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Using poetry and metaphor to learn across the curriculum

Stanley Wayne Brown

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USING POETRY AND METAPHOR
TO LEARN ACROSS THE CURRICULUM

A Thesis
Presented to the
Faculty of
California State University,
San Bernardino

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts
in
English Composition

by
Stanley Wayne Brown

June 1999
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Approved by:

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Date
Abstract

Poetry has a dubious place in our educational system today: administrators, teachers, parents, and students praise it, especially in the elementary years, yet it is used less and less as students advance into the upper grades. In fact, in the secondary school, poetry is often seen as nothing more than a diversion—a creative break from the regular curriculum. Students and teachers, under the pressure of college entrance exams, Advanced Placement tests, high school proficiency exams, and other standardized tests find it increasingly difficult to find the time and justification for reading, and especially the writing, of poetry.

However, cognitive scientists and educational theorists suggest that poetry is not secondary to learning; it is primary. Because poetry is closely associated with metaphor, which is used to make connections in all fields of study, poetry is a versatile tool for learning. Poetry can be used to connect disciplines, as well as promote intellectual growth through various levels of abstraction and difficulty. Therefore, this writing, in addition to promoting the use of poetry as a way to advance knowledge in students, will suggest and explain how this can be done.
Acknowledgments

I am grateful to the English and composition teachers I have encountered at California State University, San Bernardino. I have found the composition program to be very enjoyable and valuable, without exception. I want to especially thank my primary reader, Juan Delgado, for his expertise, effort, and inspiration; Dian Pizurie, for adding her experience in composition to my project during a busy time for her; and to Larry Kramer for his wisdom and inspiration.

Also, being a reluctant member of the information age, technology has proven to be as difficult as anything else I had to encounter in the writing of this thesis. I thank Ed Barber, Jackson Wong, Kevin Russett and Claude Oliver, to name a few, who have gone out of their way to help me take on all the problems that have arisen since I started this with a lump of coal and a clean sidewalk many years ago.

Moreover, this thesis would not have happened without the contributions of my students who wrote much of the poetry included, and who have taught me much about poetry, teaching, and life over the years. Their poetry is, I think, the best part of this writing.

Also, thanks to my wife, Pat Brown, who encouraged me through this, and gave me the necessary support needed to complete this project.
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Introduction

In the film Il Postino (The Postman), Mario is a character who delivers mail to the acclaimed poet Pablo Neruda. In one conversation about poetry he asks Don Pablo (Pablo Neruda’s character) what a metaphor is. Don Pablo says simply, “When you talk of something—comparing it to another.” For an example, he asks Mario what it means when he says, “The sky weeps?” Mario answers that “It is raining.” Mario, understanding the concept, then asks why a simple thing has such a complicated name?

It is true that metaphor is very common to everyday conversation and communication. It permeates science, sports, storytelling, the arts. It is also very important to poetry, as is suggested by Il Postino. Merriam Webster’s Encyclopedia of Literature concurs, saying that metaphor is “common on all levels and in all kinds of language,” and it “is the fundamental language of poetry” (756). Not only is metaphor mixed into our everyday language and basic to poetry, in this paper I will argue that metaphor is central to thinking and learning as well. This being true, I will build a case for the importance of poetry reading and writing in the classroom in general, and how the creating of metaphors in poetry will aid in the knowledge making of students specifically. I assert that not only does the reading and writing of poetry, in a broad sense, develop an individual cognitively, but that one will make gains in more than one discipline while doing so.
Chapter One
Poetry and Education

In the year by year, day by day, revision of educational paradigms, there are some common themes that are being affirmed by many voices today. For one, people don't have just one intelligence, but many. Also, students learn in different ways. Third, the best learning engages the emotions as well as the intellect. Fourth, learning is an active rather than a passive activity. Fifth, students need to be able to think creatively and critically, and schools aren't doing enough to promote this. And sixth, words, language, reading, writing, speaking -- all forms of discourse -- are central to the making of meaning in an individual. In short, in our modern age when politicians and educational leaders cry of the need for technology, let me qualify this: Our students need, and our culture needs, as much or perhaps more than any computer, or the internet, the tools of literacy: discourse (with other humans!); active learning; word play; reflection; and fresh ways of learning, thinking, and seeing that involve more than one type of intelligence and learning style. Furthermore, I suggest that a part of such a program should, can, and would involve poetry, and that poetry is very much neglected and misunderstood by our educational system and its practitioners.

An example of how poetry is misunderstood in education today is found in this familiar story: A colleague, returning from an Advanced Placement conference, told me that the presenter didn't believe in having students write poetry because she had too much to do, too much to cover. This AP presenter, seems to embrace an attitude
that Joseph Tsujumoto, author of Teaching Poetry Writing, assigns to some of the administrators he has observed:

At the first extreme, poetry (like art in general) is shoved into the 'creativity corner' by many administrators who pretend to champion its importance at awards assemblies and parent-teacher meetings. In general, it is deemed (again like the other arts) a divine gift given to the few, an idiosyncratic endeavor, or a frivolous waste of time. (25)

Likewise, in keeping with these administrators and this AP presenter, it is common in high school and college to read poetry, but not to write it. I make the former statement based on experience and observation, a statement that is corroborated by poet Aileen Fisher when she says, "It is sad to say that not many of the teachers above the third grade say they use poetry in the classroom" (qtd. in Copeland 28).

Admittedly, any teacher who has ever attempted some "creative" assignment with his or her students knows where this attitude might come from: not every drawing, poem, story, or sculpture turns out to be brilliant. In fact, quite the opposite is the natural order of things. Teachers may feel like they can't control what is happening nor affect the quality of the efforts since the students do them themselves. Moreover, other problems and questions arise: creativity and active learning create more chaos, less order, and louder classrooms; and, if you have students write poetry, as with any creative activity, how do you know whether any high order thinking is really going to take place? How do you teach a creative assignment? Just as bad -- how do I
evaluate "creative" work? I know from experience that students left on their own to
create a group project can return with something that was fun for them, but does not
satisfy my desire to have them think in significant ways. The same can be true of
poetry writing. Students will return with pages of bad, cliché rhymed verse, if you let
them, and you may feel like no one has learned anything at all.

Yet, there is the ongoing conversation that claims, despite these many problems,
that the following truism stated by Virginia O'Keefe in Speaking to think, Thinking to
Speak is not the most desirable situation: “Schools have been designed to meet the
needs of a certain class of learners-- those for whom passivity is an acceptable way of
learning. Quiet classrooms with docile students, dominated by the teacher's voice are
still perceived as 'good' classrooms" (1). Moreover, while we as teachers might value
order and the sound of our own voices and ideas, students, of course, see things
differently. William Glasser reports that after talking to many high school students in
depth that the students "see quality in athletics, music, and drama...Almost none find
anything of high quality in regular classes" (qtd. in Kirby 36). The explanation for this
seems apparent: we have all seen young people come up to us as adults with poems,
drawings, art projects, group skits, and other works that we weren't that impressed
with, yet the students obviously valued these things. People value what they have
developed themselves; they value their own accomplishments. Moreover, where there
is value to an individual, there is potential for learning. Virginia O'Keefe in Speaking
to Think, Thinking to Speak says that cognitive research shows that meaningful
knowledge must be generative. Or more explicitly:
Working with knowledge demands more than recall of information; it requires building knowledge structures. Cognitive scientists today share with Piageticians a constructivist view of learning, asserting that people are not just recorders of information but builders of knowledge structure. When we know something, it is not just information we have received. We must interpret the information and relate it to what we already know.

If that is true, we cannot inoculate students with knowledge. (6)

So people learn by building knowledge inside of themselves--by taking in new information and building on what we already have. It must not just be received—it must pass through us and our thinking and experience. Tolstoy in the same way claims that you can’t teach the meaning of words to students. Students learn the meaning of a word when they feel the need to use the word. Then, once they have used it, the word and concept become theirs (qtd. in Vygotsky 150).
Chapter Two

The Relationship between Poetry and Metaphor

That being the case, what is the link between learning and poetry? What is poetry -- that is, the essence of poetry? How do people learn? How might poetry affect cognitive growth? Lilian Moore, quoted in Speaking of Poets, says this about what poetry is:

The language of young children often has the expressiveness and directness of poetry. Young children often think as poets do -- in metaphor, one of the building blocks of poetry, a fresh and vivid way of looking at the world. It's Shakespeare saying, 'Juliet is the sun.' It's Picasso changing modern sculpture through metaphor: taking a bicycle saddle and handlebars and creating the head of a bull. (qtd. in Copeland 10)

Moore's statement suggests a couple of advantages to poetry as a learning tool: one, it is a natural, organic activity used by children; and, two, it has applications to other areas of knowledge besides language arts. She refers to Picasso's metaphorical thinking, but metaphor is very common in the sciences as well where it is used to explain ideas. For instance, in a science class you might hear about the "spiral staircase" or about "building blocks." Darwin explained evolution as a "race for survival." In the field of psychology, Freud talks about a willful rider upon a horse "to convey the relationship between the ego and the id" (Gardner 96). It is not surprising that poets come from all fields of study, then, and all types of vocation and activity.
John Dos Passos was a medical doctor, for instance. Wallace Stevens was an executive with an insurance company. Poetry is a language of discovery and freshness that relates to all fields of knowledge. Karla Kuskin makes a common statement about poetry when she says: "As human beings we spend a lot of time trying to figure out what in the world is going on around us. I try to capture this curiosity in my poems" (qtd. in Copeland 35). Likewise, Richard Shiff in "Art and Life: A Metaphoric Relationship," says:

Excluding the possibility of the creation of entirely new worlds and the resultant transformation of all personal identities, acts of genius or dramatic breakthroughs in fields of study can affect our present world order only if they are joined by means of a powerful metaphor. Indeed establishing the metaphoric bridge may be considered the act of genius, and the entry into new areas of knowledge is its consequence. (108)

Shiff's comment that metaphor is essential for "genius" gives metaphor a magical quality affirmed in even more effluent terms by poet Jimmy Santiago Baca in Speaking of Poets:

Language is the most powerful gift given to us. If you have a strain of madness in you, in a very sublime and benevolent way, as I think I do, I thoroughly and blindly believe that simile and metaphor can pierce steel. I really believe that. I believe that the energy that goes into a metaphor or simile coagulates from all cosmic debris. I believe that when all of this is concentrated, it is more powerful than steel. It is an extraordinary power
given to us by the gods.... simile and metaphor help us communicate in a mysterious and magical way. (qtd. in Copeland 44)

Though Baca speaks more lyrically than Shiff, the idea is the same: that metaphor, one of the most important foundations in poetry, is a powerful and effective tool for achieving knowledge.

Merriam Webster says that metaphor is a figure of speech that “suggests a likeness or analogy between two subjects.” Metaphor in a general sense takes many forms, from the implied comparison of the “the ship plows the sea,” to the explicit comparison of a simile, “a brow as white as marble,” or an explicit metaphor, “She is a red, red, rose.” However, the root words of the term metaphor suggest more than just a connection between different objects. The word metaphor is a derivative of the Greek “metapherein,” and means “to transfer, change,” from “meta” which means “after and beyond” and “pherin” which means “to carry” (Merriam Webster 756). These terms suggest movement, transcendence, metamorphosis, creation. In constructing a metaphor one makes a “qualitative leap from a reasonable, perhaps prosaic comparison to an identification or fusion of two objects to make a new entity partaking of the characteristics of both” (Merriam Webster 756). It is worth noting that in constructing a metaphor, according to this statement, one leaves the “reasonable” and “prosaic” behind, to form some kind of “fusion.” Once again, metaphors are made to sound profound and even magical.

As Webster’s uses the word analogy to define metaphor, it is done in the general sense of the word. That is, metaphor can be a very specific term that is used to
distinguish the figure of speech from, say, a simile, but in a general sense a metaphor is used to express any number of different kinds of connections, similarities between dissimilars. For instance, it also can take the form of personification, in which human characteristics are passed onto objects as in “the wind screamed.” Metaphors can also be extended; that is, once a comparison is made between two different things, this relationship can be further developed in the poem or prose by using other imagery that suggests the same relationship (An example is provided later in the paper). In simple terms, a metaphor, in the most general sense, can take many forms. While I will discuss poetry generally in this writing, I will focus much of this discussion primarily on poetry that makes use of metaphor—that element of poetry that scientists find so useful and poets find magical. Along with metaphor, I will look at poetry that makes bridges of any kind: between the intellect and the affect; the personal and social; the mathematical and musical and linguistic; between the unconscious and the conscious. In other words, I will use poetry as a bridge to build knowledge, connect disciplines, combine different intelligences.
Chapter Three

Poetry, Metaphor, and Cognition

Not all poetry, perhaps, has equal cognitive value. James Moffett, for instance, in *Teaching the Universe of Discourse*, in discussing the range of abstraction and the mediums that lead into different levels of thought, such as fiction, drama, etc., says that poetry "plays the whole scale" of abstraction, both high and low (46). So, certain kinds of poetry, one would expect, would yield more cognitive results than others. So, how does the mind work, and what kind of poetry writing will lend itself to cognitive results?

As to how the mind works, Piaget sees the development of thought as "a story of the gradual socialization of deeply intimate, personal, autistic mental states" (qtd. in Vygotsky 34). In other words, Piaget sees that ideas start within the individual and exist in inexpressible forms. As the individual matures, he is able to shape his thinking so that his thoughts can be conveyed to others. Lev Vygotsky agrees, although he sees the progression happening in inverse order (34). That is, Vygotsky sees the individual starting socially, with imitation, and then moving inward into the more personal, deep, and complex thinking. In any case, the relationship between varied personal thought processes such as dreaming and reflection, and an audience, is certainly the domain of poetry. That is, the poet may deal with poetry on as something he or she does personally for just him or herself. At the same time, there may be an effort on the part of the poet at some stage, or perhaps a growing awareness, that the
poetry may be meant for sharing with others. This, of course, can grow in scope from sharing with a close friend to sharing with an audience of strangers and publishing.

To summarize one of Vygotsky's theories, conceptual thought, or the thought processes we think of as the high order thinking in Bloom's taxonomy, starts with what he calls "unorganized congeries" (110). These are "heaps" of material in which the thinker is discerning some sort of relationship. This is followed by what he calls "complexes." He says: "The principal function of complexes is to establish bonds and relations. Complex thinking begins the unification of scattered impression; by organizing discrete elements of experience into groups, it creates a basis for later generalizations" (135). In other words, complexes are the associative mind at work. The mind seeks to find relationships and differences, and groups things together. As one moves away from the less defined "congeries," and through more advanced "complexes," the relationships between the items that are grouped become more explicit and refined. Thinking in complexes, in associations, is the foundation of linguistic development, and a study of language history shows that it evolves through complexes --that is, through non-conceptual associations. For instance, the Russian language has a term that means both day and night, and the term "sutki," originally meant seam, as with cloth, then stood for any juncture, then metaphorically it came to mean twilight, and later the time from one twilight to the next, "the 24 hour Sutki of the present" (Vygotsky 130-31). In looking at how language has evolved in complexes, one can see associations that are not necessarily conceptual. Twilight and a twenty-four hour period from twilight to twilight are related, but yet there is an
important semantic difference. They are related to time, however; one as a point in time in a twenty-four hour cycle, and the other as the time period between two twilights. The meanings are completely different, but the term is the same because they are related generally to time and time changes.

Genuine concept formation, on the other hand, requires one to abstract and to "single out elements." It involves synthesis and analyses (Vygotsky 135). It involves being able to use something to think independent of its original context or purpose. In short, symbolization is needed to think abstractly—to conceptualize. That is, when one becomes aware of the word “sutki,” as referred to above, as a metaphor, then, you may use the world symbolically and move it in and out of various contexts. Vygotsky says that language, as a symbolic system, is a key ingredient in the development of conceptual thinking: "..learning to direct one's own mental process with the aid of words or signs is an integral part of the process of concept formation" (108). Ach says that concept formation is an "aim-directed process, a series of operations that serve as steps toward a final goal. Memorizing words and connecting them with objects does not in itself lead to concept formation; for the process to begin, a problem must arise that cannot be solved otherwise than through the formation of new concepts" (qtd. in Vygotsky 100). It is worth pausing to reflect on the idea that conceptualization, beyond mere association, involves a problem. That is why educators believe that students need to do more than memorize theories in mathematics; they need to solve problems, perhaps doing the dreaded "word problems," hated by students because they make you think and apply knowledge. (Or
better yet, have them solve a problem that is real, in front of them!) At the same time, it would stand to reason that the act of writing poetry involves some of the same kinds of problem solving. For instance, working with meter and rhyme schemes involves a sort of problem: when rhyming one must find a match both in sound and meaning at the right point in the lines; meter involves finding words that work both semantically and in terms of syllabic stress and rhythm. Likewise, creating an octave that follows and completes a sestet in a sonnet another, as well as bringing a poem to a satisfying conclusion or ending. An example of a poem that is, I think, both associative as well as conceptual, is a poem I wrote about a situation created by a friend's suicide. The poem entitled "Julie's Suicide," reads as follows:

'Why did Julie die?'

Hannah, age four, asks,

watching silhouettes of her parent's heads.

'I want to watch Julie play tennis,' she cries

from the back seat.

The headlights follow the road,

and her baby brother sits nearby.

To her, death is a color,

and Mommy and Daddy

look into its eyes, and say nothing,
while Lucas kicks his foot

and watches the lights

trough the window.

(Pacific Review 46)

In this poem there is an associative construct, that is, I merely saw a relationship between the way the children and the adults perceive this situation. However, upon reflection on the poem, I understood that there were three distinct ways in which Julie’s death was being perceived: the youngest, is mostly oblivious to the situation, but no doubt has an affective response; Hannah understands some of the ramifications of what happened—that she will no longer get to see Julie anymore; and the parents, though not fully comprehending the situation themselves, understand the death in many ways that they could never convey to their children, especially when dealing with knowledge such as Julie’s recently diagnosed manic depression. This is what enabled me to feel I had brought the poem to some sort of satisfactory conclusion. In other words, I started writing the poem through association, but finished the poem, in my mind, through reflection—through realizing a concept or idea.

Regarding further the question of how the mind works, one general answer is that people learn when they are involved. This, I think, is illustrated by my poem about Julie. As Virginia O’Keefe says, "In order to learn, students have to think through problems themselves. They have to create examples, question what they are told, and examine new data in relation to old.......Cognitive research shows that meaningful knowledge must be generative"(6). In other words, knowledge making comes from
within a learner, as she processes what information or stimulus has come in from outside. Relating this more specifically to poetry and metaphor in learning, Elizabeth Ashton states, "An essential feature of metaphor is that it demands the interpreter becomes actively involved in searching for meaning" (358). And Moffett, in Detecting Growth in Language repeats this idea when he says about metaphor, "The receivers have to fill in some of the meaning from their own imaginations, because metaphors work implicitly" (26).

Both of these quotations talk about the engagement on the part of someone reading the metaphor. On the other side, that of the writer, Peter Elbow explains two types of thinking that take place when referring to the writing process in a general sense. He refers to "first-order" thinking as "intuitive" and "creative." It doesn't require "conscious direction" or "control." According to Elbow, first order thinking is used in discovery, to "get hunches," or "see gestalts" (Embracing 55). In this type of thinking artists such as writers and poets try to be as uninhibited as possible, and let the process lead to associations and insights they had not been able to see before, as often happens; say, when a poet is struck by an unusual metaphor. Looking back on Vygotsky, it seems reasonable that many of these associations are nothing more than complexes, until one reflects on them and discovers their meaning, as I did in my poem "Julie's Suicide." A student poem that was written perhaps entirely with first order thinking is a poem called "What's Next" by an ex-student of mine named Matt Hardy. It struck me as a poem with a great deal of energy, and I liked it immediately. We entered it in the district Writing Celebration, and Matt emerged as one of the winners.
Yet, when I asked Matt about the meaning of the poem he seemed as much of an outsider to it as I was. I thought he was referring to *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* in the poem, as we had read the novel earlier in the year. I wanted to ask him about the theme of the individual versus society and alienation, about the romanticism I found in the poem, and about his challenge to tradition. I had, I thought, a number of insights into his work, but Matt just shrugged and said he didn't know why he wrote it. Perhaps he didn't know how to talk about his poetry, or maybe he stayed within a purely intuitive domain. This is the poem:

We all met up on
this waterlogged spot,

We floated on down
life's dwindling
path. Met up with
others, played
and laughed.

LOVE
HATE
LOVE...

Listen to music and
dance. Choose your
side today.

Don't be like your parents you might say.

Puff Puff Puff Puff

Inhale the world.

The repentant man started to laugh as others shot him in the back. Round about in a circle it occurs like the EARTH.

RUN STOP

RUN
Ohoo...Ohoo...Ohoo...

Look what I did.

Ohoo...Ohoo...Ohoo...

Look what you did.

Oh I remember that occasion.

Damn that man and his whole religion.

What's next?

Whether or not you like Matt's poem, an instructor may feel dissatisfied with Matt's lack of awareness regarding his own thinking. In order for greater growth intellectually, Matt could be encouraged to think about his poem through activities that would give him a greater understanding of what he has written, and help him to talk about his work. One example of such an activity would be to later have Matt write a poem based on this one, or part of one, and then explain how the two are related.

Second order thinking, on the other hand, is the "conscious, directed, controlled" thinking that is commonly thought of as critical thinking, according to Elbow.

"Second order thinking is committed to accuracy and strives for logic and control"
Many researchers and theorists see what Elbow describes as second order thinking as an important domain for intellectual growth and maturity. Vygotsky says that Piaget, for one, "demonstrated that the school child's concepts are marked primarily by his lack of conscious awareness of relations, though he handles relations correctly in a spontaneous, unreflective way" (Vygotsky 162). Vygotsky goes on to refer to what he calls "Claparede's law":

To become conscious of a mental operation means to transfer it from the plane of action to that of language, i.e., to recreate it in the imagination so that it can be expressed in words. This change is neither quick nor smooth. The law states that mastering an operation on the higher plane of verbal thought presents the same difficulties as the earlier mastering of that operation on plane of action. This accounts for the slow progress. (164)

It is apparent from Vygotsky and Piaget that conscious thought comes later developmentally, and that it requires much difficulty to achieve it. Moffett, in Teaching the Universe of Discourse repeats this idea by seeing conscious thought as an important part of cognitive development. He says that "...even very small children make rather high-level inferences," but "...increased consciousness of abstracting has as much to do with developmental growth as has progression up the abstraction ladder. I believe that growth along one dimension fosters growth along the other" (23-24). Regarding the first quotation about the ability of children to make inferences, it would certainly be possible for a student to write a poem, even a very good one, without an awareness of what she is doing, as I attempted to demonstrate with Matt
Hardy's poem. As children's poet Mary Ann Hoberman says, "None of the work I do in the schools ever comes consciously to me when I write the poems; it is only when I am actually there that I see how to share them with the children (qtd. in Copeland 55). Furthermore, it would follow, then, that a teacher wishing to engage his/her students, such as Matt Hardy, in intellectual growth as defined by Moffett, or in what Elbow calls second order thinking, or conscious thought, would want to involve students in activities after the initial writing of poetry that would encourage metacognitive activity. This happens with Mary Ann Hoberman as she brings the poems to the schools and shares them and begins to see them in new ways. I will elaborate on this later in the paper, but with students, other activities that would encourage metacognition besides oral readings include revision, peer editing, and the use of a portfolio, which requires reflection by the students on their work.

Peter Elbow, however, doesn't value one type of thinking above the other. He says,

"We are in the habit--in the academic culture anyway--of assuming that thinking is not thinking unless it is wholly logical or critically aware of itself at every step...."

However, he says, that using prewriting to encourage first order thinking leads to "insights" which are "usually shrewder than the person's long-held convictions." He sees them as two opposite forms of thinking to be used against each other, and in harmony with one another. Yet, he too values conscious thinking highly; "...we must not trust the fruits of intuitive and experiential first order thinking unless we have carefully assessed them with second order critical thinking" (Embracing 56-57).
Moffett, perhaps, overlaps Elbow when he talks about the left and right brains. He sees each side of the brain as important in completing opposite but cooperative function with the other half. He divides them up as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left Hemisphere</th>
<th>Right Hemisphere</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Intellectual</td>
<td>Intuitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analytic</td>
<td>Synthetic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linear</td>
<td>Holistic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>Nonverbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sequential</td>
<td>Simultaneous</td>
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<tr>
<td>Temporal</td>
<td>Spatial</td>
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<tr>
<td>Digital</td>
<td>Analogical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>Implicit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Literal</td>
<td>Metaphoric</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

He says: "Compare literal meaning to melody, in which one note at a time is struck sequentially, and figurative meaning to chords, in which several related notes are struck simultaneously" (Det. Gr. 27). Just as chords are needed in music, so are individual notes. In popular music, for instance, rhythm guitar is needed to back up a lead guitar. In poetry, if the poet is using metaphor, it will stimulate thinking on the right side of the brain, while the need to use detail will stimulate the left. Moffett elaborates by saying that: "... intuition synthesizes experiences into metaphorical
complexes and feeds them in explicit sequences. It's as if the analogical half, specializing in classification, makes up the collections or categories of experience, while the digital half, specializing in seriation, names and chains these categories" (Det. Growth 28).

Poetry is an excellent activity for encouraging this kind of trade off between the left and right brain, because poets must choose literal, concrete detail, while dealing with more general ideas and concepts. An example of this is found in this short poem by Hebrew poet Yehuda Amichai called "Song":

When a man is abandoned by
his love, an empty round space
expands inside him like a cave
for wonderful stalagmites, slowly.

Like the empty space
in history, kept open for
Meaning and Purpose and tears. (47)

The poet gives specific detail and images, which involves left brain thinking, yet develops the metaphor of a cave to represent the emotional life of a man for whom loss leads to inner activity and growth. For students to participate in this type of thinking then, that involves both left and right brain activity and interchange, then an instructor needs to develop assignments that encourage both exchanges between both
halves of the brain, of which I hope to demonstrate later in the paper. Moffett in Detecting Growth in Language emphasizes the value of whole brain activities like poetry for human development when he says:

An overemphasis of the verbal/analytic half of the brain in our own culture is endangering the culture, because it drives out the integrative, analogical thinking desperately needed to coordinate action within the vast intricacies of both individual and international life in this era of modern technology. Balance is the key, and the grand paradox is that people reason and visualize better if they stop sometimes in favor of intuition and metaphor. (68)

Moffett's assertion that our institutional emphasis on the left brain endangers not only the balance of the individual, but also society as a whole could relate to such diverse areas as business and medicine where vision and the ability to integrate many pieces into a whole are important. The development of the right, intuitive brain is essential in order for individuals to have this power.
Another advantage of poetry is that it has the capacity to join one's emotions with one's intellect. As Lev Vygotsky says about the intellect and the affect: A major weakness in traditional psychology is that these are separated (10). And Dan Kirby and Carol Kuykendall say in *Mind Matters: Teaching for Thinking*: “We know from our own experience that thinking flourishes in an environment where thinkers are free to voice convictions and beliefs and feelings. Our primary assumption about thinking is that thinking and feeling are one” (14).

They also refer to Oliver Sacks, who warns against any view of thinking which "eschews the judgmental, the particular, the personal, and becomes entirely abstract and computational" (qtd. in Kirby 14). Poetry, with its close ties to music, is of course, affective and personal oftentimes. A poem that illustrates the affective appeal of poetry is “Chuparosa” by Juan Delgado:

The feeder is red with sugared water.

A hummingbird’s wings burn.

Behind a window with bars

A man lies face down on a cot;

His chest beats out a dream

While the hummingbird hovers.

The dreamer sips at what
His eyes offer him: the U.S. border.
   Poking his face through
An opening in the chain-link fence,
   He checks if it's safe to cross.

The possibility of work is his nectar.
   He dashes into a ravine
And likes flat on the ground;
   He has made it past the patrols.

His dream is the hummingbird's flight.
   His eyes scan the night.
If he is not spotted, he will join the rest,
   But the desert is a sweeping net. (7)

Both the intellectual as well as the affective would enrich a reading of Delgado's poem. It would be helpful, for instance, to know that the chuparosa is both a hummingbird and a red flower that hummingbirds like that can be found in the desert—Palm Canyon at Anza-Borrego is full of them, for instance. It might help to know about some principles of poesy such as how to divide lines and an understanding of figurative language. But one's response to the poem is going to be greatly affected by how much empathy the reader shares with the dreamer in the poem. And Moffett
explains how the emotional and intellectual minds intertwine cognitively to create knowledge. He says, "...many of our 'classes' and 'concepts' are irrational, private, and unconscious" (Teaching the Univ. 21), which suggests that we will, of course, not all react in the same way to the same material, either intellectually nor affectively. And:

From a later point of view, one categorizes and interprets events, partly in the light of new information received in the interim. But most of all, the details of a particular scene 'stick' because they become assimilated to similar details from other scenes remote in time from that one. The linking of perceptions of different times and places may be affective or logical."

(Teaching the Univ. 21)

So Moffett is saying that knowledge is built by making connections, and one makes those connections with the heart as well as the intellect; and, he suggests, I think, what Kirby said, that the two are inseparable from one another in the thinking and learning process. This is also supported by Vygotsky who says: "Every idea contains a transmuted affective attitude toward the bit of reality to which it refers" (10). And just as there is a need for balance between the left brain and right brain, intuition and logic, and conscious and unconscious, undirected thought, there is a need for balance between the affective and intellectual. Bleuler explains the paradox that as thinking "becomes more and more complex and differentiated, it becomes better adjusted to external reality and less dependent on affects." Yet, paradoxically, "...emotionally significant events of the past and projection to the future become more influential"

(qtd. in Vygotsky 23). So for cognitive growth to occur, there must be growth in both
areas. Furthermore, Bleuler adds: "When a balance between these two modes of intelligence is lost, then we have either a pure dreamer, who lives in fantastic combinations and disregards reality, or a sober realist, who lives only in the present and does not try to foresee the future" (qtd. in Vygotsky 23).

Once again a common theme is repeated: that a balance is needed in learners, people, and in our educational system, as one considers the many dimensions there are to a person and to the mind. Barry Sanders, for one, in A is for Ox, asserts this need for balance in alluding to Froebel's "philosophy of harmonious development" in which parents are encouraged to "think seriously about the delicate balance among intellectual, physical, and emotional growth" (207).

As for poetry's relationship to the logical/affective mind: Bee Cullinan, an education retailer who endorses the use of poetry materials in the schools, says: "Poetry feeds the heart as well as the mind. The most effective reading and writing programs have a strong poetry component, and the value shows up in children's language arts skills. But it doesn't stop there. Poetry enriches teaching in every area of the curriculum" (2). Not only is the affective important in developing the intellect, but Cullinan claims that poetry has the ability to develop skills across the curriculum. This claim will be examined in the next section of this paper, which discusses how poetry is particularly valuable in teaching for, and integrating the multiple intelligences.

John Stuart Mills gives an endorsement for poetry use across the curriculum in his essay, "What is Poetry?" when he states:
The word 'poetry' imports something quite peculiar in its nature; something which may exist in what is called prose as well as in verse; something which does not even require the instrument of words, but can speak through the other audible symbols called musical sounds, and even through the visible ones which are the language of sculpture, painting, and architecture—all this, we believe, is and must be felt, though, perhaps indistinctly, by all upon whom poetry in any of its shapes produces any impression beyond that of tickling the ear. (1051)

Mills, in defining poetry, alludes to at least three areas of curriculum: language, music, and art. Likewise, Howard Gardner in Frames of Mind gives us a theory about what constitutes intelligence that challenges an assumption that has operated in education for a long time. He also explains the mind of a poet in a way that corroborates what I have written about poetry already: that it works in more than one domain of the mind.

Gardner challenges the notion of one generalized intelligence, traditionally expressed as I.Q., and the way intelligence tests are given: "...intelligence tests rarely assess skill in assimilating new information or in solving new problems" (18). Furthermore, he says, not only are intelligence tests flawed because they don't assess problem solving, but also:

While in theory the idea of a single 'horizontal' problem-solving apparatus is attractive, in fact the carefully selected problems to which it is said to apply turn out to be disturbingly similar to one another. Thus the claim that we use the same problem-solving apparatus across the board
becomes vacuous. In fact, in common with Piagetian psychology, nearly all the problems examined by information-processing psychologists prove to be of the logical-mathematical sort. (23)

In other words, generalized tests of intelligence tend to test people in a narrow ways that don't include the complete intelligence of a human being. In addition, Gardner challenges other dominant points of view in education developed by researchers and theorists, such as Piaget: "Piaget tells us little about creativity at the forefront of the sciences, let alone about the originality that is most prized in the arts or other realms of human creativity" (21). These statements claim that intelligence needs to be measured in a different ways and suggest that the process of education needs to be revised so that it recognizes and values originality and creativity. He argues that there are a number of intelligences that coexist in humans both independently and interdependently: “.the conviction that there exist at least some intelligences, that these are relatively independent of one another, and that they can be fashioned and combined in a multiplicity of adaptive ways by individuals and cultures, seems to be to be increasingly difficult to deny” (8-9). Gardner identifies seven intelligences: linguistic, logic/mathematical, music, spatial, kinesthetic, interpersonal, and intrapersonal.

It is worth noting that by saying intelligences can be "combined," Gardner suggests that intelligences, though independent, do not work in isolation. Others have followed Gardner's work into the idea that students with different strengths learn best in those domains, and should, perhaps, be allowed and encouraged to use these
domains to build knowledge. Charles Fowler says, in citing Gardner: "All people's minds are quite different, and education should maximize each person's own intellectual potential" (45). Also, Bruce Pirie, in arguing that students can and do learn kinesthetically, says, "After all, life experience comes to us in many forms, and the strongest learners are those with many ways of knowing" (46). According to Harold Taylor, who refutes the idea that the arts have secondary importance in education: when schools develop the artistic intelligences, they "open up the mind and nourish the sensibilities" (qtd. in Fowler).

Gardner's theory is well known in education today, and it works well with the cross-curricular paradigm that says that divisions between subject areas are somewhat false or inhibit the natural learning patterns of students, as content areas such as math, English, history, and science blend into one another. For instance, career mathematicians spend two thirds of their time writing, and scientists may have to use mathematics. Educators, then, in recent years, have been seeking ways to integrate curriculum from diverse content areas. Poetry is one activity that can accomplish this readily. Children's poet Mary Ann Hoberman supports this well with this statement:

I would like to see poetry read every single day. Make it a daily routine or event. I'd connect it with all kinds of other things they are studying. For example, in my own work, 'Bugs' could be used in science class. Poems can be used everywhere. This is part of the whole language philosophy where you cross-fertilize ideas. Poetry is both subtle and simple; often it
can get different concepts across very effectively. (qtd. in Speaking of Poets 58).

Poetry, because of its reliance on language, is linguistic in nature. About poetry, Gardner says, "Fascination with language, technical facility with words, rather than desire to express ideas, are hallmarks of the future poet" (76-77). At the same time, because of its roots in orality and kinship with sound, it is also closely related to music: "The poet must have keen sensitivity to phonology, the sounds of words and their musical interactions upon one another. The central metrical aspects of poetry clearly depend up on this auditory sensitivity, and poets have often noted their reliance on aural properties" (Gardner 75). It also involves a sort of mathematical sense when one considers form and meter. Furthermore, logic is employed as poets relate ideas to one another, and deliberately cross up or challenge ideas through juxtapositions and inversions. Again, in the words of Gardner: "Eliot once observed that the logic of the poet is as severe, though differently placed, as the logic of a scientist. He also noted that the arrangement of imagery requires just as much fundamental brainwork as the arrangement of an argument" (76).

It would appear that poetry draws from all subject areas and intelligences, potentially. While I have discussed musical, logical-mathematic, and linguistic intelligences, consider this statement by children's poet Arnold Arloff: "Those who are interested in what I do need to go back to French imagists and some of the constructivist painters and sculptors of the early 1900s. I'm probably more influenced
by skyscrapers and great city pile of brick and steel than I am by poets creating in the halcyon days of the 1920's as cummings did” (Copeland 5).

An example of a student poem from one of my classes that incorporates music with language is as follows:

We the Musicians
At the beginning of life
At birth that is
We are welcomed by music
A rhythm of joy and happiness
Throughout life
The rhythm of the best has continually changed
From a racy guitar sound
To a hip hop underground
Onto a mellow sax doing a solo act
Revealing what goes around...comes around
Not knowing that the body is an orchestra
......The mind the conductor
...And the emotions are the melodies of life
We continue to play the game
Knowing that each will not be the same
and every rhythm played twice is a wasted note
A wasted note is a wasted song
A wasted song is a wasted life.

-- Floran Sulit

Aside from the play with language demonstrated by some figurative language, one is aware in reading this poem that the student is playing with sound and rhythm. The redundancy of the first two lines is a choice made by the writer, I believe, strictly on the basis of sound in the form of rhythm. The second line starts the poem into a kind of swing that is easiest to here in juxtapositions like, “From a racy guitar sound/ To a hip hop underground.” In these lines we hear the alliteration in hip and hop, and have the same number of syllables in each to line to compliment the end rhymed “sound” and “underground.” Another student poem that demonstrates how poetry integrates content areas is a poem called "Flesh" by Salma Baqai, which, I believe, was inspired by an anatomy lesson:

Silky, soft,
smooth,

covers every inch

Others have
lumpy, bumpy,
crinkled, wrinkled,
flesh.

Imagine us
without this cover up.

Our blood would
drain out
Muscles bare
Germs to
crawl inside
the bare.
What an ugly
sight, revealing our true insides.

Open,
broken,
a token of commotion.

Our organs
all exposed
to things
we might want to close

Our toes,
our nose,
would not be a pretty
What would we do without our beautiful, waterproof, keratin rich protection?

The writer demonstrates her knowledge of the purpose and function of skin (science) and scientific terminology: germs, organs, keratin; combined with an ear for music: "Open, broken, a token of commotion" is an example of rhyme, as is "lumpy, bumpy, crinkled, wrinkled; with, of course, the linguistic, in the sense that Salma was able to convey her idea through words, to name three of Gardner's intelligences employed. I would argue, too, that some sort of logical-mathematical intelligence is found in her arrangement of words, lines, and stanzas. For instance, her first stanza orientates us to her subject, the second compares different types of skin, while the third asks the reader to consider a possibility. These stanzas represent a logical progression that is similar to the sort of logic one might employ in solving a mathematical word problem, or coming up with a reason why an experiment in science has turned out the way that it has.
A book that demonstrates beautifully the multiple intelligences present in poetry is Langston Hughes's *The Book of Rhythms*. He talks about the musical dimension of the arts and poetry as something that is basic to human life: "Thousands of years ago men transferred the rhythm of the heartbeat into a drumbeat, and the rhythm of music began" (6). Hughes sees rhythm all around him, in squiggled lines, water, rocking chairs, bird flight, the first day of school. As for rhythm in poetry: "Rhythm is very much a part of poetry. Maybe that is because the first poems were songs. In ancient Greece poets made up words and tunes at the same time. In the Middle Ages bards and troubadours sang their first poems" (25).

Furthermore, Gardner refers to two additional intelligences as interpersonal and intrapersonal: interpersonal being the ability to get along with others; and intrapersonal, the ability to know oneself. Daniel Goleman concurs in his book *Emotional Intelligence*, again challenging the emphasis on I.Q. and logical-mathematic and linguistic intelligence. While acknowledging that traditional I.Q. does have some validity as an indicator of success, he feels, like Gardner, that it has been overgeneralized: "There are widespread exceptions to the rule that IQ predicts success--many (or more) exceptions than cases that fit the rule. At best, IQ contributes about 20 percent to the factors that determine life success, which leaves 80 percent to other forces" (34). For instance, he says that tests have shown that hope is a better predictor of success than SAT scores (86). And hope, Goleman points out, and other desirable emotional conditions, are determined in part by a person's ability to
manage one's emotions: "The goal is balance, not emotional suppression: every feeling has its value and significance" (56).

It should seem reasonable, for anyone familiar with poetry, to understand that poetry is a way to express the sad and woeful as well as to celebrate beauty and happiness. It seems, then, that poetry would be a good vehicle in which to develop one's emotional intelligence. Goleman supports this: "Some of us are naturally more attuned to the emotional mind's special symbolic modes: metaphor and simile, along with poetry, song, and fable, are all cast in the language of the heart" (54). Once again, we see in particular, an allusion to the power of metaphor and simile, figurative language being closely associated with the art of poetry.

An example of a student who used poetry to deal with the death of her mother is a good example of what Goleman is talking about when he says that the emotionally intelligent don't "suppress" how they feel. I have had numerous teachers about gifted students who frustrated us because they were able to deal with class material intellectually, but it usually stayed along way from themselves and their lives. The following poem was written by one of my students as her mother's cancer advanced into late stages, and represents, I think, accomplishment of both the intellectual and affective intelligences:

The Loss

Mom,

Your hair,

Black, white, gray:
Zebra hair.

Your hair
Inscribed in the soap bar.

Your hair
In the bathtub
Like worms after the rain,
On the sidewalk,
Drying in the sun,
Dying.

Your hair
Shed among the furniture
And on your sweater
And on my t-shirt.

No! Stay out of the kitchen, Mom!
I don't want hair in my sandwich
Or on my dinner plate.

Just sit down and take your pills
Or go take a nap.

Please get out of my way:
I have to clean.

Hair always on the floor--
Always have to vacuum.
Always have to clean, have to dust, have to wash

Hair
Away from this house.

I shouldn't complain
I know it's not your fault,

Mom.

It's the radiation.

To make you better,

To cure your illness

In your head,

To rid you of your brain tumor.

But you and I know that

Chemotherapy,

Radiation

And medication

Will not really be the end of

Your cancer.

I look in your eyes,

Hazel eyes,

Dark with partial death,

Yet half-alive with smiling tears.

I look in those eyes
And we both understand that

Death is the only,

The perfect

Cure.

And nausea

And fatigue

And hair loss

Are just results of a mortal attempt

To keep you alive

Here on earth

With your suffering.

And we radiate you

And poison you with chemicals

But all we can really do is

Wait

And observe your loss

Of hair,

Your loss

Of life,

And feel your death,

As you die.

(Bennett 32-34)
Beth's mother died at the end of the school year, and she shared this poem in class before her mother died. Many of her classmates attended the funeral. Goleman speculates on how a poem like this can empower its writer by explaining that "By putting sensory details and feelings into words, presumably memories are brought more under control of the neo cortex" (212). He also explains that: "The emotional brain is highly attuned to symbolic meanings and to the mode Freud called the 'primary process': the messages of metaphor, story, myth, the arts. This avenue is often used in treating traumatized children. Sometimes art can open the way for children to talk about a moment of horror that they would not dare speak of otherwise" (212). So while some people would say that poetry writing can be "good therapy," based on what these diverse voices are saying about human development and the mind, it can also prove significant in terms of cognitive and personal progress. In Beth's case, poetry functioned as a bridge between her feelings and thoughts; it employed linguistic and musical intelligences in the selection of sound and words. It is really the work of a whole person employing many parts of herself to complete a whole statement of thought and feeling.
Chapter Five

Moving One Poetry Assignment Through Levels of Abstraction

In this next section of this paper, I would like to examine how one might use poetry as a system in order to advance learners from simple literacy to increasing abstraction, and how particular steps in the writing process relate to the discussion of development I have already covered. It is Moffett who I quoted earlier as saying that poetry covers the whole cognitive range, from the simple and concrete, to the abstract and complex. This gives poetry flexibility as a learning tool that enables one to employ it in a variety of situations and for a variety of purposes. Also, of course, as a teacher, it is necessary to understand how the poetry is being used, and to check for learning. Otherwise students may be engaged in writing poetry that does not offer the cognitive value the instructor is looking for. I will illustrate how poetry can be used at different levels of difficulty in two ways: First, by showing how one single writing assignment advances through degrees of difficulty and higher level thinking from the beginning of the writing process to the end; and secondly, to illustrate different types of poetry and assignments that illustrate different levels of difficulty.

Regarding the first aim, Poet Lee Hopkins states, "I always found that poetry was a wonderful vehicle for children, and in part for slower readers, because poems are usually short, the vocabulary is usually simple, and I maintain that sometimes more can be said and felt in eight or ten or twelve lines than in an entire novel" (qtd. in Copeland 76-77). Reflecting on Hopkins statement, I would say I have used more and more poetry in the classroom at Victor Valley High School in part because I have
always had a sizable portion of low ability students in my classes, and poetry is short and easy to work with. I have found the following statement by Karla Kuskin to be particularly true as well when dealing with lower ability high school students: "Poetry should welcome you through its wonderful words and rhythmic language and wonderful sounds. It shouldn't be intimidating. It shouldn't, in any way, keep you out (qtd. in Copeland 38). When sharing poetry with less able students, I believe, the poetry should be easy to understand in terms of both content and theme. Sonnets don't work for the most part, especially if you want the students to write poetry using the poems read in class as examples. Rather, I choose free verse like the following poem by James Moore from 25 Minnesota Poets #2:

That Summer

Sometimes we played tennis,
sometimes we sat in the dust and planned our birthdays.

I was in love with the blonde one.

How many evenings we sat on the porch
and dusk handed over the dark
to all of us kicking our legs under the swing.

The horse we pretended to ride were really bicycles.

But the love was truly love.

Whoever we are now
we once walked the white line of the tennis court
one after the other with our arms held out for balance. The brick streets were ours!
O, the thick shadows of those elms.

No other childhood is possible.

It is too late to change the name

on the gravestone of a single leaf. (194)

Aside from some nice imagery and metaphor, I like to dwell on lines like "whoever we are now" and "the love was truly love" to get students to think about the purity and innocence of children, and the dangers they face in becoming adults of losing their identities to something false, or perhaps in taking an identity that might not be real. In any case, there isn't a person alive who doesn't have a childhood memory to connect Moore's poem to, and to write about themselves. It is a poem that is common to human experience. Moreover, the free verse format allows students to play with language and utilize their own speech, without having to strain for high level diction or accommodate rhyme schemes or meter. Yet, the students are asked to form their poems the way Moore does by eliminating unnecessary words, listening to the rhythm of their voices, and paying attention to the way they end and begin their lines.

Another poem from the same book that I use with high school students is called "Robert Zimmerman, Where Are You?" by Margaret Hasse. Although most students today aren't likely to have Robert Zimmerman, that is Bob Dylan, as a hero, many students do have a famous person they look up to, or perhaps an older relative or friend. Also by Hasse is a poem called "High School Boyfriend" which is about meeting her old boyfriend twenty years later in the small town she grew up in while getting gas for her car. These are all poems that I believe are close to the students
consciousness, having to do with love, the future, heroes, childhood, growing up. And, cognitively, selecting poems that are close to student experience is sound, too, as Piaget says: "Experience forms thought, and thought forms experience" (qtd. in Vygotsky 51). In any case, they all have easy vocabulary, I think, and yet all contain creative imaginative poetic language stated as allusions, metaphor, simile, and with creative imagery, such as these lines from "High School Boyfriend":

Parking in breezy nights,

in cars, floating passageways,

we are tongue and tongue like warm cucumbers.

(Hasse 167)

The cucumber image is one that elicits from the class giggles, smiles, questions, alert silence, and discussion.

These poems are accessible, and having students write poems in free verse about heroes, loves, and childhood need not be difficult cognitively. On the other hand, writing a good poem in free verse is not easy work, and it may require a great deal of cognitive work. As poet Lee Hopkins says, "Writing is easy. Rewriting is hard" (qtd. in Copeland 81). And Arnold Ardoff claims that he can write seventy-five drafts while working on a poem, and he usually does about twenty drafts of each poem (qtd. in Copeland 3). No doubt there is a great deal of problem solving and cognitive work in the kind of effort these professional writers put into finishing a poem. So teachers may be advised to start an assignment on a lower difficulty level cognitively, and then work for more abstraction through the writing process. As one progresses through
prewriting, writing, and revision, consciousness and higher order thinking are likely to advance as well. Students oftentimes won’t be inclined to rework their writings, so the writing process may be advanced through a variety of strategies. For instance, students can be asked to revise one another poems, instead of their own, for a fresh look at their work. Or, students can simply be asked to write their own thoughts and questions about another’s poem. These sort of activities can encourage reflection on the part of the writer.

An example of how to do this in steps is as follows. My explanations are both detailed and general enough to offer applications to a variety of different situations. First, the instructor shares a poem or poems to the class that are accessible to them and close to their own personal experience. Joseph Tsujimoto recommends that students are given more than just one example of poems: “Paradoxically, giving students many examples, by both students and adults, can encourage the writer of original poetry. Originality can best be realized through freedom of choice, which becomes meaningful only when one is aware of many options” (10).

Secondly, discuss the poem, its features, ideas and themes, unusual characteristics, and allow the students to respond to it in any way they choose. This will hopefully not only get the students thinking and feeling, but it should bring them to reflect on their own life experience as it relates to the poem. Also, during this stage the student may start to become aware of the poem as an example or model of a poem they might write themselves. An example is a kind of scaffold, that is a form of support that helps students go from the unknown to the known (O'Keefe 51) and is
essential to learning. To many students, the form of a poem is not something they can visualize, but examples give them a visual model.

Third, involve the students in prewriting having to do with the theme of the example. For instance, list all the people you have admired. Or write about a strong childhood memory you have. Through step three, it is important to avoid any difficult, conscious cognitive work if you want your students to be successful. Prewriting can consist of lists, clusters, or quick writes. But students should not be presented with a problem to solve. Or, let me qualify, if they have a problem to solve, it is usually not best to face it directly in the case of creative writing and discovery. As Peter Elbow says:

If you want to get people to be remarkably insightful, try asking them the hard question and then saying, 'Don't do any careful thinking yet, just write three or four stories or incidents that come to mind in connection with that question; and then, do some fast exploratory freewriting. It turns out that such unplanned narrative and descriptive exploratory writing (or speaking) will almost invariably lead the person spontaneously to formulate conceptual insights that are remarkably shrewd.” (Embrac. Contr. 56)

It is worth noting that though no serious conscious thought has necessarily taken place, the writer, may, nonetheless "spontaneously" create "conceptual insight" that is significant, and even brilliant. Earlier in this paper Elbow's term for this was "first order thinking," and Moffett called it "unconscious" thought, while acknowledging
that this type of thinking could be high order cognitive work. It was also Moffet who said, however, that both consciousness and abstraction are needed for cognitive growth and development, and that one promotes the other. Step four then, would be to write the poem, using the prewriting, or first order writing as the raw material for the writing. At this point the writer is definitely presented with conscious problem solving. He must attempt to create a poem, and likely, a poem of his own that bears some kind of relationship to another admired example. As for the use of examples, Vygotsky claims that imitation is "indispensable." He states that through imitation, and with adult intervention, a student can achieve more than she could on her own.

Step number five, for the teacher who wants students to advance cognitively, should involve revision and/or peer editing. As Elbow says: "What most heightens critical awareness is 'coming back' to a text and reseeing" (Embracing 58). By looking at a text again and seeing it with new eyes, one is involved in reflection and metacognition. One may analyze what one has done well, remove or change or bring together disparate elements of the poem. Tsujimoto sees revision as concerned with three elements: diction, "compression," which involves eliminating words, phrases, and stanzas; and development and extension, which involves adding words, lines, and ideas to the poem to make it complete (24-25).

Revision, then, involves elaboration. Moffett sees elaboration as an involved cognitive activity:

"Elaboration is the flowering of an idea; seed differentiates into stem, root, leaves, and blossoms -- all of which come from within. Elaboration is
unfolding a given, whether the given is an object to be descriptively
detailed, as summary of action to be filled in, a statement to be
exemplified, or a premise from which corollaries are to be deduced.”

(Pet. Growth 13)

Incidentally, when it comes to revision, one common problem that teachers have is
getting students to truly revise their work. Peter Elbow recommends learning revision
by working on someone else's paper (Writing With Power 23).

Step six is to share a poem with an audience. To publish. This, too, can lead to
discovery. Hearing one’s words instead of reading them; the response of others to
your writing—these experiences will lead to new ways of seeing. This is also an
important step for children or students when literacy, rather than high level thinking
skills, is the focus. Sanders says, "... true reading and writing have deep, telluric
connections that run back to speaking and listening" (200). And:

Without a full experience in orality a person cannot truly embrace an
animating and invigorating literacy. Orality is the armature, the
framework, on which literacy takes its particular shape and fills out its
contours. Orality makes social and emotional development possible....

Young people thus talk themselves into a whole and consummate life:
they hear out loud how they feel. Without practice in speaking and telling
stories, without the joy of playing with language -- which includes telling
a few lies--youngsters quite literally self-destruct. It is not just that they
have a weakened sense of self, but that without the formative power of
language, the inner life never fills out and takes shape. That leaves
nothing, no substance, for literacy to embrace. (34)

Also, G. Gagert says: "I believe when children perform such poems they experience a
kind of dramatic therapy" (qtd. in Cullinan 13).

Step seven would include the use of a portfolio. A portfolio is a body of student
work saved by each student. Portfolios, among other things, require and encourage
students to go back and rethink what they have done. Instead of doing a poem, once
for a teacher, the student retains the poem, and is encouraged to go back and revise
the poem at a later date. Portfolios promote the kind of thinking spoken of in this
statement by Elizabeth Ashton:

Most of the best research on cognitive development suggests that it is
extremely important to create situations in which students must think
about their own thinking, reflect on the ways in which they learn and why
they fail to learn.... It’s clear that the more students are aware of their own
learning processes, the more likely they are to establish goals for their
education and the more deeply engaged they are in those processes. (103)

In a portfolio students reflect on their work, select writings, revise what they have
already worked on, and synthesize disparate elements into wholes. Students may do
these activities individually, or they may do while receiving responses on their work
from peers, parents, or their instructor. It promotes the kind of self-awareness and
metacognition that Elizabeth Ashton is talking about. Karen Mills-Courts and Minda
Rae Amiran praise the metacognitive benefits of portfolios from their experience at a
New York College. They explain why they chose to use portfolios in part with this statement:

"... our students were not approaching their own learning consciously enough and were operating much too often on unexamined basic assumptions about the learning process and the content involved in that process. We found them to be too disengaged and passive to use information in analytical, creative, and productive ways. We believe that those weaknesses are not confined only to our program, but are typical of postsecondary education in general. (102)

Again, they repeat a common theme: that students are too passive, and that they don't actively "use" knowledge enough. To counter this, the authors used creative writing course with portfolios:

Our courses, from first to last, are designed to encourage students' sensitivity to language, to develop their ability to articulate their thinking and feelings as precisely and powerfully as possible, and to increase their analytical skills and their ability to be self-conscious, reflexive thinkers. Certainly such aims will make a talented poet a better poet, maybe even help that student become an extraordinary poet, but the aims are designed primarily to teach all students, not just the gifted. (105)

It is worth noting that Courts and Amiran are not only talking about the benefits of portfolios in this context, but also that of poetry. The poetry presumably gets the students involved in their work, and the portfolios promote reflection. Specifically
about the reflexive portfolio aspect of their poetry writing, the authors report that the students “are being asked to think critically at all times...they must analyze, evaluate, synthesize, reach conclusions...” (1060.)

A way synthesis can be used in a portfolio is explained in the Kirby text. The authors discuss Dan Kirby's use of memoir, but this concept could certainly be adapted for poetry. Kirby starts out by "throwing out" ideas for exploration rather than assigning topics. In the case of poetry, that would involve giving the students many examples, and many different kinds of poetry. Then, in the case of memoir: “The serious work on invention begins when Dan asks his students to sort through their portfolios and select three or four particularly strong pieces and weave them together to form a memoir. The tough, creative work is in finding a scheme for weaving the short pieces into a seamless whole” (145). In the case of poetry, students could be asked to go through their portfolios and look for some commonality on which to base an anthology on. Examples could be Neruda's Oda Elementales in which he praises the basic matter of the universe, such as a pile of firewood, an orange, and a pair of socks he received for a present. Or perhaps they would put together a series of memory poems, narrative poems, or surreal poems. Or the students could go back and examine key metaphors, and analyze what these say about themselves, their work, and their thinking. Other ideas would include poems in varying formats about relatives, places one has been to, or unusual people one has met. In any case the portfolio would cause the writer to reflect on her writings and to come up with some sort of insight into them as a collection; to choose from the writings; to revise poems; and to
write new poems to complete the collection. Again, in the Kirby text, they quote D.N. Perkins as saying: "Creativity --the mind's best work--involves no special processes, just special purposes to marshal familiar operations like noticing, remembering, looking harder, judging, doing, undoing, problem-finding and--above all--selecting" (16). The portfolio, I believe, gives a writer the "special purpose" Perkins refers to here. And certainly the operations that Perkins lists would be used in taking part of a portfolio and turning it into a collection of poetry.
Chapter Six

Different Types of Poetry for Varied Cognitive Levels

Now that I have demonstrated how one poetry writing assignment, which is seemingly simple at first, can lead the writer into more and more reflexive, conscious, and critical thinking, I will discuss how different types of poetry can be used with students at different cognitive levels. X.J. Kennedy, a poet who oftentimes writes for children, says, "When kids first discover poetry of any sort, usually in school these days, it’s the funny stuff they most enjoy. I would hope that nonsense verse might be a vehicle to win kids over to deeper poetry later." (qtd. in Copeland 84) Shel Silverstein gives students options in terms of how to play with language:

- Put Something In
- Draw a crazy picture,
- Write a nutty poem,
- Sing a mumble-gumble song,
- Whistle through your comb.
- Do a loony-goony dance
- 'Cross the kitchen floor,
- Put something silly in the world
- That ain't been there before. (22)

This is not my favorite kind of poetry, perhaps, but I enjoy the language play — especially in the nonsense work that reminds one of Dr. Seuss. But history has shown
me that high school students respond well to this type poetry --even honors and AP students, or maybe I should say, especially honors and AP students. Honors and AP students, being the most disciplined of the students I see each day, like to play like anyone else. Perhaps they get less opportunity to do so. In any case, I have seen advanced students getting carried away by humorous verse, like Shel Silverstein’s, on more than one occasion.

Another type of poetry that is simple and very accessible and lends itself well to humor is a list poem. A list poem is written much like a shopping list, with a series of items that are all somehow related. In a list poem, though, the poet uses word and line order to create humor, meaning, irony, paradox, and anything else literary or poetic. The following list poem was written by a junior named Trudy Carlson, after she heard my poem "Women You Should Be Afraid Of" read aloud. She in turn read this poem aloud in front of an audience at an evening poetry event at our school:

Guys To Stay Away From

Dirty guys

Smelly guys

Dirty smelly guys

Guys who wear tight pants and cowboy boots

Enough hair to hide large animals in guys

Metallica, Van Halen, White Snake guys

Large guys who sweat more than seems humanly possible

Guys who wear too much make-up
Guys who don’t know how to put on make-up

Pamela Lee loving guys

Guys in bands going nowhere

Overindulged egos for no apparent reason guys

Chris Lopez guys

Short guys (for their own safety reasons)

Large, pink, balding, winking, drooling guys who hang out in front of liquor stores

Guys with boyfriends

Guys who are prettier than me

Snotty Pukey guys

Guys who lick up disgusting things for money

Been around the block and then some guys

Guys who blame it on PMS

Bitchier than me guys

Pillsbury Doughboy guys

Going on his fifth year in high school guys

Endless supply of rude comments guys

Guys who hate all female singers

Intimidated by me guys

Guys in high school who act their age

Larger chest than me guys

The guy who works the register at Thrifty
Guys who yell

Guys who hit

No sense of humor guys

No sense of romance guys

No sense of Shakespeare guys

Guys without talent (drinking doesn't count)

Nicotine inhaling guys

Chemically dependent guys

Whiny guys

Gynecologist guys

Proctologist guys

Guys who don't wash their hands

Suicidal guys

Homicidal guys

Guys who hang out at the skating rink in their spare time

Guys with too much gel

Guys who can't get this poem

Who does that leave?

Trudy's poem, though simple in form, still has a number of sophisticated features such as humorous juxtapositions, irony, and meaningful repetition. Note the sophistication in a line like, “Guys in high school who act their age.” There is irony in that we expect to hear, “That don’t act their age.” Trudy, then, slyly with this one line goes on to
expand her satire to include most of the guys in high school as a part of her ever growing list of troublesome males. When a poet is dealing with irony, she is dealing on an abstract level, since irony deals with double meanings—and comparisons between what is expected and what is actually said. Getting irony requires that one is able to hold two different meanings of a statement at the same time, and to compare them. Much like metaphor, there is a kind of connection being made between different statements, situations, and/or meanings.

Another type of poetry that is very accessible, but tends to be more serious, is what I call a descriptive poem. Students are asked to look at something in a new way and create unusual images. The emphasis is not on sound or form, but on imagery. On seeing something exactly, or seeing something in an unconventional way. For example, these lines in Robert Bly’s “Driving toward the Lac Qui Parle River:

“I am driving; it is dusk; Minnesota.
The stubble field catches the last growth of sun.
The soybeans are breathing on all sides.” (45)

In these lines, Bly suggests an acute eye with “The stubble field catches the last growth of sun,” with both the detail as well as the personification. This personification is continued into the next line with soybeans that are said to be “breathing.” The unique way that the author perceives his subjects in a descriptive poem creates an unspoken meaning. In this case, Bly seems to suggest that the plant life shares a state of awareness with him, the way that, say, all of creation is said to praise God in biblical
literature, and plants and animals are ascribed a human awareness in some native American works.

A poem that is very similar to a descriptive poem, but is more explicit in its meaning, is a reflective poem. Because a reflective poem requires explicitness as to its meaning, it *may* be a step up cognitively for students. In a reflective poem, students are asked not only to describe, but to contemplate a subject with an explicit statement.

For instance, Robert Bly in “The Loon’s Cry” says:

> “From far out in the center of the naked lake

>     The loon’s cry rose.

> It was the cry of someone who owned very little” (46).

In this case, Bly’s third line is not a description, but rather a reflection on the first two. William Carlos Williams poem about the red wheelbarrow is example of a well known poem that is reflective in nature. As Moffett says in *Det. Growth*, Writers "have to make sense not of something someone else has abstracted, but of the matter they confront" (16), and, he says, no reality is raw when we are conscious of it: "A retinal image, for example, is the body's equivalent of the artist's conception. So the sensory impressions from which people abstract concepts are themselves abstractions" (17). In other words, the process of receiving information through the senses about the world around us is an abstractive process in itself. We must look through conceptions we already have about the subject being observed in order to perceive it in some meaningful way. The danger regarding thinking, however, would be that students don't really look at their subjects, but just replay their preconceived notions of what
they think they see. So the writing teacher must have discussion and give examples that show students how to look at something with a poet's freshness, in order for the abstraction that Moffett is talking about to take place. In any case, here is a reflective poem by a student of mine named Leah Gould:

Water
So clean,
So pure,
So few things
So true in the world.
Silent power to mold mountains.
Serenely rocking you to sleep.
Slipping your cares away,
Singing to you its tales.
Slithering through every crack,
So sneaky, nothing can escape it.
Sounding like the bells of heaven,
Some call it holy.
Silkily the river whispers into
the sea.
Shining in the sky the tears of angels,
Scattering the food for life.
Sorcery that controls existence.
Leah not only observes and describes her subject, but her thinking and reflection are evident in metaphorical lines like, "Slithering through every crack,/So sneaky,/nothing can escape it." She looks at water in a different kind of way, by seeming to compare it to a kind of snake or predator. Moreover, the unity of images suggests a developed concept, in words like sorcery and holy and the snake imagery, suggesting the magical, primeval, and supernatural qualities of water. Water to her is not merely water—it is something more than that. And her metaphors, when taken together, add up to a concept that goes beyond mere association.

Barbara Drake, in Writing Poetry discusses metaphor in a chapter called "Observation and Image, Meditation and Metaphor." She uses a prose passage called "The world Eaters" about slime molds by a "writer-scientist" named Loren Eiseley to illustrate how a writer or a poet moves naturally from observation to metaphor. Drake says:

Eiseley may first have arrived at this comparison by simply observing slime molds. What does a slime mold look like? How does it behave? What are the consequences of its life cycle? When these observations are used in comparisons involving human society, the writing becomes metaphorical.... this image-making faculty has always been the mark of the poet. Homer is full of similes, and it was Aristotle who first said that metaphor was essential to poetry and was the one thing that the poet could not be taught. It's an intuitive perception of similarities between dissimilar.
In Drake's discussion a couple of things are evident: that reflection is a natural result of observation, and that metaphor is a sign of reflection. Moreover, as is stated by Aristotle, the intuitive mind enables one to make connections that may be realized later. So, observational and metaphorical poetry is a kind of poetry that involves discoveries and epiphanies. Because of this, poetry should work well in science classes. Students could be asked to write poems to describe the sort of activity that they observe. As I mentioned earlier in this paper, spiral staircases, building blocks, and the double helix are all scientific metaphors that are poetic to a degree because of their use of metaphor.

I assert that metaphor, then, is the basis of cognitive growth. It is William James who says, "Geniuses are, by common consent, considered to differ from ordinary minds by an unusual development of association by similarity" (344). The ability to see relationships is essential to thinking, as one does in building metaphors. James elaborates by saying:

Reasoning is always to attain some particular conclusion; or to gratify some special curiosity. It not only breaks up the datum placed before it and conceives it abstractly; it must conceive it rightly too; and conceiving it rightly means conceiving it by that one particular abstract character which leads to the one sort of conclusion which is the reasoner's temporary interest to attain." (336)

That is to say, when conceiving a metaphor, one must select the aspect or quality of each part of the comparison that brings the two dissimilars together. This seeking out
to make connections, and the selecting of qualities, leads the creator of metaphor from association to selection to abstraction.

There are plenty of models that a writing teacher can use in asking students to write with metaphor. Tsujimoto in Teaching Poetry Writing to Adolescents lists an "extended metaphor" poem as a type of poem he models and assigns. He asks the students to simply create a simile or a metaphor about his subject, and then to advance that comparison through the poem through imagery. A student example he gives, was written by a seventh grader named Heidi Lowrey:

The Mason

The poet is like a mason

He pours his thought onto the paper

Then smooths out the wrinkles

Then a child walks through the wet cement

Making footprints that will soon harden

Forever imprinting your mind. (67)

This type of poem, because of the metaphor, requires significant cognition, I believe. The only danger would be that students could speak in rote metaphors or clichés, so that they are really thinking, but rather merely repeating what they have heard from others. In order to combat this, teachers would be well advised to take students out into nature on field trips, and expose them to many different creative-thinking poets. I have, for instance, taken students camping at Joshua Tree National Park and at Anza
Borrego, and given them poetry-writing assignments based on observation and reflection.

Another type of poetry identified by Tsujimoto is what he labels a "paradox poem." He gives the following assignment: "Write a poem illustrating a paradox. A paradox is a seemingly self-contradictory statement that expresses a possible truth -- pointing ultimately to mystery" (78). It would be impossible, I think, to complete this assignment without some significant cognitive activity. Students must first understand what a paradox is, then be able to find something that is paradoxical in the world around them. In Bloom's taxonomy, we would be talking about interpretation and application. Yet, Tsujimoto offers this example from a seventh grader:

Like referees

Watching each move the other makes

Then blowing a whistle on the defender

For the parents

Yet, they are an actor and an actress

For when one is in pain

The other feels grief too

Tina Hines (79)

The concern with this sort of assignment is that it would be difficult. One does not usually find paradoxes by looking for them; one stumbles upon them. For this reason it would be advisable to apply Elbow's first order thinking and procedures on this assignment. Or, this could be an assignment that is aided by the use of portfolio:
students could go back through their writings at a later point in the course, looking for a paradox, or a writing that might lead into something paradoxical. That would allow a student to chance upon a paradox without having to problem solve how to come up with one in a single piece of writing.

For advanced students, there really is a wide variety of other poetry forms that involve cognition and problem solving. Haiku, for example, requires a kind of compression of both the specific and the general in very few words. One must problem solve in order to find completeness, as in this poem by Basho:

Cormorant fishing:

how stirring,

how saddening. (29)

Other classical forms lend themselves to problem solving and thus, cognition. Robert Frost once said that writing poetry in free verse is like playing tennis with the net down, to which, a bright student of mine named Kelvin Pittman, replied "What is wrong with playing tennis with the net down?" I agree with Pittman, and usually avoid much in the way of prescriptive structures when assigning poetry. I don't want form to get in front of expression. Nevertheless, a poem like Frost's "Nothing Gold Can Stay" with it's iambic form and rhyme scheme could make a good model for an advanced student. Likewise, a sonnet involves meter, iambic pentameter, and an opening octave, which presents a problem, and a concluding sestet, that responds to the problem in some way. The sonnet format would challenge the student in terms of
sound, form, and concept. An example of a fairly accessible sonnet is "Sonnet" by Tennyson:

She took the dappled partridge flecked with blood,
And in her hand the drooping pheasant bare,
And by his feet she held the woolly hare,
And like a master painting where she stood,
Looked some new goddess of an English wood.

Nor could I find an imperfection there,
Nor blame the wanton act that showed so fair--
To me whatever freak she plays is good.
Hers is the fairest Life that breathes with breath,
And their still plumes an azure eyelids closed
Made quiet Death so beautiful to see
That Death lent grace to Life and Life to Death
And in one image Life and Death reposed,

To make my love an Immortality. (1099)

In order to write a sonnet, one would first have to be exposed to enough sonnets and be able to comprehend what a sonnet is. In this case Tennyson is able to resolve the problem of how a scene involving death could in some way be beautiful. Sonnets involve both a problem and a resolution. Then, the student writer would have to again apply that knowledge in developing his own poem. This, of course, is a very difficult cognitive act. As Vygotsky says: “The greatest difficulty of all is the application of a
concept, finally grasped and formulated on the abstract level, to new concrete situations that must be viewed in the abstract terms... The transition from the abstract to the concrete proves just as arduous for the youth as the earlier transition from the concrete to the abstract” (142). In other words, the grasping of a concept by a student in school is difficult, but not as difficult as attempting to apply that knowledge—a task that is just as hard as getting the concept in the first place. So for a student to read and understand the concept of what a sonnet is, is only halfway through the difficult cognitive work of applying it. Fortunately for the student in terms of effort, but unfortunately for the student in terms of growth, most teachers and professors do not ask students to apply their knowledge by producing the type of poetry that is studied. That is one of the most important positions of this paper: that by not writing poetry, by merely studying it, students are missing out on a great deal of potential cognitive growth and personal development. As all teachers know, you learn something better when you teach it and have to explain it; I would assert that an even greater step is to apply and use knowledge.
Conclusion

In conclusion, the writing of poetry is a valuable learning experience because it provides a bridge to not only critical thinking but also to the affective mind and to the multiple intelligences. Not all types of poetry writing are the same, however. Though unconscious spontaneous thinking has its value, conscious critical thinking can be promoted through the use of certain type of poetic forms as well as through reflective activities such as revision and portfolio. Poetry also fits well into today's educational paradigm that stresses an interdisciplinary approach to learning, as well as an acknowledgment of the multiple intelligences. Moreover, poetry enjoys unusual pliability in classrooms in that it is at once a short, germane, and entertaining form of literature for the less skilled; and a potentially abstract, concentrated genre for the advanced. And, as Lakoff and Johnson point out in Metaphors We Live By, figurative language, the foundation of poetry, is common to nonacademic life as well. They state: "We have found...that metaphor is pervasive in every day life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature" (3). And as our metaphors change with modernization and technology, Moffet suggests we need to develop the right brain more in order to make sense of it all -- something that can be aided by poetry. And finally, because poetry, metaphor, and language play are basic, nonacademic endeavors, poetry offers us a tool to promote literacy in an age which is
becoming faster, more sensory driven, and less contemplative, it seems, year by year.
Works Cited


