker of the poem is clearly a student who likes Halloween masks, I am intrigued by the possibility of this poem being a veiled descriptor of the poet's own identity masking. The poem as a whole deals with minutia of personal information tied to identity, yet throughout, the speaker dissembles. This complexity of identity construction mirrors the life of a poet in a sociocultural setting, one in which the identity may not be recognized or affirmed by others.

During the focus group, Ben shared a poem he uses in his poetry class, adding to his teacher identity. The poem, "Barbie Doll" by Marge Piercy (1971), he claimed produces a strong response in his students. With lines like "so she cut off her nose and her legs and offered them

up," the poem confronts body image conformity within contemporary social pressure, and the dire effects of conformity. Both the poem Ben wrote about student testing and his choice to bring the Piercy poem "Barbie Doll" are detailed with visual imagery and that represents aspects of youth culture. Ben's choice "Barbie Doll" reflects sensitivity to his identity as a high school teacher and to students' identity negotiation within their social context.

Another participant, Carmen, African-American, stylish in oversized cat-eyed glasses, met me twice a coffee shop in Detroit. She has taught English Language Arts classes for five years in a Detroit high school. This school of 600 students is known for its college preparatory curriculum. The Detroit Public School (DPS) student body has 18% Individual Education Plan (IEP) eligibility and 100 % of the students receive free breakfast and lunch. Carmen, raised in Detroit, explained the impact of a poetry-in-the-schools project: "I stumbled upon poetry and never left, pretty much." After high school, Carmen attended college where she participated in more poetry workshops. Carmen was performing with a slam team the week I interviewed her, and she continues to read her poetry at public venues in the Detroit metropolitan area. Carmen explained that the written and spoken word was her life, and she saw that same power reaching students everyday. At many points in the discussion, she pointed out that her students engaged with poetry for both language building and for self-expression. Her language-as-therapy lifestyle and teaching style mixed with her expressed desire to improve continually as a writer. My poem about Carmen touches on her writerly life as it evolves and intertwines with the lives and writing of others—her writer identity.

Carmen's House

Reading and writing
go hand in hand,
hand to hand
in my house.

I read,
stretch,
move to a new place.
It's an internal process,
to write for yourself.

At the same time
I connect with others.
I connect with all
the authors I've read.

And the one I just read
tells me,
You gotta step it up.

The more I write,
the more I learn about myself.
Maybe there are some times
that I write poems
about things and I didn't realize that
I felt
that about that,
I didn't realize
that
still bothered me
about this house.

This poem aims to explore Carmen's identities within the discourse of poetry writing. Carmen's metaphor "in my house" represents first a physical place, then her personhood, then expands to comprise an entire discourse, that of poetry writing. Through writing poetry, Carmen learns about herself ("I didn't realize that/ I felt/ that about that"), and she "connects with all /the authors [she has] read." Her reading of poetry reflected her teacher identity and her slam poet experience, both places where she encounters new poetic voices. Her words to which I added italics, "*You gotta step it up"* highlight her connection to other poets, almost as if she is in continual conversation with them. Specific lines reflect the identity moves Carmen made during the interview, from her self-reflective writer ("the more I write, the more I learn about myself"),

to her close connection with her reading ("the one I just read/ tells me…."). Her identity fluctuation as a writer correlates to the Moje and Lewis (2007) framework of identity restructuring within a social discourse.

Furthering identity negotiation within the focus group, Carmen shared a poem by a London Youth Poet Laureate, Warsan Shire (2012), entitled "What We Have." This poem was a new favorite poem that she shares with her classes, she explained. It is a poem that highlights a feminist view of female existence with men, and suffering from that existence. The lines "Then the men we try to love, say we carry too much loss, wear too much black, are too heavy to be around, much too sad to love" suggest a burdened life, one of women caring for and about men who may not be able to reciprocate. This focus on relationships within an unstable, perhaps violent society--a sophisticated, adult topic, appears in another setting in Carmen's poem "daughter.lost.," a poem she emailed me in response to my request for a recently written original poem.

daughter. lost.

my daughter Micah makes Kanais
sound like ice cream
sandwiches freefalling from
grubby fingers mid-recess
on her tongue.

this second grade boy reduces the ringing
bells of her 6 year old voice to
ghost with a casual
I don't care about what you're
talking about.

her responding scream firecrackered
through the shrinking tunnel
of hallway.
I find her in the "peace" corner with

flag pole triumphing tall in her

spine. she says *I wouldn't say sorry.*
I wanted to make him care.
I bet he cares now.

months later when he
tells her she's less velvet
ribbon, more racing toys
trucks across shiny gym floor,

and he likes her after
all, she glows vibrant as fluorescent
"open" sign, hula dancers stretch
across her cheeks and shimmy
all the way home.

I tell her she was always
sunset on arid nights; that she
was dancing flames before he
named her electric.

her tiny hands only have space
for his compliment. she offers
no response.

Here, the speaker of the poem tells us that the daughter "wanted to make him care. I bet he cares now," reflecting the female concern for the boy's feelings and wanting the boy to change his ways toward her. Both poems, Carmen's "daughter. lost." and Shire's "What We Have" convey this female vulnerability within a world of men and a lack of female control over life events. The sense of wanting to both protect from men and to reject the ensuing pain resounds in these selections, conveying Carmen's sensitivity to such relationships. Her sharing of both her original poem and the Warsan Shire poem reflect her constructed identities to include feminist, mother, teacher as well as the poet identity I highlighted in my poem, "Carmen's House."

In a college town outside of Detroit, I met Adam in his classroom on the third floor of a large, aging high school with a culturally diverse student body. Adam is a youthful forty-something white male, in tennis shoes and hoodie, relaxed in a collegiate way, befitting the

college town in which he teaches. The classroom walls are papered with posters, among them posters promoting poetry readings in the area, some with Adam as a headliner. The front desk behind which Adam sits is disheveled—hay-stacked, actually—with papers. As a local poet and creative writing teacher, Adam recounted his interest in poetry as having grown from the slam scene he observed as a student in California. He recalled that slams revealed to him a "powerful use of language," after which he went on to earn teaching credentials and an MFA in writing. Having published poetry and a book on poetry pedagogy, he reads his poetry in public readings throughout the area. Adam's identity highlighted in my poem below, is that of a veteran teacher and poet who correlates time passing with the passing of his ability to bring the most current poetry and pedagogy to his students. This identity as expressed to me in the interviews is a two-fold teacher identity: the talented teacher-poet who engages students in the classroom and audiences at his readings and the reflective creative writing teacher who fears losing his ability to engage students with poetry that touches their lives. Again, the poem is composed of only Adam's words from the interviews—I selected the words from the transcript, arranged the sequence, and configured the lines and white space to present Adam's teacher-poet identities as he spoke them.

Slow Change

I

I keep changing.
I remember my senior English class,
a teacher teaches Somerset Maugham:
incredible passages of the artist
on this island, a description of this woman,
a local on the island, beauty around her,
ocean and trees.
I was captivated by that.

II

I
slow down
time
as I write.

III

If I'm writing about students
in a way where I'm trying to be
sensitive

to a student,
then later,
I don't want to be the teacher
who doesn't care.

IV

Yet, I get older--
I think I'm nearing the time--
Can't tap the energy,
Can not tap the energy.

V

I think a younger teacher,
a younger teacher
will be able to do
that
more
because I am
almost
almost
past my time.

Adam's responses to my questions during the interviews showed that he thinks continually about his writing and his teaching practice. This poem, touching on his fear of losing close connection—relevance—with his creative writing students, correlates to his lived-experiences with the slam poetry environment in California. The anecdote he told about the English teacher who exposed him to Somerset Maugham as mentioned in the poem above,

suggests that these early experiences influenced his career choices, providing details that support his identity as a teacher. Following his teacher's model, Adam wanted to be able to bring fresh and current voices to his students, and he is "trying to be sensitive," to speak to them in voices the students hear and feel. My aim in this poem was to show how Adam's identity as a teacher is tied to his ability to reach the youth in his classroom through aesthetic experiences with language—to be a teacher who can "captivate" the way his teacher did for him with the Somerset Maugham text. A second part to the teacher identity, however, is Adam's concern about his pedagogical efficacy; this concern is reflected in his statements "can't tap the energy" and "almost past my time." Adam's constructed identities co-exist within the sociocultural setting of Adam's classroom. As he put it: "I keep changing."

Adam's identity as a teacher who connects with students' lived experiences resonated in the poetry lesson he brought to share with the focus group. A set of three poems explored the concept of what it is to "pass" in a multiplicity of current social settings. The poems "Passover (or Thursday)" and "The Show" both by Jon Sands (2016), and "Sunday Afternoons at Claire Carlyle's" by Toi Derricotte (2010) all exhibit types of passing. Adam explained how the students read the three poems and discuss the separate and entwined human connections and the identities tied to *passing*—the meaning of Passover for Jewish people, an identity element about which Sands writes, "I am a Gemini. I am Vegetarian. I am a Poet. I am Jewish." Sands' other poem, "The Show" serves to mark the passing of prowess in a sport, a passing that with age moves to the next generation. The third passing happens in the racial landscape of skin color with Derricotte's "Sunday Afternoons at Claire Carlyle's." In the race passing, Derricotte writes that "Almost all/were light and straight-featured /enough to pass—some did,/some didn't." This lesson on passing used contemporary poetry to expose the human condition as it is tied to the varied

meanings of one word. The sophistication of the passing metaphor represents Adam's effort to be relevant to his profession and to his students' lives. Adam's shared poems joined my poem "Slow Change" to illustrate Adam's concern for *relevance* in the poetry he brings to his class.

Adam's poem about testing, written in the ten-minute writing session tacked on to the focus group, added another dimension to his teacher identity as well as to his poet identity. Here, in this quickly-drafted poem which was written to my suggested prompt, Adam showed his ability to spontaneously compose imagery. The speaker in his poem is the "loud mouth" teacher who knows how to administer a standardized test. Because the speaker displays cultural sensitivity to student identity negotiations as shown in the line "misgendered in front of their/ Peers," I am reminded of Adam's own interview statements about how he wants to be a teacher who cares deeply about students.

Loud mouth at the front of the room—
And the clipboard with the
Students' first and last names
I know how to pack and repack

The plastic bin, alphabetize the
testing booklets and the answer sheets
I know what an acceptable
        TI-83 calculator looks like
I know how to issue instructions as if
What we're doing is important
And I know there's a kid in my room,
At least one, who will cringe when
He/she/they must fill out the
Bubbles with their birth name
What they call their dead name
Risen now from the grave to
Attach zombie-style as they will be
Out loud—misgendered in front of their
Peers and for what?
So we know how many kids know how
To question questionable commas?
What I don't know is how we
Got here—to this place where
We are testing children in the name of saving them.

As in the three poems about passing, Adam showed with this original poem that he is attuned to current issues in the lives of students. The speaker of the poem here suggests that educators are responsible for knowing and teaching relevant material and that ironically "We are testing children in the name of saving them." Adam's responses in the interviews, his poetry lesson, and his original poem reveal the teacher-poet's identity as skilled in bringing relevance to student learning, all the while insisting that poetry can illuminate issues in ways that aesthetically touch emotions and minds.

Three Teacher-Poets Come Together

Identity Connections Through Poetry

In the following sections, I present an analysis of my findings from the focus group where the three teacher-poets and I discussed identity, agency and aesthetic experience as they pertain to writing poetry and teaching poetry in high school. First, I uncover how the teachers perceive how poetry writing has been a means for themselves to negotiate identity, and a means for their students to express their identities. Some of the subtopics included here are identity growth through poetry writing, student identity formation, the role of poetry selection for classroom study, and how that poetry selection can encourage student identity affirmation. The identity section concludes with a discussion about writer identity and challenges in teaching student writers. Then, I connect identity to agency, discussing how these teacher-poets perceive agency for themselves and for students through poetry writing. Furthermore, I link agency to identity following Moje and Lewis' (2007) theory of strategic identity restructuring as agency. Agency surfaces in the form of teaching strategies that address the challenges of imagination and choosing a starting position and afford opportunities for students' growth as writers. Finally, the

section moves to descriptions of how these teacher-poets perceive aesthetic experience as significant to themselves and their students.

Identity negotiation manifests in poetry writing and in the social discourse surrounding the teacher-poets, as shown in the poems they shared, wrote, and the discussions about writing and teaching. Most significant is the identity intersection of teacher and poet, and how this intersection supports the classroom discourse around poetry writing. Interviews and the focus group discussion were interwoven with evidence using stems, "I like to tell my students—"or "my kids tell me that—" as teacher-poets recalled the struggle to begin a poem or to revise one. The teacher identity was supported by the writer identity, a connection affording insight and agency. Most striking about this group of teacher-poets was their engagement with their chosen discipline. They were not only teachers of poetry writing—they were learners themselves, and as such, approached teaching poetry writing with a learner's energy and insight.

In the focus group gathered around a table in a public library, we considered, among other topics, how writing poetry influenced identity formation. Participants characterized their own poetry writing process as one of self-discovery in which individual identities were explored and expanded. Carmen stated, "the more I write, the more I learn about myself. And maybe there are some times that I write poems about things and I didn't realize that I said that about that or I didn't realize that still bothered me." This self-awareness is an example of the *character* element in the body of writing identities as Ivanic (1994) refers to Goffman's (1959) theory of identity. Goffman suggests that writers' identities are comprised of self, author and character. Ivanic (1994) referred to this character dimension as, "the textual identities which are socially constructed in the act of writing" (p. 12). The construction of identity in writing parallels what some scholars considered identity as performing in discourse (Butler, 1990; Denzin, 2000).

Carmen's statement displayed an awareness of how this formation of character functions within her writing. Another teacher, Adam, explained, "If I'm writing about students in a way where I tried to be sensitive to what a student said, then later I don't want to be the teacher who doesn't care." In view of this statement, it appears that Adam's identity may be, in part, constructed within his poetry, suggesting Denzin's (2000) view of identity formation through narrative. His thinking about his teaching seems to deepen when he writes, contributing to his attitude toward his classroom practice. Both Carmen and Adam's statements showed that the structure of their identities within the sociocultural setting (Moje & Lewis, 2007)—here, a focus group composed of teacher-poets—was that of teacher-poets who have positioned themselves to engage in reflection.

The focus group discussion revealed that student identity formation through writing was facilitated by the teacher-poets who had experienced *how their own identities* were explored in their writing. As with Jocson's (2005) poetry program, the teachers conjoined their concepts of identity formation in poetry writing to their students' identity construction, encouraging exploration and growth in language skills and personal agency. For example, Carmen explained how, *similar to topics explored in her own poetry*, she "let students figure out that there might be something that they're tangling with." She encouraged them, "OK, just start writing and see where it leads you." And later, she stated that students often write about painful events, "like a brother's death." In addition, Carmen, in her earlier interview, had discussed how poetry was like therapy for some youth, who in her school, don't have a counselor to tell, "This is what I'm thinking. This is what I'm feeling." Carmen's statements showed how she exhibited the capacity to transfer her own identity from writer to teacher, and thus *transfer writing experiences* to her teaching, hereby exploring topics that cause personal struggle. Since Carmen had earlier shared

how poetry topics continued to surface in her writing, as shown in the earlier poem "Carmen's House," it was interesting that her statement reflected her readiness to help students with "something they're tangling with." Carmen's identity as a writer informed her teacher identity, affording her a writer's insight.

Another aspect of identity negotiation emerged when teacher-poet Ben explained how his class of AP scholars grew through poetry writing. Ben stated that these students who were generally high-achieving scholar identities, "might discover that poetry allowed them to find that artistic space inside of them"—poet identities. However, they often struggled with the freedom of poetry: "I wonder if the blank page is the problem." He described how "each writer has to negotiate an individual purpose or a sense of audience for his or her poem becomes an area of tension." After describing his ideas and experiences, he decided, "I think a lot of kids who have trouble with the blank page are really in trouble with all the stuff in their head about what writing has to be." Ben's views present a significant facet of identity negotiation in secondary English classrooms. Students who are accustomed to working with clear formulae, models, targets can find themselves frustrated. The scholar identity is challenged by the artistic activity. Without prompts and rubrics, students must grapple with their lived experiences to create something new. This area of vulnerability may provide the biggest reward when a static identity is re-conceptualized after a poem is written. Moje and Lewis (2007) explained how learning can be viewed as the transformation from one identity to another; thus, Ben's AP students' from scholar identity to poet identity can be seen as learning under this sociocultural theory.

Both Adam and Carmen strongly supported the use of contemporary poetry in their classes as a way to facilitate engagement with identity. To do this, these teachers emphasized choice and sensitivity to the cultures, interests, and the knowledge backgrounds of their students.

Adam said that he uses mostly contemporary poetry because "kids have gotten poems forever in school, and it seems like a poem is a puzzle to figure out, not necessarily *relevant to their experience*." Using contemporary poetry, he said, broadened the possibilities for developing student identity--to understand that their experiences, their words, and their writing ability was sufficient for poetry. Further, he provided an example of how a contemporary poem engaged students by connecting to an event from recent history and because of the aesthetic experience that is produced when read aloud:

> There's an incredible poem by a guy named Fred Moramarco called "Messages from the Sky," which was written shortly after September 11th. I think my students are moved by it. It's a beautiful moment in class when we read this poem together and talk about it. It helps them understand the power of what a poem is, what it can do. And then they can think about how can I write something that's powerful.

The 9/11 destruction of the Twin Towers may be one of the most familiar historical events for students today, yet most have probably not read a poem about it, and such a poem may expose *their own lived experiences* as worthy of examination. Thus, exposure to this poem might lead students to write about their own difficult obstacles—a death, an escape, or an assault. Further, Adam commented about the aesthetic element "power," a concept addressed in a later section of this paper.

Another teacher, Carmen, used contemporary poetry to "make [poetry] *relate* to students," a phrase that indicated *identity connection* between students and content. She explained how she first shows young people reading poetry on YouTube, from poetry sites like Brave New Voices (youthspeaks.org/bravenewvoices) because, "it's helpful to show them in class in terms of spoken word because they're looking at people their age." This example reflects

the broad definitions of identity (Bordieu, 1977; Foucault, 1972) in that they are constructed within and by discourse, in this case by affirming one's own common attributes. Carmen then, by understanding that identity is further performed in written discourse (Butler, 1990; Denzin, 2000) may facilitate identity negotiation in their students' writing. Thus, her students may take on a writer identity more easily after having seen their external identities and their youth concerns affirmed in the spoken word video.

Carmen's use of spoken word videos mirrors how Hanauer (2010) used poetry to help English Language Learner (ELL) students negotiate their multiple identities as immigrants of diverse backgrounds, often finding themselves struggling to find a secure place in American society. Similar to how Hanauer's ELL students wrote poetry, poetry writing suited these students' identity negotiation, not only to explore thinking, but also to express pain and frustration. In fact, Carmen stated that for some of her students, poetry was "a type of therapy, a type of expression, it's life-saving." She said, "poetry gave them a way to say 'this is what I'm feeling, what I'm thinking," an aspect of identity negotiation aligned with Ivanic's (1994) view that multiple identities can be explored in writing and also Freire's (1970) view that activism is tied to personal voice.

In addition to personal identity, these teacher-poets reflected on how poetry reading and writing facilitated students' developing *writer identity*, an identity developed specifically through their written discourse (Ivanic, 1994). In their classes, teachers reported that students grappled with the issue of how to start. These teachers explained that students said this because they did not know how to position themselves in the poem. Ivanic (1994) discussed how writers must construct writer identities through how they position themselves in their text, because "every word a writer writes contributes to the impression she is creating of herself to a reader" (p. 5).

The teacher-poets reported their strategies for helping students begin to write, which Ivanic suggested is what students mean when they say they are "stuck." To this obstacle, Adam offered, "One of the metaphors I like to use is imagine yourself as the director of the film and you get to decide what the camera is focusing on." He added further, "In terms of point of view, I like specific exercises like write about yourself in the third person." In agreement, Carmen added that she liked to ask students, "Where are you in the story? Are you third person? Or first?" Like personal identity, writer identity is also an act of positioning in context of a sociocultural setting or discourse. These teacher-poets perceived their teacher identities as facilitators for student identity development—both identities as writers and identities negotiated and positioned in their written poems.

Poetry Facilitates Agency for Students and Teachers

During the focus group, the teacher-poets in this study expressed self-efficacy in teaching poetry writing which appeared to be a result of their poet identities. They were lively in the discussion, each adding commentary to others' pedagogical ideas, and readily sharing their own classroom experiences as examples. They spoke of practices such as using contemporary poetry, promoting student choice, and sharing strategies they use in their own writing. According to Moje and Lewis (2007), agency "can be seen as the strategic making and remaking of selves, identities, activities, relationships, cultural tools and resources, and histories as embedded within relations of power" (p. 18). These teacher-poets spoke of drawing from their own writing experiences as they encourage students to write. The confidence and direction they expressed was continually tied to their own identities as teachers and poets.

The teacher-poets reflected on their own writing process as a source for their pedagogical thinking. Adam, when explaining his pedagogical moves, used his own writing as a

reflection point: “When I write prose, I write a lot of prose myself, a lot of fiction, a lot of essay, I’m trying to be just as precise in language as I am in poetry. And I’m trying to be just as playful, just in different ways.” Adam’s range of experience contributes to his understanding of the writing process, and thus, his agency in teaching students the writing process. Ben also felt that personal identity might enhance self-efficacy in teaching another. He explained this as practical experience with arts education: “If you are part of a band and have experience as a musician or if you’ve taken an arts class and you have an experience in arts, you understand what it means to envision a project, carry it through, and see how other people respond to something you made.” Here, Ben’s example invoked Bandura’s (2006) view of agency: that the ability to take action is developed by self-efficacy and the instruction working together. It appears that these teachers’ experience with their own creative process may result in perceived ability to lead learners in writing poetry.

Another way the teacher-poets showed agency was in their flexibility with shared poetry in their classrooms. Carmen commented on how students exhibited confidence when they discussed reading contemporary poetry:

> “What’s wonderful about [poetry] is that there is a lot more freedom for interpretation. With poetry, students have options where they can say, ‘I think this line means this or no, I think this line means that.’ It’s about more room for analysis and discussion.”

And likewise with writing poetry, Carmen reported that her students appeared to feel a sense of freedom and confidence:

> “Students feel academic writing is something actually we have to be very intellectual to do and very intellectual to understand. They don’t seem to experience poetry the same way. They view poetry as something that everybody can do or everybody can get into. So

> a student who is struggling is more likely, at least in my class, to feel that it is not something being forced upon them."

Teachers' reports, like Carmen's, reflected their perception of students' agency--agency to choose to perform with a genre that felt accessible. Carmen's students' confidence may be stemming from Carmen's relaxed attitude towards poetry, both the interpretation and creation.

Freedom to choose was another aspect of this agentic attitude that seemed to come from the teacher-poets' own poet identities. The teacher-poets discussed how students were drawn to and challenged by the expanded choices afforded by poetry writing. Significant among the list of affordances was the experience of creating something artful *without a direct prompt*. Ben discussed this at length when he considered his Advanced Placement students. They met choice with trepidation, perhaps weighing the risk of not excelling at a poetic task. Yet, he observed:

> "the ability to create a text like a poem that people can receive and appreciate for what it is is a leap of imagination. It's the ability to visualize and imagine and put yourself—imagine someone out there who would appreciate this experience and you imagine how you're going to arrange words in a way that either a specific or unspecified someone might receive those words. You're trying to communicate an experience and that takes imagination."

Ben argued that when students are challenged and supported, they gain self-efficacy for a creative literacy task. For Ben's students, this may be the most significant example of identity development. Agency developed in this way comes with the satisfaction for the scholar identity that one can imagine a course of action independently.

Teacher-poets also recounted how they used their own writing knowledge to help students position themselves in the texts they are producing. Students often complain of "writers' block" or being "stuck" because they must choose a point of view and a situation. Sometimes they do not know why they cannot begin. For this, Adam offered his strategy for helping students

start their poems. He advised them to imagine they are directing a film. The director must decide details of setting and dialogue, the opening scene. Students' agency can be seen here as they make these choices and grow their identities as writers, a transfer that in Moje and Lewis's (2007) framework is described as re-conceptualizing identity. Similar to Adam's strategy, Carmen described how she asked students, "Where are you in the poem? Who are you?" in order to prompt them to find a point of view and a setting. Once students were able to view their options in clear ways, both setting and point of view, they could view the options for their poems. Adding another strategy, Ben used his experience with prose writing to help his students view their options. He said that he told students he often begins a poem much as he would a prose piece. With Ben's high-achieving students, comfortable writing informational text, this advice may have been uniquely effective. These strategies from three teacher-poets evolved from their own backgrounds as writers. Again, writing poetry became a conduit for identity and agency development because teacher-poets use their writing experiences to teach writing.

This writing pedagogy fosters student empowerment through teacher-poets' sharing. When Ben, Carmen and Adam suggest writing strategies that they themselves use or have tried, power is leveraged among writers in the room. Instead of *explaining*, this personal *sharing* of experience empowers students to take-on writer identity. Ben's ability to understand his students' questions about poetry writing shows that he, too, has had these questions, and that he solves it by beginning "much as he begins a prose piece." Likewise, Carmen asking "Where are you in the poem?" is not teacher asking student, but rather, writer asking writer. This pedagogy is emancipatory in that, "a teacher forces the student to prove his or her capacity, to continue the intellectual journey the same way it began" (Ranciere, 2010, p. 6). The teacher-poets here are not explaining what to do; instead, they are equals exploring the intellectual task of writing.

In multiple ways teacher-poets shared their writing process experiences with students to help students develop their identities and agency as writers. Poetry writing may be a new experience for some students, but Ben claimed that all students benefit. He noted, "kids who did well in traditional academic English class wrote completely surprising things in poetry, things totally different than they had for other English assignments. Using language for an aesthetic and self-directed purpose is a valuable experience."

Although these teacher-poets are experienced classroom teachers, poetry, as a genre, afforded rich opportunities to develop identities. Poetry offered options for thematic tie-in, attention to claim and evidence, and grammar study. However, these teacher-poets claimed that the most compelling reason for poetry in the classroom was the aesthetic experience. To support this claim, the following section aims to explore the power of poetry by examining the way the teacher-poets described poetry experiences in the classroom.

Poetry Offers Aesthetic Experience

These three teacher-poets reported strong emotional attraction to poetry, both personally and for their students. While they first described their interest in poetry as intellectual, bound with identity connections of contemporary culture and situation, they also spoke of their engagement with the human emotion they experienced. Most notably, they reported that when poetry was read aloud in class, an experience was usually produced.

A key to poetry's allure resides in its connection to the human condition, to human emotion, and that the experience poetry offers is a deeply human experience. Facilitating an experience for the classroom, however, can be difficult. Dewey (1915) concurred, describing the teacher's problem as "that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing" (117). To produce an

experience, the teacher must seek to present content in an engaging format, one that invites *experience.*

In both the interviews and during the focus group, teacher-poets expressed the importance of the poetic experience in general, and in writing poetry specifically, as a means of affording an *artistic, aesthetic experie*nce. They referenced their own early encounters with poetry as influential to their identity development. Ben's was simply "I wrote a poem once," encapsulating the emotional connection of human to language experience. Carmen's moment of impact was less direct: she stumbled into the school poetry program and "pretty much never left." Finally, Adam too, recounted his time spent in California with the Spoken Word scene as a defining experience. Dewey (1934) described aesthetic experience to be "appreciative, perceiving, and enjoying, denoting the consumer's rather than the producer's standpoint" (p. 49). Yet, both are identities. The artist identity, in this case, the poet, is not merely performing. She is working to perfect and then improve her product. The art, if to be viewed as aesthetically vital, must be produced with a practiced and continually improving perception. This is how artistry develops—by practicing with deep thought applied to the aesthetic outcome. That being said, intense concentration may render the *writing* of a poem an aesthetic experience in itself, for the student writer. This type of experience may be what Wordsworth (1802) described, in his "Preface to Lyrical Ballads," that poetry is "emotion recollected in tranquility" (p. 138). Such recollected emotion was part of Wordsworth's artistic process. Like Wordsworth, a student can also focus on a poetic idea, conjure emotion, and have "an experience." Adam described such events as powerful, as "the power of telling their own stories in their own language," producing "minimum words with maximum impact." The power he indicated relates to the Deweyan experience produced when the writer uses language to "tell their own stories."

In the teacher-poets' descriptions, the reciprocal nature of the aesthetic experience, creating and receiving, is embedded, representing two identities within artistic discourse. The art is created and felt deeply when created; this is an aesthetic experience. Likewise, when the art is received by the audience, the receiver can have an experience, if inclined and prepared to take in the art. Such an experience can be described as transformative, and correlating to this, Moje and Lewis (2007) described the transforming nature of identity and agency as one of "taking up, disrupting, and transforming discourses" (p. 18). Thus, the connection between aesthetic experience and identity is that of transformative power and agency.

Still, for these teacher-poets, poetry can afford an aesthetic experience but not guarantee one. Dewey warned that not all events are experiences due to "distractions." Adam acknowledged, "I don't reach all students." His use of the word *reach* related to Dewey's ideas about experience in the sense that experience is both emotional and intellectual, and a person's emotions cannot be forced. The *reaching* suggested that while a teacher may present material, the student must be able to fully receive it—to be reached. Teachers commonly use *reach* as a metaphor to express the phenomenon of deep student engagement and motivation to learn more. Like Yeats, who described teaching as "lighting a fire," student engagement and learning may correlate to an aesthetic experience. Ben spoke at length about students accessing their untapped power of imagination, and Carmen described her students' engagement with the freedom of poetry. Thus poetry affords aesthetic experiences where language and emotion coalesce, yet these teacher-poets attested to the difficulty of engaging every student.

Personal poetry performance, whether spontaneous in the classroom setting, or planned in a larger performance venue, can also light the fire of aesthetic experience. Both Ben and Carmen explained that students listened to poetry performances on YouTube, and Carmen herself

performed with a slam team—each performance an homage to the aesthetic experience. For Adam, classroom readings were significant events: "I read with some feeling, so they can experience the whole art of the poem …I remember being captivated by the reading of a poem and thought *whoa.* This is what I want students to feel—I think that reading aloud is important from that spirit of offering a poem as a gift to the audience." Unsurprisingly, asking students to read poems aloud can bring surprises. Some students who are reserved, and even the reticent, establish new identities in performance. Adam encouraged students to read their poems at a local poetry event and noted transformation: "kids have gone from being very, very quiet in class to reading their poem in front of 500 people. I think that's a pretty powerful thing to happen."

Discussion of Findings

This study found that both teacher and student identity growth and agency were strengthened due to teacher-poets' own writing experience. My research questions 1) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets perceive poetry writing as a vehicle for expressing identity for themselves and their students? and* 2) *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe how poetry can develop agency for teachers and students?* are answered with affirmation and supported with details from the classroom. First, teacher-poets described and showed in the discourse that their own poetry writing nurtured their efficacy and pedagogy as poetry teachers. Further, the teacher-poets described how poetry writing fostered growth for their students' identities and agency. As classroom teachers of different classroom contexts, each teacher-poet provided examples of how poetry writing afforded a rich genre for exploration and growth.

Identities were explored in the poetry writing as the young writers positioned themselves in the texts as they wrote (Ivanic, 1994). Teacher-poets reported that student identities

restructured as a result of that writing (Moje & Lewis, 2007). Throughout the interviews and focus group, teacher-poets described their positive perceptions about how students benefit from poetry writing and from emancipatory practices that empowered students (Freire, 1970; Ranciere, 2010). These teacher-poets taught poetry writing with personal engagement, approaching students as one writer discussing with another writer. Viewed from this broader viewpoint, Bandura's (1989) theory of agency illuminates how the teacher-poets' type of writerly life models a possibility of lifestyle for students. The value of such role-models in life cannot be overestimated.

My third research question was *How, if at all, do secondary English teacher-poets describe the aesthetic experience of poetry writing for themselves and for students?* Teacher-poets in this study shared how poetry impacted them on an aesthetic level to the point where they attribute their early experiences with poetry as instrumental in their career choices. They also affirmed that they conducted poetry reading in their classes, either live reading or viewed on YouTube, and they described their perceptions of the readings as "powerful" for students in their classrooms. These teachers' accounts echo Dewey (1934) in how the aesthetic experience is received and how it resonates in the life of those who produce and consume art experiences.

Identities for both teacher-poets and students developed in part through aesthetic experiences, nurtured by the linguistic freedom and self-reflective focus of poetry. Findings suggested that that the connection between aesthetic experience and identity formation was significant when contemporary poetry about current topics raised student engagement and emotional response. Student engagement supported both choice and ability to act, fostering identity transformation. Teacher-poets used poetry performance, video or live, to create aesthetic experiences that engaged.

What has been exposed in this study is a *model of engaged teaching*—a specific model for secondary English teachers and a general model for how engaged teaching is linked to engaged student learning, literacy, and motivation. This teaching model embodies the ethos of teacher as learner, and of the classroom experience producing synergy of students and teachers learning together, sharing aesthetic experiences, and discovering new understanding. Here, both Freire and Ranciere are evoked as the teacher shares power and learns beside students. The teachers-poets mirrored Freire's (1970) belief that teachers approach learners in their context and with their skills, embracing the cultural wealth of all students and building up from there. Furthermore, Ranciere's (2010) theory of emancipatory teaching resonates in the classroom where teachers and students create aesthetic experiences, of artistic and academic benefit.

Implications for Research

The three teacher-poets' reported perceptions establish a strong argument for programs like NWP as empowerment and support for teacher growth, here discussed through identity and agency. Poetry as a vehicle for this teacher growth is the significant element of this study, tying the power of the aesthetic experience to student engagement.

This research follows the work of scholars like Fisher (2007), who worked with students in an urban setting and found that poetry writing was a vehicle for finding voice and empowering youth, Peskin (2010), who argued that 12th grade students were engaged and challenged when writing poetry, and Wilson (2010), who found that progressive teachers of poetry writing favored the use of prompts and models. My study looked specifically at teacher-poets' perceptions and was limited to three teachers' interviews and focus group. Further research in a classroom might find other evidence of poetry's capacity to facilitate identity development. Moreover, classroom observation research could uncover how transactions between teacher-poets and students foster

identity growth. In a broader sense, this type of research would follow the work of Moje and Lewis (2007) in studying the role of identity and agency in learning literacy. Because literacy learning remains the essential goal of all research into poetry in the schools, I conclude with a poem that highlights that student-centered mission.

Delivery

Reading
A poem arrives
written last year by a living person.
The poem falls on desktops, dead white handout,
words stiff, unable to walk.

Delivered, the poem is taken up.
A voice reads the poem aloud
Each word sounds like the first word
ever spoken
to ears that hear too much,
to ears stuffed with sounds.

But this voice is new,
it enters heads,
A voice inside
exhales.

Writing
Pencils in fists
fight for air,
colorless figures in heads
waking,
a day, a time, a person
until the dead leaves lift in the wind,
uncovering.

With the heater
whirring louder,
voices rise in throats,
conflate with tongues,
mouths open wide.
The result
may be deafening.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Interview Protocol

Interview 1

1. What is poetry?
2. How is teaching poetry different from prose, if at all?
3. How does poetry reach the underserved, at risk, or even quiet student?
4. Can you describe your poetry pedagogy today? How and what poetry do you teach? How often?Can you share any artifacts from that teaching?
5. Has this changed at all in the years you have taught English? If so, how? Do you have any artifacts from earlier teaching and can you share them?
6. Did you receive any formal or informal education in poetry reading or writing? When? Please describe the experience.
7. Did your teacher education experience provide any poetry or poetry pedagogy instruction? If so, please describe it.
8. Did you have early experiences with poetry that you can remember? If so, what were they?
9. What, if any thing, has most influenced your poetry teaching? If you can identify influential experiences, please explain why they were significant to you.
10. Do you think it is important to include reading poetry in high school English curriculum? Why or why not?
11. Do you think it is important to include writing poetry in high school English curriculum? Why or why not?

12. Have you written any poems that you could share? Why did you choose to share this poem? Can you read it aloud for me? Thank you for sharing this poem.
13. Can you write a poem to share at the next interview?

Interview 2

1. Could we start with your new poem? Will you read it? Thank you.
2. Please tell me about the poem, how you conceived the idea for it, and the writing process you followed.
3. How do you feel about reading your poems aloud? Do you have any experiences to share about reading poems aloud?
4. How important is it to both read and write poems in school?
5. Did you teach any poetry since we last met? If so, please describe the lesson and the outcome.
6. Do you have any favorite poets or anthologies that you favor? If so, please list them and describe what attracts you to them.
7. Do you share your writing with any club or group? Do you participate or lead a writing group for students, teachers, or community members?
8. What professional development, if any, would you be most interested in for poetry reading or writing? Please describe it fully.
9. The next time we meet, we will be with other teachers of poetry in a focus group setting. Please bring a poem to share and any discussion questions you may have.

Appendix B

Focus Group Protocol

1. Introduction to protocol
2. Brief synopsis of findings, insights
3. Identity
4. Agency
5. Sharing of poems.
6. Discussion of poetry pedagogy.
7. Discussion of professional development possibilities.

Appendix C

Emergent Themes in Participant Interviews

Table 1: Emergent Themes in Participant Interviews

IDENTITY Carmen	As a youth, I stumbled upon poetry one day and never left pretty much. The Inside Out group met every Wednesday and that was my core interest. I was really an avid reader, if not always poetry. I've been reading for literally forever. My mom was my model because she always had a book. I read that book so that's why we're here. I definitely being in middle school, reading college level material. At that time I was more of a novel person than I was a poetry person. I think what's wonderful about [poetry] is there is a lot more freedom for interpretation. We don't have the same constraints. I feel like the poetry in which you have students looking for different things, and analyze the language, you can analyze the speaker, you can get experiences and for that particular experience is where I feel like teaching novels is a bit more restricting. Students feel academic writing is something we have to be very intellectual to do and very intellectual to understand and they don't view poetry the same way. The basic concepts that most people teach through other text I try to teach through poetry. My use of poetry has broadened over five years of teaching. In the beginning I might teach a specific poem or stick to just the figurative elements. And now I'm more likely to tie in a persona poem that reminds me of the character in the novel, whereas before I would probably stick to the poetry unit or stuck poetry with teaching figurative language. Now I've expanded to teaching pretty much everything with poetry. I have taken poetry classes, and written various poetry, otherwise poetry workshops. I got a lot of poetry in high school I was involved with the Inside Out poetry in the schools program Then I worked with a poetry group at Eastern for two years. After I came back home I attended workshops. So you'll have 10 workshops about 10 different things, and how to engage the classroom and things like that. When I was in high school my own classroom teachers didn't really teach poetry. It was just in the school group (InsideOut). My teachers didn't really teach writing poetry in the poetry units we would typically do. The poetry units were mainly free verse poetry. It was like Maya Angelou, Sonja Sanchez. Really that's about it now that I think about it. But it was the Inside Out that actually helped train me to teach poetry. The different forms of poetry, contemporary poets besides the poets in textbooks. The last workshop that I was in was about how to teach hip hop in the classroom. It was one

Table 1: (cont'd)

	of the best workshops I ever went to. So just the idea of expanding, you know what is poetry, but how to make it relate to the students that you are teaching, how students can use the proper form, or techniques, or literary aspects. There's a book called *Uncommon Core*, if I'm not mistaken. It's a book of great contemporary poems that can be used in the classroom, and most are like pretty clean. And Brand New Voices has a similar website I like to use because performers are youth. So it's helpful to show them in class because they're looking at people their age. For me, creative writing would be a separate class. And poetry would be its own entity. teachers would include it in their curriculum. I think that's monumentally important. It connects to that creative side of the brain that kids don't really use any more. And I have kids who hate English they hate the novel that we read but thy love to write poems. I just that think that poetry is a type of therapy. Its and type of expression, it's life saving for many people. I think communication skills are lacking. So when you see all these writers can express themselves and it makes you want to do it. They teach you how to do it. The way to express yourself is a way to release emotions that's not dangerous to anybody else. Lets out frustration. It's there's kids who otherwise won't have therapy ever, who won't ever see a counselor's office ever. And it's a career path for some people. I don't think they know that people can make a living off of writing poetry but they do. In terms of that therapy aspect, I think for me that's pretty important. I teach some of the kids who probably could've been in therapy, having someone to talk to on a regular basis, somebody licensed, somebody who can actually counsel them. That option is not available to them. Even in my school. We have someone to do the transcripts and someone to guide you with courses, but we don't have any one to say to say, "This is what I'm thinking. This is what I'm feeling." Reading and writing go together. There are probably 3 or 4 books in my bag right now and a novel right now in my purse. Because I'm a creeper. But I feel like you don't know good poetry until you really start reading. You become a better writer as you read more. I certainly do. Every time I sit down to read something, I'm like" This is great. I I got to step my game up, I got to get it together." But also introducing you to new concepts. It's like I feel like it stretches your mind every time you read somebody. It takes you to a new place. So the idea that you can sit down and write. You know you write for yourself and that's an internal process. but when you connect with other authors or something, it's completely outside of yourself. And I feel like you have to get outside of yourself to be a good writer. At least for me they should go hand in hand or hand to hand in my house. In Focus Group: I write more about myself, and maybe there are times I write poems about things and I'm like, Oh I didn't realize that about that about that or I didn't realize that still bothered me. I suppose that shapes how I see myself or how I look at myself.

Table 1: (cont'd)

IDENTITY Adam	I believe that people can call all kinds of things poems if they want to. I think they allow students to have a lot of room for what they want to write. For me, Trying to hone your language so that you're precise in what you're trying to say. Because a poem is I'm teaching them how you process in the world. How can you paint this picture vividly for the reader? Not all that different. I think I would say when I right prose, I write a lot of prose myself—a lot of fiction, a lot of essay. I'm trying to be just as precise in language as I am in poetry. And I'm trying to be just as playful, just in different ways. In a poem there's more room to maybe not be as cohesive or as linear in your thinking. And I think in your essay that's a little more difficult. Even in fiction that's a little more difficult. People want to follow a thread a little more clearly, where in poetry I think you can wander. You can make intuitive leaps that aren't necessarily logical leaps. So I think that could be maybe a difference. I'm trying to teach the power of language, I'm trying to teach the importance of precise language, I'm trying to teach the importance of staying away from clichés of trying to have depth and insight in your work and using specific sensory details. I think a lot of those things are the power of good writing whether it's a poem or essay of some sort—or fiction even, although fiction has other dimensions you want to mess around with. Ultimate when I really want to start teaching poetry, I start with exploration of self. So I'd start with like exploration of who you are, what are your stories that are important to tell, how do you understand yourself? I call it writing— questions that I feel like they can write answers to for their whole lives. The questions are: Who are you from—who are the people that have had some kind of influence on you, that have been important to you, that you've learned from in your life? Where are you from—where are the places that are important to you? What are you from—what are the experiences that you've had? So I really want students to go into these stories of people and place and experience—and that a global event that is connected to you also?" So we started to move outward from that first part of archeology. So the first part is you, the next landscape is maybe your immediate environment—the world around you. And then the next landscape beyond that is the landscape that is more regional, national and then global and then maybe the whole universe, who knows? so I feel like I have a lot to offer my students in terms of contemporary poets that they can discover and learn more about. So yeah, I introduce them to a lot of contemporary poets. so I really like to introduce them to the broader world of poetry beyond just the classical poets that everybody knows about but it also makes them understand the power of what a poem is, what it can do. And

Table 1: (cont'd)

	then they can think about how can I write something that's powerful. If you're teaching 8 to 10 poems, there's a lot of room for voices from all kinds of different experiences A lot of times, that quiet person begins to understand that his/her/their story is worthy because other people are sitting around listening to it. And it's one of the most important times There's something powerful about realizing other kids in the class have stories and I have a story, too. And as interested as I am in their story, they're interested in my story. I think that's a powerful moment. and I've written books about it, to, so that helps me articulate and define what I believe more. I've grown as a writer and I feel like as I get older I'm beginning to understand that as much as I'm all about contemporary poetry and trying I feel like as I get older I'm beginning to understand that as much as I'm all about contemporary poetry and trying but I do keep changing and I do keep looking for new poems all the time—fresh writing exercises and those kinds of things essential questions, things like that. I don't know, I do think I do probably only have a few more years. Already, I can fell myself relating to students not as well as I once did. think that was my introduction to poetry that mattered to me. What I cared about. I've always come from a place of poetry that's immediate, poetry that is engaging to an audience on a verbal level and poetry that is meant to be shared with a I started and I think my introduction so poetry in terms of the music to language in terms of poets as people who document contemporary history and contemporary life, contemporary moment p. 6 etc. As I got a little bit older, and I began to branch out more into the world of poetry and started attending poetry festivals, like the Dodge Poetry Festival in New Jersey or the North American Haiku Conference or the Bear River Writers Conference, I began to see a broader world of differ kinds of poems. Poems that weren't necessarily meant to be in a poetry slam book, but be just as powerful. I began to get a little more formal training through writer's conferences and things like that. And when I got my MFA, I got it in fiction, not poetry, but the program I went to allowed you to take one semester in another genre, so I did take semester of poetry there and I learned a lot more about specific craft elements of poetry. And a lot of it was

Table 1: (cont'd)

	confirming things that I I would attend as many poetry presentations as I could and poetry readings as I could to learn more about it. So I would say in the last 12 to 15 years of my journey in poetry that I'm still not as fully versed in a lot of formal poetry mechanisms or pedagogies as maybe people who teach poetry at the university level are, but I'm pretty well-verse necessarily feel like there's one way to read a poem out loud. And I also don't believe that there's such a thing as "slam poem" or a "slam style" And I also talk to my students about poetry really being an oral art and existing way before written language But I feel like if you're getting to the emotion of a poem, then that's great. You're doing it well .Or I will read it with some feeling, so that they can experience the whole art of the poem and .I remember my senior English class, that teachers teach us Somerset Maugham. I can't remember the title of the book right now, but there were just some incredible passages of the artist being on this island and this description of this woman who is a local on the island and the beauty around her—the ocean and the trees—I remember being captivated by that. I was already teaching creative writing, because I love creative writing. I would teach some poems and I'd been in a couple of poetry slams and I was teaching some of that—everything like that. I was teaching a lot of fiction writing things like that, and my classes were going really well and I was going well as a teacher. I won an award for being a great first year teacher from northern California, something your story being important, you story matters, your voice is powerful. Going from a class where I'd be teaching about a technique, here's how you can write a story or here's how you can write a poem to "You are the curriculum. You show us What's the story that you need to tell?" As I said, as I get older I think I'm nearing the time when I'm not able to tap that same energy as effectively. And I think a younger writer, a younger teacher will be able to do that more. Because, I'm almost past my time. Not yet, but…

Table 1: (cont'd)

IDENTITY Ben	I think in a poetry class, every student might have a different reason or their poem and I run into this as a teacher. I don't want to assign topics. If we are talking about poetry, what I try to lead kids into is thinking about the occasion you would write a poem for and an individual purpose or a sense of audience for his or her poem. You understand what it means to envision a project, carry it through. If you only do that for a semester, your ability to visualize and your skill at visualization. That translates into…. What reading is in my life. Just the short version is that I stumbled into poetry writing as a fluke and it changed the way I saw language, it changed the way I saw people and it changed the way I saw the possibilities of where my life could be. It's hard to say if that's a positive thing. I think that I don't know that I have an easy answer for this is the sense that I came to teaching because I wrote poetry and it was a long route and this is more than a half hour discussion. I occasionally share that with the kids but I also put myself as not on a pedestal. I m sitting here writing with you and by the way, I've been doing this for about thirty-five years longer than any one of you has been alive. So let me give you some advice and try to get them engaged in poetry. Poems that they were drawn to and share They feel more comfortable saying they like them, I don't know one of those things, "This is what I think poetry should be because this is what we've studied in class." I rub my chin and I think that I appreciate these poems but I do not pull the Anthology of English Literature off of my bookshelf when I want to relax and read some poems. That's more for when I want to think and read some poems. Maybe it's a flaw in my character. But I definitely think that what I thought I was drawn to in poetry and the writing and teaching poetry is my ability to do things were were words. The realization that I had the ability to do things with words that were just like what….

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DEVELOPING PEDAGOGY FOR POETRY WRITING: AN AUTOETHNOGRAPHY AND POETIC INQUIRY

ABSTRACT

While poetry loses ground in secondary school curriculum, interest in teaching it continues to grow for individual teachers. This autoethnography is a self-study of one teacher's development in her teaching of poetry writing. With a Deweyan (1913) mindset towards art as aesthetic experience, this article examines how a secondary English teacher's pedagogy transforms from a standardized mode featuring formula poetry assignments. After attending National Writing Project, she finds agency to develop her own poetry writing skills and to then offer authentic poetry writing assignments to her students. Authentic poetry writing centers around silent writing time in class and workshopping poems in small groups. Her teaching continues to evolve when she enters a doctoral program and experiences the effect of using contemporary poetry for teaching poetry writing and poetry performance as an artistic extension. The autoethnography explores each stage of growth though theoretical lenses of Freire (1970/1993), Foucault (1982), and Ranciere (2010) seeking to understand the dynamics of power in the classroom. Along with the "expression of reality" afforded by the autoethnographic method (Richardson, 2000), this study incorporates Poetic Inquiry as a secondary method, using poetry for both recounting the events of the examined life and also for deepening insight (Brady, 2009). The result is an autoethnography that tells of the journey and provides a poetic lamp along the way.

To write, then, is a meal
we share with others,
tasting, testing, smelling--
at the table of humanity
sitting beside others, living and ghosts.
Receive on the left, pass to the right.

According to Denshire (2013), "Autoethnography, an alternative method and form of writing, can make for uncomfortable reading" (1). Certainly, the writer of autoethnography experiences something close to discomfort if the writing, as Richardson (2000) states, "expresses a reality" (16). I acknowledge at the outset that this autoethnography carries with it all the affordances and limitations of any ethnography. As Emerson, Fretz and Shaw (1995) note, "there is no one "natural' or "correct" way to write about what one observes" (p.5), and further, that within a postmodernist epistemology, no one perspective can know everything. That said, I situate this autoethnography firmly in the humanity of all writing, as my poem above expresses, "Receive on the left, pass to the right."

Autoethnographies, as Creative Analytical Practice (CAP) are "highly personalized, revealing texts in which authors tell stories about their own lived experiences, relating the personal to the cultural" (Richardson, 2000, p.11). As qualitative research, the autoethnography shows how a situated speaker perceives herself within her world through her words, in this study through prose and poetry. In this vein, my autoethnography traces my footprints as I taught poetry writing at the secondary level—approximately 15 years of growth divided into three stages of five years each. Embedded throughout the narrative is my exploration of the struggle for power between students and teacher, each bearing personal needs to control and contribute, stemming from identity and agency. Working from the theories of Foucault (1982), Freire (1970/1993), and Ranciere (2010), I contemplate my journey from traditional instruction in poetry writing toward an emancipatory classroom practice. This article begins with my early

attempts of assigning certain types of poems to be written by a set date and moving to my discovery of National Writing Project (NWP) and its pedagogy. Finally, I embrace the philosophy of intellectual emancipation and seek ways of promoting power sharing in the classroom and enhanced student ownership of poetry writing. In the spirit of poetic inquiry (Brady, 2009), this chronicle is sprinkled with my own poetry, offering another lens on this teacher life-scape.

Traditional Pedagogy for Poetry Writing

As pedagogy developed from early university-style lectures of the 1300's, it standardized through the centuries, following a model from industry, of desks in rows, common curricula and assignments designed to teach and test "to the middle"—or to the normal standard. Davis et al. (2015) describe this type of standardized educational philosophy as identifiable in much of the common curriculum and testing that is tied to accountability. Unsurprisingly, this educational philosophy tradition is also found in schools today and especially in the classrooms of new high school teachers--those striving to teach a district-prescribed curriculum while learning how to manage classroom behavior. Like many new high school teachers in 1999, I often taught lessons that were not progressive and not aimed at individual student differentiation.

I had not been taught poetry writing in high school, but wrote it myself and longed for experiences that would expand my skills. At the University of Minnesota, I sought out the poetry workshop professor, John McNally, who asked me to audition for the workshop course by submitting a poem. I remember slipping the poem under his door the next day and waiting. The call came that same evening, welcoming me to the course because I "used concrete imagery." Decades later, I still recall this phrase, bidding me toward a life interest; to see life as McNally (1966) wrote, to "learn once more the arts of slouch and swear and smoke and skip flat stones on

the high canal….” (p. 81). Remembering poetry class with McNally, I note the words of Dewey (1902) explaining how a teacher leads the pupil to “personal experiencing” (p. 110). McNally’s teaching led me to experience more poetry; he encouraged me by reaching out in that phone call, he modeled the writerly life of a poet, he invited me to write poems about my lived experience. This was empowering.

Despite this empowerment from progressive teachers like McNally, my first attempts at teaching poetry writing followed a model I would call standardized, or limited. As a beginning teacher in high school classes of thirty or more students, I was consumed with classroom management issues. Furthermore, I had absorbed my district’s expectation that every student should have some sort of uniform experience in high school, a linear view of education (Davis, Sumara & Luce-Kapler, 2015). I assigned poetry writing activities that I thought would guarantee a poetic result; that is, the poems produced would include a poetic element—like imagery. For example, I recall using Langston Hughes’ “Theme for English B” (see Appendix A) for classroom reading and discussion and an activity called *copy-change*. First, I handed out the poem, and I led a brief discussion about Langston Hughes’ life. I asked students what they knew about him, and often someone shared that he had written the poem referenced in Lorraine Hansbury’s *Raisin in the Sun,* entitled “Harlem”: “What happens to a dream deferred? / Does it dry up like a raisin in the sun?” We reviewed the main lines of the poem, and I pointed out the line stating that he had been the first black student enrolled in Columbia University. Then, I read the poem aloud, asking students to read along silently and to watch for details that reveal Hughes’ identity and message. After the reading, students volunteered many details they noticed in the poem—Hughes’ likes, wishes, and message to his white instructor. However, they didn’t know about the musical references— “Bessie, Bop, or Bach,” and I told them more about the

Harlem Renaissance and how this alliterative list reflected Hughes' influences, classical and contemporary. Finally, the class settled in to *copy-change*. This was an activity in which students copied seminal features of Hughes' poem and replaced his details and imagery with their own. First, I modeled how I might copy-change the opening of the poem.

Hughes':	Mine:
The instructor said,	My teacher assigned,
Go home and write *a page tonight.* *And let that page come out of you—* *Then, it will be true.*	*Tonight please write* *a poem of truth.* *Let it come honestly,* *Let it come openly.*
I wonder if it's that simple? I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem. I went to school there, then Durham, then here to this college on the hill above Harlem. I am the only colored student in my class.	Can I be open? Can I write truth? I am _____etc.

Hughes' line, "I am the only colored student in my class" became "I am the only member of the basketball team in my class, or I am the only foster kid in my class." The benefit of this lesson was that students were able to find an identity-fit for this image. Rather than asking them to write about basketball or some other activity, this poem allowed them to use their own culturally-lived experiences as details in this copy-change. After they wrote the fitting descriptor, they were able to continue the poem in ways that appropriated the characteristic. For example, the student who wrote "I am the only bus-riding senior in my class," was able, later in the poem, to provide details that explained his reason to be riding the bus (license revoked), and then to describe the humiliation he felt when, as a senior, he rode the bus with all underclassmen. This student was able to make the poem his own, even though he started with a copy-change activity. Although the poem was not original, the copy-change of "Theme for English B" was one in which poetic elements were written and discussed. Above all, for my fledgling practice as an English teacher, it produced a classroom-full, of page-long, free verse poems that incorporated

thoughtful line breaks, white space, structure, and concrete imagery. At the time, I considered this to be an effective lesson in poetry writing. Now, viewing this lesson through a different lens, I see the limitations in this assignment.

Although effective as a poetry activity, the copy-change of Hughes' poem restricts learning in an important way. First, it does not do justice to Hughes' message about race. When students substitute the imagery of the poem, they must in turn manipulate Hughes' imagistic details to reframe the message to suit their situation. This multi-step process requires students to work within the form of a poem, adding, subtracting, and changing poetic elements. It also asks them to reflect on their own lives—using an element of their identity—to remake the poem. These actions are useful for making personal meaning. The problem I see as I look back is that in asking students to do this with Hughes' poem, I risked diminishing an urgent issue in Hughes' life, and in today's educational context. Hughes' own struggle as the token "colored student" in the class at Columbia is not uncommon in schools yet today. For me, this assignment stands as a lesson well-intended but misappropriated. Another poem would have been better suited as an activity for working with details and imagery that invoke identity, and the copy-change concept has limitations as poetry writing instruction.

Like the copy-change assignment, the Biopoem, a formula poem (see Appendix B), had limitations for teaching poetry writing in an authentic way. I recall the format of fill-in-the-blank, sequential grouping of imagery, that when filled in by a student produces a free verse, auto biographical poem. The Biopoem begins with a student's first name, then continues with sentence stems used to begin ensuing lines. For example, the first name is followed by four adjectives, then a relationship line, then "lover of"—name three nouns, may be abstract or concrete, followed by the stem "Who feels…." and so forth. Biopoems are often used as vehicles

for developing student identity and for teachers to get to know students at the beginning of the year. Used in such a way, they were effective for my class. I enjoyed reading them and thinking about individual students, their cultures, and their multiple identities as expressed in the listing of details and imagery.

These poems and many like them can be found online, on teacher websites and in printed materials designed for delivering ready-to-print handouts. When I began teaching in the early 2000s, these assignments were passed like currency between teachers who, like me, were aching to teach poetry writing to their students. I recall the teacher who shared it with me when I was student teaching. She showed me student sample poems, and I was impressed that they all used concrete imagery to represent abstractions. I used this formula poem for a few years, until I heard students respond, "Oh this Biopoem assignment again" and I felt the dismay and guilt of the lived lie: this was an assignment, not an aesthetic experience. In writing this assignment, students were surely learning about concrete sensual imagery, but they were writing to fill in the blanks. They were not fully engaged in *authentic* poetry writing; therefore, I may have missed an opportunity to touch students' lives with original poetry writing.

While I was intent on including poetry writing in my classroom curriculum, one aspect of writing pedagogy that was missing during my first years teaching poetry was workshopping, or any kind of revision work. While I personally revised my own poetry, it seemed impossible to ask students to revise their poetry. I recall students even saying, "It's personal—you can't ask someone to revise their poem. It's their feelings!" Indeed, this was the prevalent thought, and it was commonly expressed among teachers as well as students. In addition, before the writing process method took hold in the 1970's, revision was largely overlooked in the writing instruction of any genre (Pritchard & Honeycutt, 2005); therefore, resistance to revision of

poetry was unsurprising. So, while I made *suggestions* for possible edits such as line breaks, omitting unnecessary words, and changing details from general to specific, and while I used peer-editing for other genres, I did not teach revision of poetry.

My early foray into teaching poetry produced a definite finding: poetry can be a powerful conduit of aesthetic experience for students, a personal outlet for expression, and a way to teach other components of the curriculum, like theme. But I was troubled by thoughts that these copy-changes and formula poems were not engaging all of my students and that students were not writing their own poetry. Evidence of this came from the students themselves. I recall that a few students would insert short, even sarcastic details and phrases into their formula poems, the minimum to complete the assignment and get by: "Who feels tired, hungry, and bored by this Biopoem assignment." In addition to this, my classroom was changing, year by year, from a homogeneous class of nearly all white students, to a vibrant variation of racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. And although I added more poetry by diverse voices like Langston Hughes, Nikki Giovanni, Sherman Alexie, and Gary Soto, I knew I was coming up short as a teacher of poetry writing. I was assigning, not engaging at the level I knew was possible. I was teaching in the front, assigning, and managing the class, with the goal of receiving a poem from each student by the end of the hour. Typical of inexperienced teachers, I was practicing procedures, policies, and standardization to ensure that all assignments were submitted and recorded as grades. For this, formula poems were safe and reliable because they produced a poem from every student. In retrospect, I see my struggle to control every assignment as an act of power. Foucault (1982) explained, "The exercise of power consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome" (p. 789). These poetry assignments either followed a formula or copy-changed an existing poem in order to control the outcome of the

writing and to "guide the possibility of the [writers'] conduct." As a beginning teacher, I felt a need to design lessons and classroom procedures that produced predictable outcomes. My philosophy was coming from an attitude that poses the teacher above the students. I was the one who knew; therefore, I must deliver knowledge to my students. This reflects the "explainer" stance described by Freire and Ranciere. While working from this philosophy, a teacher may not see students as fully capable equals, but rather as intellectual underlings waiting for the explanation. Yet, my desire to *share poetry writing* with my students was still alive. Rather than continuing with a limited, traditional way of teaching, I sought a way to empower students. I was open to honoring the creative force that is alive within each human being, and I was open to the pedagogical moves that can guide creativity because "Even Rivers Are Not Free."

Like a river
burrowing through the centuries
a beast of the earth
It flows
electric in the sunshine
but held tight
between banks
rock. Rock.
And now my
hands are cupping
to scoop the wet
life to my lips.

In the following section, I discuss the second stage of my development as a teacher of poetry writing, a stage that is framed by my participation in a local summer program of the National Writing Project (NWP). I first explain my initial reticence for the NWP, due to the hype surrounding this particular professional development. Then I describe the central strategies

valued by NWP, such as sanctioned writing time, fishing, and Quaker readings. Finally, I describe how I introduced writing time into my classroom in the form of Poetry-Mondays, and I note that this practice was a step towards emancipatory pedagogy.

Influential Professional Development

My teaching of poetry writing changed when I spent a summer month with National Writing Project (NWP), a professional development program touted for its reputation of transforming teachers through writing workshops and feedback. Yet, I wondered. I knew many excellent English teachers who did not personally write beyond lesson plans and curriculum. Can personal writing be transformative for teaching? My skepticism was affirmed by Brooks (2007) who found that a teacher's personal writing did not impact the teacher effectiveness for four elementary teachers who participated in NWP. At least for these elementary teachers, effective literacy teaching did not require teachers to be authors. But I was secondary English, and I was drawn to writing.

Despite my initial doubt, it was at NWP where I experienced authentic writing and workshopping models. Each day, the seminar, held at a local Intermediate School District, summoned about twenty teachers to focus on a poem or passage. After the poem was read aloud twice, the entire class of teachers wrote in their writing notebooks. They wrote poems, worked on short stories, memoirs, or essays—whatever genre they felt drawn to. This time, about twenty minutes, was sanctioned for writing. The rule of writing time was never broken, no matter how busy the day. Writing time was announced—to write as we wished, and the room went silent.

At first, it felt awkward to write in the classroom, a bit forced, and difficult to just start something without a direct question or prompt. However, I was used to journaling and had written poetry in college, so it did not take long for me to generate my own thoughts, and to

again feel my need to represent my lived experiences through poetry. I found myself lost in the moment, creating my own aesthetic experience in which I heard, saw, tasted, smelled the images surrounding the topic I wished to explore. Entirely alone in a room full of writers, I wrote, and most significantly, I recognized that this sanctioned writing time was part of a simple and authentic method of teaching poetry writing. Without prompts or assignments, teachers can set aside writing time and invite students to write about anything they wanted. This was such a basic concept, yet it struck me as a radical shift away from the standardized practices I had been using.

In this month of NWP, I worked in earnest on my own poetry. For the longest time, I had not written, workshopped, and finished a poem. Here I was, doing what I had longed for, filling the empty space in my intellectual life and pushing myself to examine my lived experiences as a source for poetry.

Another influential aspect of NWP was the readings held after a week of writing. The teacher-leaders introduced us to what they called "Quaker Readings." These Quaker Readings were strange, magical readings named after the Quaker spiritual meetings where members reportedly spoke from divine inspiration. Here, participants read their poem or passage without being called on, they just broke the silence with their poem or passage, one after another. The first poem I read during a Quaker Reading was, for me, as transformative as "Fireworks Over Wabeek."

> The stem
> shoots up
> straight,
> drilling into the night,
> then stops,
> pops,
> and conversations bloom,
> ripening into a din of pleasure.
>
> Roses

petals, leaves, thorns too,
whole gardens,
falling,
falling.

The sighs of the faithful
become the exhalation of
bombs,
when the stars weep,
blood rains down
and
we love it.

"The exhalation of bombs" and "we love it" I had scribbled on a notepad as I watched fireworks with my family the July evening before this Quaker Reading. Then during NWP writing time, I finished the poem. I read my poem aloud, and along with a surge of relief, I felt the exhilaration of self-expression. Here was the rediscovered interest first encouraged years ago by Professor McNally at the University of Minnesota.

John McNally, I have returned.

Returning meant more than just writing on a personal level, it meant that my teaching of writing took a significant turn. Dewey (1902) claimed that the teacher's problem is "that of inducing a vital and personal experiencing" (p. 110). Now, I understood that the "vital experience" of which Dewey spoke demanded authenticity, and for teaching poetry writing, it required class time devoted to writing. After NWP, I no longer used the formula poetry models. Instead, I encouraged students to work from ideas or prompts and to create their own structures and rhythms. In addition, I used strategies for creating poetry "seeds," a metaphor the NWP instructors used to describe the ideas for poems.

I recall an instructor at NWP sharing the "fishing" strategy, a strategy in which the writer goes to a place and a time in her memory, and then "fishes" for all the images that can be caught from that event. From there, the written images are examined for poetry ideas, or "seeds."

Strategies like this can be stunningly effective, I thought, and I was once again struck with the authenticity of the process. This fishing, gathering, and sifting for seeds was how writers find and develop ideas, because in some way, they must engage in "The Hunting."

> This is the hunting
> the shadow-watching
> the palm-scratching.
> Sighs so deep
> ribs creak.
> And then pacing,
> stalking
> cross-hatched
> across time and culture
> between bed and desk
> from poem to a place inside me,
> somewhere I see with my unstuck eye,
> hear my name called, lick a wound,
> and turn back to taste the ink,
> hear the march of symbol and font
> between walls of white space,
> say them out loud from protruding lips,
> hear the sound of my own voice
> so strange that I startle,
> slink to the door and twist
> the knob. O, just so, halfway.
> It opens and the day crouches,
> somersaulting into the business of
> trade and travel,
> intersections
> where someone makes dinner

and the dog howls

"feed me."

Like feeding the dog, the everyday events and non-events hold images that speak to us. Uncovering these images by "fishing" wa just one example of my developing pedagogy. I began to understand what I had previously misunderstood: My students are creatures like me. They feed on experiences, and part of teaching is affording authentic experiences that allow them to look inward at their own lived experiences. They need these authentic writing experiences as a means of self-discovery and expression. They need the time in class, specially allotted, to allow students to experience the mental searching, reviewing, testing, and eventual discovery of poetry writing.

The year following the magical summer of NWP, I began with renewed commitment to teaching poetry writing. I decided that Mondays would begin with a poem read, then students would take that poem, add it to their writing notebooks, and use that poem or another from their notebooks, as i*nspiration* to write their own. I *invited them to write*, using the verb *invite* as used by the NWP instructors, and I clarified that they could write poetry or prose, a new piece or continue an ongoing project, as they wished. This invitation to write reflects an emancipatory philosophy. The students are free to choose, as the word *invite* indicates. But most notably, the invitation signifies a new attitude in teaching, one that suggests that the teacher is not superior, not the "master-writer" or "master-explicator;" but rather, the teacher is one who shares her story with students who are capable and equal beings.

Similar to my first NWP writing session, poetry writing was not natural for my students when I first introduced class writing time. Students hesitated and asked the usual questions: What kind of poem? How I can just write in class? Should poetry be expected like this? Shouldn't I write at home, alone? And students who worried about their Grade Point Average

asked the usual questions, too: What kind of rhyme? How long does it have to be? Will this be graded? Do we have a rubric? No Rubric?

> Students say to me,
> *Give us the rules*,
> the *length,* they say.
> *the rubric*.
> And I do not.
> I give only
> a blank page,
> white as a bedsheet,
> unwrinkled,
> still cold.

I answered each question calmly and took my notebook with me to an open chair at a student table. Then, I asked students to write for fifteen minutes, to write their poem or story and say something honest, evoking Hughes' "let it come out of you and then it will be true." It was at this point that I truly doubted myself. Can students just write—no formula, no prompt*?*

I had begun with a poem which we read and discussed. This should be enough scaffolding, I thought. Yet, I feared that a Vygotskyan (1978) viewpoint would conclude that this was a stretch too far, that the activity was too unclear, and that students did not have the skills to produce poetry. All these doubts circled, yet *my heart* knew that poetry writing was ideally differentiated, that students could approach writing poetry within their Zone of Proximal Development (Vygotsky, 1978). Writing poetry in this unstructured way allowed students to use the language and skills they had and to freely create meaning from their lived experiences.

These aspects, the freedom and the expectation to write formed the support that I received at NWP. Yet while I felt deeply transformed by the NWP experience, and I took steps to add this writing pedagogy to my practice, Brooks (2007) had found that teachers' pedagogy did not change after attending NWP. That being said, another researcher Whitney (2008)

reported findings that teachers felt personally transformed by the NWP experience. Unsurprisingly, these conflicting research findings represent human engagement in this (or any) undertaking; each comes to the table, as it were, with individual needs and wants. Even during my NWP experience, I recall that a teacher-participant did not write during the allotted time, and never shared personal writing with the group. I noted at the time that this teacher did not write, but it is only now that I think of the student in any class who cannot, for whatever reason, participate. This choice to refrain does not diminish or deficit the individual "who follow their own orbits" (Ranciere, 2010, p. 141). I can, in sum, accept that contradictory research will continue to emerge on professional development for writing pedagogy.

It may be, after all, that the writing groups and feedback they afford constitute emancipatory strategies necessary for what hooks' (1994) described as a "holistic model of learning [that] will also be a place where teachers grow, and are empowered by the process" (p. 21). When writing is written and shared in a group, risk is involved, and when teachers share risk-taking with their students, all are vulnerable, and also empowered. I argue that this empowerment will lead to growth for learners in classrooms, whether or not specific pedagogical moves that produce this growth can be identified.

For me, class time for independent poetry writing was a worthwhile risk. Early in the fall, after first reading a poem, and leading a brief discussion about what students noticed about the poem, I announced that we would now have "writing time," and I invited all to write for ten minutes. The room silenced, and I wrote along with my students. Moments passed in purposeful writing. Then, about eight minutes in, the silence broke into whispering when a student passed his notebook to a neighbor. "Read this," he said. "We Break the Bread."

Here,
I share my pleasure

with you.
Come.
Will you taste
my utterance,
my words?
Will you sit at
my table of
experience?

This interaction, the excitement for sharing a new poem, happened often, perhaps every writing time, every Monday. At first, it annoyed me that the silence was disturbed, and I felt the power shifting to the students. I wanted to control the writing process, but students were choosing when to share. Eventually, I came to the understanding that students grew from this discourse, this early, organic essence of workshopping. In all, I learned that if given purpose and space, students will write during these focused writing times. Although I was at first hesitant to yield so much time and trust to my students, I recognized that by establishing writing time in my classroom, my classroom was transforming from standardization to an authentic pedagogy. By simply inviting students to respond to a poem or prompt, I was empowering students to choose their poetic response, *to own it*. This type of engaged praxis involved risk-taking on my part, and I turned to Freire's statement: "it is necessary to trust in the oppressed and their ability to reason" (p. 66). Trust, is the other side of empower, I now recognize. Indeed, Ranciere referred to the teacher allowing students to prove their capabilities in their work. This is trusting in human intellect.

In the next section of this article, I describe workshopping as it was practiced in NWP and how I used workshop strategy in my classroom. The section also highlights, through my own poetry, topics and insights skimmed from my memories of student poetry.

Learning to Workshop

While in NWP I learned to workshop in a way that fostered growth and encouraged talent. Although I had workshopped in classes before, I found that those models of workshopping that I had experienced were less effective than the NWP model. One model I had first experienced in college and later used in my own class, focused on one student's poem before the

entire class. While this may have been effective in modeling how to notice poetic elements and in demonstrating revision, some students said they felt pressured to notice poetic elements when they weren't sure, while others reported that too much was said about one student's poem and not another. Furthermore, this workshop model cannot be used for all students' poems if the class is too large, and the student-poet whose poem is used for the whole-class workshop may feel self- conscious. As an example, one student asked me after class to recount the comments about her poem because she could not concentrate to listen due to her anxiety.

Another workshop model I had used in the past was a modified peer-editing workshop model. This peer-editing model consisted of partners sharing poems and discussing them, pointing out ways to improve the poems. As a workshop model, this was problematic because students did not have the knowledge or skill with poetry to offer useful advice. Therefore, they seemed to do one of two things when they workshopped: 1) they praised the poem, or 2) they criticized it heavily. Sometimes, I feared that an overly critical experience might discourage talent. In sum, novice writers do not have the expertise to tell other writers how to write poetry; yet, students value the idea of workshopping their poetry. Despite some positive aspects to both workshop models, these types of workshops didn't foster growth for my students' poetry and they did not offer strong encouragement for students who love writing poetry.

NWP workshop contrasted with other methods by offering an opportunity for unskilled student writers to contribute meaningfully to another writer's growth. Workshopping in NWP followed a model where writers met in groups of four, found a quiet spot to talk, and followed a protocol. The protocol directed that each poet read her poem, then listened for five to ten minutes while group members discussed the poem. The workshop group members *noticed, chose a favorite line*, *wondered,* and *suggested* about the poem; no judgments were needed. Students

were comfortable and able to workshop following this protocol. In essence, the workshop group was a mirror, a reflective audience for the poet.

As I consider the workshopping process and the questions that arise in anticipation of it, I find myself thinking of what good workshops can do, and the fears stir within us--"Will We Throw Stones?"

Well
your poem
is,
and stones can shatter
or chip, you say.
I say
stones can open windows,
skip like sound device
and sink,
rippling forever.
Do we throw
or keep them
smooth in pockets,
warming?

Yes, feedback during workshop can result in stone-throwing. I have lobbed a few and received a few myself. But the warm stones in pockets also teach. When writer to writer, equals in hope, engage, the workshop is effective. The NWP method, while eschewing critique, teaches workshoppers what sort of feedback encourages improved writing, and like other forms of reciprocal teaching, both parties benefit.

Workshopping can be a rigorous task, demanding the group members to be alert and thoughtful as they focus on a poem. Also (like other types of shopping), it can hone taste. Workshoppers learn what delights the ear, what confuses, and importantly—what sounds stale

from overuse. In NWP, I learned to love workshopping my own poems, perhaps because I had a focused audience that granted me real feedback. I heard what lines were liked most, what imagery patterns or poetic elements were noticed, what was wondered about. I also learned a great deal from workshopping others' poems, the noticing, wondering and suggesting that builds skills for one's own writing. The end result was as Bullock (1998) stated, "Workshop teaching also moves students more directly toward the ultimate goal of schooling, which is to produce thoughtful citizens of a democracy" (p. 7). Like other aspects of empowerment, democratic thoughtfulness takes practice—and trust.

Poetry-Mondays were successful insofar as student engagement went. Students wrote during the 10-15 minute sanctioned time, and after the minutes were up, I asked for volunteers to read their poems. Typically, I did not have to wait long for volunteers to read. Students were surprisingly willing to share their writing. And, while the initial poems were often rhyming and scant of imagery, the quality improved as the weeks progressed. I thought then—and I still believe—that students began using more imagery and rhythmical language as they read more of the poems I introduced on Poetry-Mondays and as they heard classmates read their original poems aloud.

By the end of the semester, most students had completed four or five poems. I then asked them to choose one poem and bring in four copies for workshop. On workshop day, I put students in groups of three or four and gave them printed copies of the protocol for support. The protocol asked them to limit the discussion to five minutes per poem, then rotate until all had shared and workshopped. During the twenty-minute workshop—which easily stretched to half an hour—I moved about the room and visited groups, listening first to the poet read, then to the workshop audience notice poetic elements, select a favorite line, wonder about something, and

finally, suggest some editing idea. I had shared with them ideas for editing, omitting unnecessary words the way a sculptor cuts away marble to reveal a statue hidden inside. I asked them to consider cutting ten words, then replacing words or phrases for others that might be more rich in detail or imagery. A last suggestion was to change lines and white space. This might include removing whole lines or even stanzas, changing the order of lines or stanzas, or changing line breaks. Because these were only suggestions, the poet was not obligated to make any change. This model was effective because when students learned that their role in the workshop did not require them to be experts, just thoughtful responders, they exhibited more confidence. In addition, this model encouraged them to rely on themselves for the final revision. One student explained, "I'm the author; I decide what to do with my poem after the workshop." Altogether, the workshop afforded the reading aloud, the feedback from the audience, and the exposure to others' poems in the group. There was no expert to explain, grade the poem, and no rubric—just democratic thoughtfulness.

Once my students were writing weekly, they showed increased courage in choosing topics and structures. Increasingly, more students wrote free-verse and chose more personal topics. The poems reflected their lives in past events, and imagined environments. Difficult, emotional, this is what "My Students Write."

> I
> Some write about
> the weekend, a fight,
> a sprain, or maybe hunger—
> they go far away
> so far a forest, far like a photograph, or a book
> between mosses a stone shudders,
> a newborn fawn drops and unfolds,
> a hawk swipes upward between pines
> seeking open sky

II
Alyssa writes about
her boyfriend's house,
all day with the baby
she thought he loved her, he said it
he said *ya, bring her over, it's fine*
but the place was a mess, noplace for a baby
clothes dishes papers scraps everywhere
and she saw a gun,
its gray stare took her breath away
away.

III
Students write for today, Monday.
Now, after the last bell rings,
the last student out shuts my door,
runs through whispering hallways,
to the stairs
descends the stairwell
three floors of stairs
twisting
swallowing
delivering
to the double door exit,
to a world where there is no rubric.

Giving my students time to write authentically and to workshop democratically, I was letting go of power and offering it to students. That exercise of power "in which certain actions modify others" (Foucault, 1982, p. 788) was loosened for the poetry workshop. This was an exciting variation in my teaching. Not only was this pedagogy producing students that were more involved in their own production of language, they were feeling the power afforded to them. I noticed that most students came with poems ready to workshop, and that they were attentive to their groups. Some groups asked to move to the hallway; I interpreted this request as a sign of interest and ownership.

I did not grade the poems themselves. Instead, I collected poem packets consisting of 1) the first draft of the poem brought to workshop, 2) evidence of workshop feedback (a poem

marked with comments from the group), and 3) the final, revised poem. The grade then, was granted for commitment to the writing process, and for showing growth. Although I had some students who did not revise their poems, claiming that they did not want to change a thing, I respected this. Within a sociocultural setting, agency can be resistance as well as positive action (Moje & Lewis, 2007).

The following section of this autoethnography deals with my effort to create a practice that is transformative. I relate how my coursework at Michigan State University led me towards the theories dealing with identity, agency and power within sociocultural settings, and how these theories fostered thinking about student learning, to the extent that my poetry writing pedagogy was impacted.

Expanding Capacity to Teach for Transformation

After beginning doctoral studies at Michigan State University, my teaching of poetry writing continued to evolve. First, my coursework introduced me to the realization that I needed to think more deeply about transformative educational practices. With that came the obligation to focus on engaging all students, fostering further identity negotiation and facilitating the agentic capacity of my students. Agency is described by Moje and Lewis (2007) as "the strategic making and remaking of selves within structures of power" (p. 4). Thus, identity negotiation or "the remaking of selves" coincides with the agency to act in sociocultural settings; in a school setting this will include learning. When my students read and write poetry they are afforded opportunities to "take on new identities along with new forms of knowledge and participation" (p. 19).

To facilitate identity transformation in my classroom, I began to focus on contemporary poetry with my students. At MSU, I noticed that professors of a poetry course for preservice

teachers, Janine Certo and Laura Apol, for the most part, shared the poetry of current poets who reflected the backgrounds of the students. They brought in poets to read and required students to attend readings. This poetry course pedagogy caused me to consider how contemporary poets who write and publish today could bring an immediacy and urgency to my students' experience with poetry. When students see and read poetry written by poets who look like them, they feel affirmed in their identities. I had used contemporary poetry before, but now I looked for poems that represented current urban environments—edgy, raw, and honest. In addition, I needed poems that represented a diversity of racial and cultural backgrounds. I looked to several sources for contemporary poets who I thought might connect with the concerns of teens. Online, I found spoken word YouTube videos, many that featured the readings of young voices, like local Detroit poet Jamaal May. May's poem "There Are Birds Here" is one that specifically spoke to my students who were familiar with Detroit's struggles because they or their parents were from Detroit. All of my students were familiar with the general history and current condition of Detroit's schools and neighborhoods.

The poem repeats a bird metaphor, and using a dialogic style, sounds both personal and urgent.

There Are Birds Here
by Jamaal May

For Detroit
There are birds here,
so many birds here
is what I was trying to say
when they said those birds were metaphors
for what is trapped
between buildings
and buildings. No.
The birds are here
to root around for bread
the girl's hands tear
and toss like confetti. No,

I don't mean the bread is torn like cotton,
I said confetti, and no
not the confetti
a tank can make of a building.
I mean the confetti
a boy can't stop smiling about
and no his smile isn't much
like a skeleton at all. And no
his neighborhood is not like a war zone.
I am trying to say
his neighborhood
is as tattered and feathered
as anything else,
as shadow pierced by sun
and light parted
by shadow-dance as anything else,
but they won't stop saying
how lovely the ruins,
how ruined the lovely
children must be in that birdless city.

After we read the poem aloud, I asked students what they noticed in this poem. "Repetition," a student responded, then listed repeated words, "bird," "here," "confetti," and "no." We then discussed what impact the repeated words produced, and a student commented that "birds" and finally "birdless" suggests that "people think there's no hope in Detroit, but it's not true." This statement showed that the student was able to connect with May and his viewpoint, here taking on an identity as a student who can interpret poetry, and showing agency to assert a claim unsolicited. After this, I asked students to consider this in small groups, and they broke into conversations about their experiences in Detroit—more strong identity negotiation, with students taking on new identities, restructuring identities. After these group discussions, I invited students to put the poem aside, pull out notebooks, and write. I asked them to consider how May used the conversational "I was trying to say," "I don't mean," "I mean," and again, "I was trying to say." Is this an effect one could use to represent a miscommunication between people? Fifteen minutes

later, students had drafts of poems to share. Many wrote about Detroit, having taken on the Detroit poet identity, perhaps.

Other poems by contemporary poets of varied cultural backgrounds were read weekly. I read poems by Sherman Alexie, Naomi Shihab Nye, Li Young Lee, and Poet Laureate Juan Filipe Herrera, to name a few. Herrera's "Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings" (see Appendix C), for example, beguiled the class with its stark and edgy imagery about life and poetry. He begins with the inscrutable "Before you go further" and then divulges, "…you must know the secret, there is no poem/ to speak of…." What unfolds is a maze of wonder, and in groups of four, students followed the winding language to find a message, if any could be found. Some group representatives expressed that the speaker of the poem was telling a friend about being a poet, and that is why the poem ends with "mist becomes central to your existence." Other group speakers viewed the line "life without boundaries" as a general statement about art and artistic freedom. Both of these claims showed that students were able to create identities that allowed them to step inside a poem and evaluate an experience—strong reader and learner identities with the agency to assert chosen interpretations. After groups shared their thoughts, we closed the class discussion with a "whip-around," an activity in which students read their favorite line of the poem one after another, no hesitations. This whip-around created a chaotic sound-scape of sharp images--the winning lines were "day by day against the razor" and "pull your spirit into the alarming waters." This experience stunned us; language is power.

Were my students responding to the contemporary and diverse voices in the poems I brought in on Poetry-Mondays? I know that students respond to the validation afforded when literature reflects their race and background (Tatum, 2007). Still, how could I measure the impact of a pedagogical move like using contemporary poetry? What about the traditional canon, the

Frost, the Dickinson? To answer this, I know that I cannot quantitatively measure the impact of this pedagogy, but I can attest that students showed engagement with the poems and that their participation and comments reflected identity making and restructuring. Furthermore, students showed agency when they participated in discussion and later suggested poems for Poetry-Monday reading. Some students told me about spoken word videos they thought other students would like. Others quoted lines from poems to respond to other literature. One student, Chloe, brought me the sheet music her chamber choir was singing: "Sure On This Shining Night" by James Agee (see Appendix D). She asked if I would use this poem for Poetry-Monday, because she wondered what the class would say about it.

Indeed, the class showed strong interest in the poem, "Sure on This Shining Night," although it was considerably older than any of the poems I had shared on Mondays. Written in 1934, the poem was put to music for choir and piano by Samuel Barber. Barber's music highlights meditative images of this tonal poem with interweaving phrasing for choir voices, creating a distinctive lyrical aesthetic. The poem is prayerful in tone as exemplified in the line "Kindness must watch for me/ this side of the ground," and many students expressed concern for the speaker's emotional health, reflecting their ability to remake selves as interpreters with a psychological lens. To follow, we listened to a YouTube video of the piece sung by a college choir and then gathered the final thoughts about "shadows on the stars," and the image's possible ties to the year it was written. This consideration added meaning for students who then told the class how war and economic depression might impact a person's mental state. Indeed, the student-led move from contemporary poetry to this Modern-era poem displayed movement in students' identities as poetry readers, and agency in their classroom leadership.

Incidents like this, in which students engaged in poetry reading, varied and bloomed in the classroom. But much of this type of engagement in poetry had happened before I moved to emphasizing contemporary poets and poems. As I stated earlier, I found it impossible to ascertain the extent of the impact contemporary poetry use has on student engagement. However, whether or not this pedagogical shift to contemporary poetry changed my students—*it changed me*. I was purposeful in seeking out and sharing poems that represented the cultures of my students, and this deliberation brought sensitivity to my teaching. Poetry requires close examination and thought, affording me space and time to consider my practice "When I Write."

> I slow down the world
> when I write.
> Cars pass outside my window
> less, and streets empty
> like war zones.
> I slow down the world,
> slow my pulse, like the last person alive.
> When I write
> I am the last teacher left
> in the building,
> when everyone else
> has gone home for the day.

The slowness in the poem represents the careful reflection that makes poetry a way of knowing and examining, a way of being "the last teacher left in the building." Teacher and writer, planning the next day's lesson, thinking about students, writing a poem--the life of reflecting in solitude, I decided, may be a significant part of the caring hooks (1994) discussed. Poetry has the capacity to foster sensitivity and caring for others because through a poem, we perceive humanity. I continue to learn about my students and their lived experiences when they write poems and share them with me. Thus, a teacher's caring surely is the cement of a holistic emancipatory practice.

Poetry can teach us about our common humanity. For example, I learn so much from what my students say and write in class, from the "Things My Students Tell Me."

I am
In this class but didn't ask to be
I feel the heater blowing
Its hot breath even in May
smells burnt
I hear sirens bleed from
a fire station two miles away,
sirens a teacher never hears.

In front of me, I see nodding heads
that did not sleep at all last night,
not at all, and the heads slip off the
bracing palms and then jolt.
It is a death of sorts, I think.

I know why those two never answer,
Those two who sit in the corner,
with no money for lunch, no phones,
dontlookatme faces
and no place.
So, their mom,
after cleaning at the Holiday Inn
meets them at 5
maybe in the Walmart parking lot,
where they'll hang till 9
when the shelter opens.

I might not have known that the shelter doesn't open until nine had my student not written about it. These voices in pain, repetition and brutal honesty reveal culture and concerns. Most of all, students' poetry affords details that force us to see humanity. For me, poetry writing in the classroom isn't about producing acclaimed poetry; it's about exercising our common need to represent the human experience through art. When poetry is honest to the human experience (*let the page come out of you and then it will be true*), it can sensitize students and teachers to each

other, to themselves, and to the world (*you are white, yet a part of me as I am a part of you*). Langston Hughes understood the capacity of art to unite humans with poetic truth.

My coursework at MSU has expanded my awareness of social justice issues and student struggles; a sensitivity that was always there has now gained an important focus. This came forward in the poem above especially in the line about students' poems. I note their worlds, the worlds they speak about and the worlds they write poems about. The homeless students who must meet their mother at Walmart to go to the shelter won't be able to complete homework for my class. I find that my identity is restructuring as I encounter and care about these students. The teacher in me extends arms open wide, and I want to write about my students and to foster their identity negotiation through poetry writing. I want to ask, "What is Your Story?"

Your people?
Your food spread on the tables,
like *mezza*,
or *iltapala,*
bread, cheese, and hardtack that tell stories.
Who smiles under lamplight of warm conversation,
generations fed and sharing stories?
What stories watch in the window?
Are they stories told at bedtime or in the sweat of nightmares?

The songs, the prayers, flutes calling the sheep down from the mountains,
or bombs falling, as parents send children away on trains.
The flight at night, hiding in roadside ditches.
The struggle of work, endless—or no work, worse.
Who stands in the doorway after slavery or war waiting to speak?
Hold up Liberty's tired arm, yes, if you wish,
but tell your story, too.
Everyone has one, even when all else is darkness.

The darkness is silence. When students find their voices and begin to examine their lived experience through poetry, they may reveal their identity positioning (Ivanic, 1994) and this identity may be affirmed by sharing the poem in the classroom. Dewey (1913) explained how "when excitement about subject matter goes deep, it stirs up a store of attitudes and meanings derived from prior experience. As they are aroused into activity they become conscious thoughts and emotions, emotionalized images" (p. 68). A student's identity in the poem is validated when the poem is read aloud and students listen. The aesthetic experience of listening to a read poem can also develop into an aesthetic experience. Listening to a poem read requires comprehension and appreciation. Dewey (1913) described perception: "To perceive, a beholder must create his own experience. Without an act of recreation, the object is not perceived as a work of art (p. 56). This highlights the concept that while reading the poem is a gift, so listening to a poem is also a gift, the gift of validation to the poet, and the gift of aesthetic experience to the listener herself. Students in my class hear and perceive poems according to their personal abilities, as projected in the "Poetry Reading in Room 415."

> The tall boy with sad eyes rises to read his poem.
> *I'll go,* he says,
> but moves slowly, searching his folder for the poem,
> then finding it, steadies himself
> and maneuvers between the crammed desks
> and students sitting on the floor, to the front
> where he adjusts his stance in the front of the room,
> yanks fingers through his long hair. He begins softly,
> *My old man*, he says, *came home last night--*
> He gropes, stumbles,
> moves words, like furniture across a room.
> *No he didn't come home last night--*

Last night, last night didn't come home…
words rush then stop
push, each one passes out of a mouth,
dry slow tongue clicks like texting
into the stale air of a crowded classroom,
sweaty, hot breaths, windows all open,
but late May delivers no wind.
He tilts forward as he reads, leaning into air
his left hand fisted in his pocket like a rock
right hand holding the poem, which rattles with his
shaking.
He reads about a father
whom he carried to bed
It's not easy, putting a grown man to bed
a voice spoke with grace
to place himself in an unsteady world
that, like this father, cannot teach a boy how to walk.

The poem and the reading come together to form the aesthetic experience, as "his left hand fisted in his pocket like a rock/ right hand holding the poem, which rattles with his/ shaking." Aesthetic experiences can tie students to the written and spoken word, and they can spur connections to the common human condition. Teachers can facilitate such experiences as Dewey (1913) explained. Creating experiences in the classroom through poetry read aloud can heighten the sensitivity toward language arts. This is what Dewey described as the artist's "unusual sensitivity to the qualities of things" (p. 51). Reading aloud to the class is one way that I tried to model active experiential learning behavior on Poetry-Mondays. As modeled in NWP, we read the poem twice. Reading twice allowed for comprehension and also for students to practice reading poetry aloud, to taste the words. Perhaps this seemed important to me because I

feared that reading poetry aloud was becoming a lost skill, and I wanted my students to appreciate poems read aloud. Cremin (2010) expressed concern about teachers in the United Kingdom not reading poetry aloud. In a United Kingdom Literacy Association survey of 1,200 teachers, less than two percent of teachers who read literature aloud reported reading poetry in the six months prior (p. 10). It is no wonder that students may hesitate to read poetry aloud, if they have seldom heard it and never asked to practice it. Yet teachers who do read poetry with their classes find value in offering an "Aesthetic Experience."

> Yes they have felt it
> these teachers who
> slam in and out of stinking classrooms
> papers strewn, book-stacks aching, all careening
> towards June emptiness.
> They felt it, though others wouldn't know it
> by their disheveled hair, and practical shoes
> their outlet clothing and the creased foreheads,
> deepening over paper grading.
> They felt it long ago when as children their mom or dad read
> a story, just so, and waited, just so, for the words to topple each other
> as the chase was on for the loot, or the animal died, or the family sank into poverty.
> They felt it too, yesterday,
> when Charlie read a poem
> in front of class, all eyes, ears waiting at some heavy door
> as each word escaped his mouth, like his own name
> calling him home. Fierce words, so honest
> his tongue bent in anger over the last, the last
> when the hush burst, exhaling puffs of grief
> and silence took the room.

This article concludes with my description of where I aspire to be as a teacher. First I discuss how my classroom emancipatory practice is based on Ranciere's (2010) theories of learner freedom. Then I describe how I express that thinking in the poetry workshopping in my classroom.

Seeking Engaged Pedagogy

More than a direct practice, emancipation is a philosophy that views everyone as equals before education. Ranciere described it as using one's intelligence under the assumption of equality. Under this philosophy, teachers engage with students, sharing their stories "and return the authority of knowledge to the poetic condition of all spoken interaction" (p. 6). Sharing a story differs from the 'explaining" that is inherent in the "teaching as banking" view that both Freire (1970) and Ranciere (2010) contend to be oppressive. Teachers who see their students as equals also see them as as capable of intellectual thought; thus, students are able to contribute to class discussions in this "poetic condition"—a condition that rests on and trusts in the ability of humans to intellectualize. After all, Ranciere pointed out, humans are capable of speech, of language acquisition. This is the same capability that ensures intellectual capacity to learn. Because "students are seekers" (p.6) the teacher can trust that access and shared stories will foster learning. Part of encouraging the voice of students is for the teacher to free herself from the responsibility of having to be the "explainer."

When I became familiar with this philosophy, I began to rethink my teaching practice in general and my poetry teaching in particular. I felt that in poetry writing, workshopping, and performance, I could focus on student empowerment. Instead of looking for poems that reflected my cultural background, I could share poems from theirs. When we write poetry, I could offer

time and invite them to look at poems they like for inspiration. Further, I could encourage them to use their own cultural material in their poems.

The empowerment expanded further when I joined the workshop as a participant rather than facilitate from the front of the room. When the class prepared four copies of a poem to workshop, I made four copies of one of my poems as well. The first time I sat down with a workshop group, poem copies in hand, a student expressed approval: "We're going to workshop your poem? Wow." Our session was engaging. Students seemed intent to follow protocol exactly with my poem, as we all did with each of theirs. We began with noticing poetic elements. Then we all stated what line we liked in the poem. Last, we wondered and suggested about how the poem might be if added to or changed in some way. While I continually felt the teacher-worry of how the other groups are following protocol, or even whether the other groups are even talking about poems at all, I noted that I felt free from the burden of having to be "master-explicator" of all poetry. I sat in a position where I was unable to control everything going on in the room; in fact, I was unable to control what was being said about my own poem. I was vulnerable and free. It felt right to end the session with "Thanks for workshopping my poem and thanks for sharing your poems." I meant it.

Since this first workshop sharing, I have continued to workshop along with my students when I can. I typically schedule workshops in the spring before a year's-end poetry reading which we call the Slam, held in my classroom. For these end-of-year workshops, I invite other staff members to bring in their poems to workshop with student groups. One year, I was delighted that an administrator and two teachers came to workshop. In preparation for the Slam, we also practice our performance of the poem with a workshop group. Unsurprisingly, students often find ways to further revise their poems during the performance workshop.

As a form of habit, I had always tried to perform the activity that I had planned for my students, whether before them as a model, or as a practice run before I assigned the activity. When they read, I read in a chair right beside them. When they wrote, I took my composition book to a table and wrote beside them. Often, after writing time, I would take my turn placing my written words under the visual camera so we could observe them projected on the screen behind me. This seemed to encourage risk-taking, by providing a model of risk-taking and allowing myself to be exposed, flaws and all. This also provided evidence that everyone writes first drafts, in great need of revision. Likewise, other teachers of poetry writing have also modeled using their own poetry writing. Dymoke (2013) in New Zealand described how a teacher she observed shared a draft of her poem with the class, and in doing so "shared something of her own identity" (p. 162). The teacher in this case fostered a personal connection with the students and built a trusting relationship. In a similar way, I modeled writing during the Monday writing sessions, and further, I sometimes shared what I had just drafted with the class. Often, if the students were hesitant to share, I would share first, and in this way break ice for others. Rather than intimidate, my modeling before the class rendered me vulnerable as a writer, validated me as a learner, and distributed power. My presence served a participatory role rather than as a judge or critic.

This is the emancipatory classroom practice that has encouraged me to look further for opportunities for myself and my students. According to hooks (1994) "Progressive, holistic education, "engaged pedagogy," is more demanding than conventional critical or feminist pedagogy. For, unlike these two teaching practices, it emphasizes wellbeing. That means that teachers must be actively committed to a process of self-actualization that promotes their own wellbeing if they are to teach in a manner that empowers students" (p. 15). For me, this vision of

engaged teaching sustains my lesson planning, reflection, and my personal growth as a poet. Teaching students with compassion and sensitivity to their culture and intelligence includes believing in their abilities and mine, because in a world of possibility "This is How It Ends:"

> It ends as it begins,
> readers write.
> writing beckons new readers to writing,
> as the shadows stretch, thicken,
> then lean away
> and all breathing slows for the night.
> So we learn and learn it well,
> because only learners teach.
> Writers read writers.
> This is how it begins.

APPENDICES

Appendix A

Theme for English B
by Langston Hughes

The instructor said,

Go home and write
a page tonight.
And let that page come out of you—
Then, it will be true.

I wonder if it's that simple?
I am twenty-two, colored, born in Winston-Salem.
I went to school there, then Durham, then here
to this college on the hill above Harlem.
I am the only colored student in my class.
The steps from the hill lead down into Harlem,
through a park, then I cross St. Nicholas,
Eighth Avenue, Seventh, and I come to the Y,
the Harlem Branch Y, where I take the elevator
up to my room, sit down, and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me
at twenty-two, my age. But I guess I'm what
I feel and see and hear, Harlem, I hear you.
hear you, hear me—we two—you, me, talk on this page.
(I hear New York, too.) Me—who?

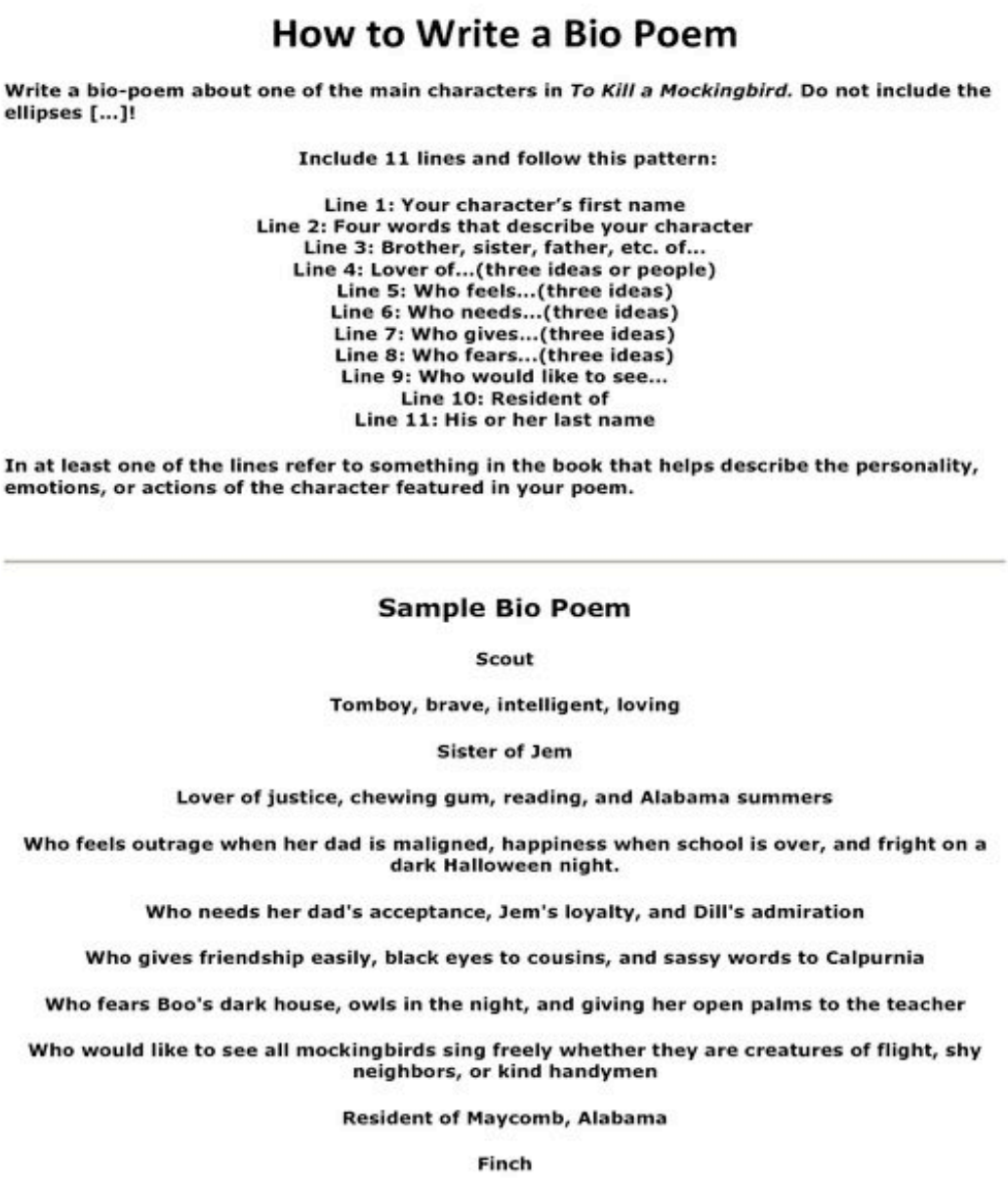
Well, I like to eat, sleep, drink, and be in love.
I like to work, read, learn, and understand life.
I like a pipe for a Christmas present,
or records—Bessie, bop, or Bach.
I guess being colored doesn't make me *not* like
the same things other folks like who are other races.
So will my page be colored that I write?
Being me, it will not be white.
But it will be
a part of you, instructor.
You are white—
yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.
That's American.
Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me.
Nor do I often want to be a part of you.
But we are, that's true!
As I learn from you,

I guess you learn from me—
although you're older—and white—
and somewhat more free.

This is my page for English B.

Appendix B

Screenshot of a Biopoem Example



How to Write a Bio Poem

Write a bio-poem about one of the main characters in *To Kill a Mockingbird.* Do not include the ellipses [...]!

Include 11 lines and follow this pattern:

Line 1: Your character's first name
Line 2: Four words that describe your character
Line 3: Brother, sister, father, etc. of...
Line 4: Lover of...(three ideas or people)
Line 5: Who feels...(three ideas)
Line 6: Who needs...(three ideas)
Line 7: Who gives...(three ideas)
Line 8: Who fears...(three ideas)
Line 9: Who would like to see...
Line 10: Resident of
Line 11: His or her last name

In at least one of the lines refer to something in the book that helps describe the personality, emotions, or actions of the character featured in your poem.

Sample Bio Poem

Scout

Tomboy, brave, intelligent, loving

Sister of Jem

Lover of justice, chewing gum, reading, and Alabama summers

Who feels outrage when her dad is maligned, happiness when school is over, and fright on a dark Halloween night.

Who needs her dad's acceptance, Jem's loyalty, and Dill's admiration

Who gives friendship easily, black eyes to cousins, and sassy words to Calpurnia

Who fears Boo's dark house, owls in the night, and giving her open palms to the teacher

Who would like to see all mockingbirds sing freely whether they are creatures of flight, shy neighbors, or kind handymen

Resident of Maycomb, Alabama

Finch

Appendix C

Let Me Tell You What a Poem Brings
for Charles Fishman

Before you go further,
let me tell you what a poem brings,
first, you must know the secret, there is no poem
to speak of, it is a way to attain a life without boundaries,
yes, it is that easy, a poem, imagine me telling you this,
instead of going day by day against the razors, well,
the judgments, all the tick-tock bronze, a leather jacket
sizing you up, the fashion mall, for example, from
the outside you think you are being entertained,
when you enter, things change, you get caught by surprise,
your mouth goes sour, you get thirsty, your legs grow cold
standing still in the middle of a storm, a poem, of course,
is always open for business too, except, as you can see,
it isn't exactly business that pulls your spirit into
the alarming waters, there you can bathe, you can play,
you can even join in on the gossip—the mist, that is,
the mist becomes central to your existence.

Excerpted from Half of the World in Light: New and Selected Poems *by Juan Felipe Herrera. Copyright 2008.*

Appendix D

Sure On This Shining Night
by James Agee (1934)

Sure on this shining night
Of star made shadows round,
Kindness must watch for me
This side the ground.
The late year lies down the north.
All is healed, all is health.
High summer holds the earth.
Hearts all whole.
Sure on this shining night I weep for wonder wand'ring far alone
Of shadows on the stars.

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